

PERFORMING RESURRECTION: UPHOLDING THE SPIRIT AND
LEGACY OF EL SALVADOR'S SAINT OSCAR A. ROMERO
THROUGH BREAD AND PUPPET'S AND MECATE'S
RADICAL THEATRE ACTIVISM AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by XIOMARA CORNEJO

Dr. Cheryl Black, Dissertation Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the Associate Vice Chancellor of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, have examined the dissertation entitled

PERFORMING RESURRECTION: UPHOLDING THE SPIRIT AND LEGACY OF EL SALVADOR'S SAINT OSCAR A. ROMERO THROUGH BREAD AND PUPPET THEATER'S AND MECATE'S RADICAL THEATRE ACTIVISM AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

presented by Xiomara Cornejo,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy, in Theatre and Performance Studies, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Chair, Professor Cheryl Black

Co-Chair, Professor Heather Carver

Professor Suzanne Burgoyne

Professor Claire Syler

Professor Victoria Johnson

DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

Amidst death threats by the right-wing military for denouncing human rights violations during the Salvadoran Civil War, Salvadoran priest Archbishop Óscar A. Romero (1917-1980), a proponent of liberation theology, declared he was not afraid of death because he believed in resurrection; if killed, he would resurrect in the Salvadoran people. Shortly after, Romero was assassinated by the right-wing military while giving mass. In 1985, the North American protest theatre group Bread and Puppet Theater presented *The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar A. Romero of El Salvador*, his life, death, and dramatized resurrection in Nicaragua. This study investigates the role of performance in 'resurrecting' Romero's spirit and social justice legacy. Romero was canonized as a Saint by the Catholic Church in 2018. I utilize social movement theory and a hybrid methodological approach, drawing from autoethnography, historiography, oral history, and dramatic writing, and analyzing primary and secondary sources and participant observations during my company apprenticeship to understand performance as manifestations of Romero. My analysis concludes that upholding Romero's teachings through performance, like *The Nativity* and other group actions and behaviors, embodies Romero's spirit, held cultural, political, and personal implications for participants, contextualizes Bread and Puppet's praxis in the spirit of liberation theology and fostered transnational solidarity activism between Bread and Puppet and MECATE. This study contributes to the limited knowledge of protest theatre history within the Americas. It expands on existing Bread and Puppet history, highlighting its Latin American influence, preserves the legacy of Romero and MECATE, and offers new insight into radical theatre practices between the US and Central America as a model.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I have often been threatened with death. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people. If the threats come to be fulfilled, from this moment I offer my blood to God for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador. Let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon be reality -
Archbishop Oscar A. Romero

My First Encounter with Archbishop Oscar A. Romero as a Martyr

I was introduced to the social justice teachings of Archbishop Romero (1917-1980), beloved revolutionary priest and martyr of El Salvador (my parents' native country) at a very early age. I grew up listening to stories of Romero's profound impact on the people of El Salvador from my family members, especially my grandmother, who would listen to Romero's homilies and radio broadcasts during which he would report on acts of military violence against the people despite receiving death threats by the right-wing government.¹ Romero is considered one of the most beloved figures in Salvadoran and Latin American history. He was a proponent of liberation theology, a spiritual and political movement inspired by a Marxist socioeconomic analysis of the Christian teachings of God that advocates for the liberation of the poor.² He was assassinated during El Salvador's twelve-year Civil War (1980-1992) by the right-wing military (a staunch opponent of liberation theology) while celebrating mass. On October 14, 2018, Archbishop Romero was elevated to sainthood by the Catholic Church, making him El Salvador's and the Caribbean's first Catholic saint.

1 Linda Cooper and James Hodge, "Archbishop Oscar Romero, El Salvador's Most Trusted News Source," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/archbishop-oscar-romero-el-salvadors-most-trusted-news-source/>.

2 Blasé Bonpane, *Guerrillas of Peace: Liberation Theology and the Central American Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1985), 9-10.

My First Encounter with Archbishop Oscar A. Romero as a Puppet

I was taking an undergraduate theatre history course when the instructor began a lecture on protest theatre, which led me to Romero once again, but this time through radical puppetry. My professor mentioned several North American radical theatre groups of the 1960's: El Teatro Campesino, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and Bread and Puppet Theater.³ I was immediately drawn to Bread and Puppet because of its oversized puppet aesthetic and carnival-style street performances, as well as its subversive culture. After hours of researching Bread and Puppet through the Internet, I came across an image that would leave an impression for years to come (See Figure 1).

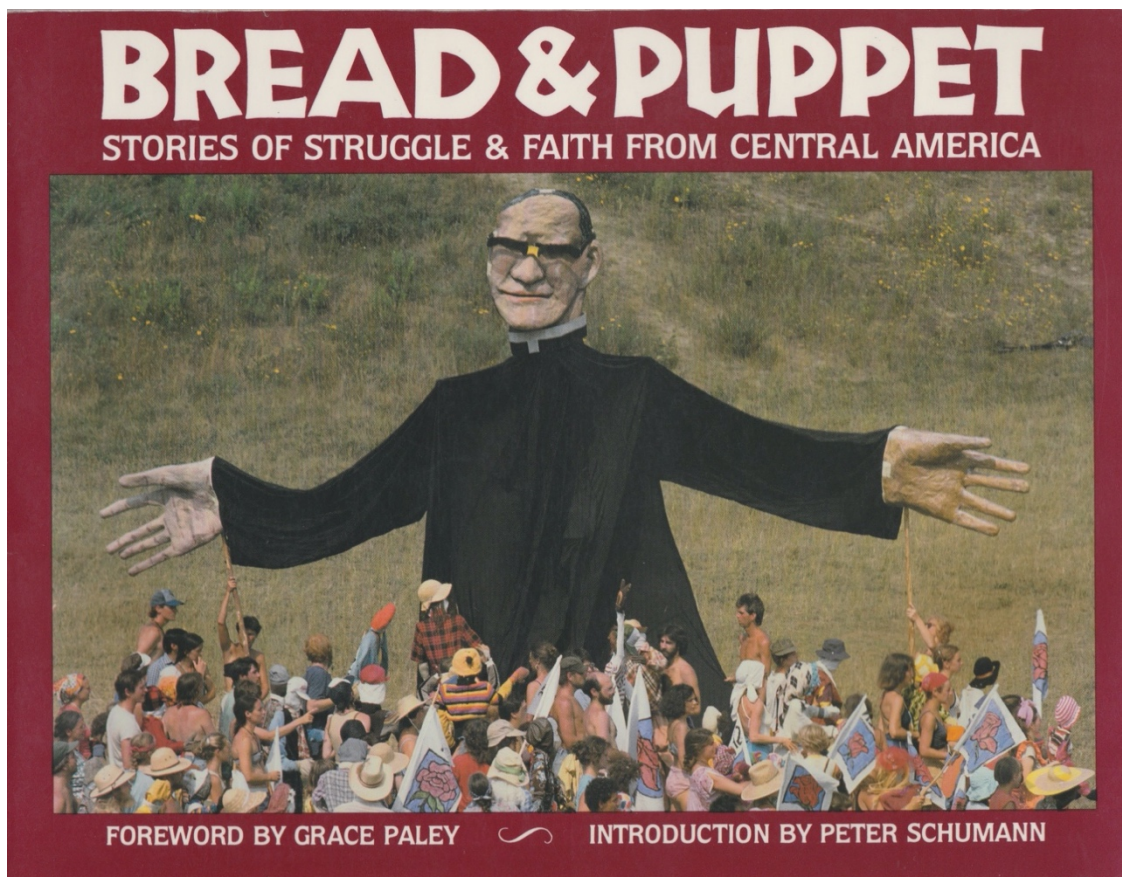


Figure 1. The cover of the book *Bread and Puppet* by Susan Green and Greg Guma.

³ In following general practice, I will refer to the art of theatre as “theatre” and use “theater” when referring to Bread and Puppet Theater, as its original company name.

The image was of Romero represented as a pageant puppet, smack on the cover of Susan Green and Greg Guma's *Bread & Puppet: Stories of Struggle and Faith in Central America*. Green and Guma document the Bread and Puppet's North American performance of *The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar A. Romero of El Salvador* in 1982. *The Nativity* is a large-scale outdoor pageant on the life and death of Romero, with Romero as the central character. I was inspired by the unique performance of *The Nativity* because it invokes the metaphor of Romero's resurrection through theatre, specifically through circus and puppetry. According to Green and Guma, the Romero puppet in *The Nativity* is "resurrected" by the performers who perform the people of El Salvador. What is more, Romero himself discussed his "resurrection" and its relationship to the Salvadoran people through one of his most notable interviews, during which he is asked to respond to the death threats he receives from the right-wing military. Romero responds that he is not afraid of death, because with death comes resurrection, and further adds "If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador."⁴ Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity* is the first production to dramatize Romero's resurrection through theatre.

The large-scale Romero puppet on the cover of Green and Guma's book is located outdoors in a field, dressed in full Catholic priestly vestments and wearing Romero's signature glasses. Standing underneath the puppet is an army of people carrying other smaller puppets and waving colorful banners as the Romero puppet extends its giant arms like Jesus Christ on the cross. This moment carried great weight for me as a first-

4 John Dear, "Romero's Resurrection," *National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/romeros-resurrection>.

generation Salvadoran American woman in theatre; my parents migrated to America during El Salvador's Civil War – a conflict in which several family members and friends were victims of violence by the right-wing military. Though I had never seen Romero in person, I never imagined him in puppet form either, nor had I seen a puppet of that scale and magnitude. Most importantly, it was the first time I had ever seen a theatrical representation of my Salvadoran roots on the cover of an American theatre book. Throughout my years of training in theatre, I had yet to come across any direct representation of Central American culture in either the academic or professional theatre world. This encounter was a pivotal moment in my life as a theatre artist, and it made me wonder: Who are the Bread and Puppet Theater exactly? And what is their relationship to Archbishop Romero, his “resurrection,” and the people of El Salvador?

As a result of my parents' appreciation for Romero's teachings ingrained in me since early childhood, I was later inspired to pursue a career as a community arts organizer and social justice theatre practitioner. For nearly ten years, I worked in partnership with the South Bay Center for Community Development (SBCC)-Thrive LA and members of local Neighborhood Action Councils, including community groups of adults, women, youth, and seniors that spearheaded social justice and art projects in their neighborhoods. The community-based work we facilitated followed the methodological framework of John P. Kretzmann and John McKnight's Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and Relationship-Based Community Organizing (RBCO).⁵ Several years later, during the Occupy Movement of 2011---a worldwide mobilization of people fighting for social and economic justice directly inspired by the Arab Spring

⁵ Kretzmann is a professor in the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. McKnight is an educator and former director of the Community Studies Program at the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University.

uprising in Tunisia---I became involved with the Occupy Long Beach (OLB), California chapter, serving as an active member of the Arts Committee for two years. In addition to the visual arts, we incorporated social justice theatre into our group's direct social action, including relationship-building among our diverse group membership, developing innovative methods of peaceful protest, and creating opportunities for community engagement. Some of the most successful efforts throughout our year and a half involvement were through Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed workshops--- theatre techniques that promote social consciousness and personal liberation---and political puppetry à la Bread and Puppet.

My experience with community-based work through relationship-based community organizing at SBCC and arts activism with OLB have had a direct impact on my philosophical and ethical practice as an artist and activist. These firsthand experiences, in addition to my years of training as a visual artist and theatre director, designer, and dramaturg, have greatly influenced my vision of radical art scholarship, pedagogy, and practice. I have witnessed the intrinsic value of political theatre as an invaluable medium to empower and build solidarity among diverse groups of people.

My Second Encounter with Archbishop Romero as a Puppet

In June 2016, after almost a decade since my first encounter and several hundred miles of travel, I arrived at the Bread and Puppet farm in Vermont for its apprenticeship summer program, ready to witness the celebrated Archbishop Romero puppet from the cover of Green and Guma's book. I walked up the steps of the Bread and Puppet Museum towards the second floor, my heart beating with nerves and excitement. I reach the second floor and there it was—in all its glory— within a few feet of the entrance. On his

face—which stands at an impressive 6 feet—he wears his signature thick, black glasses with a little strip of color in the middle. His facial expressions include half-smile and soft eyes. His hair is painted on his head as a crew cut. His papier-mâché body is covered in a typical black priestly robe with a white and black collar painted on his neck. His arms are stretched out, embracing several other smaller puppets from past Bread and Puppet performances placed around and in front of him. I smiled, stood back and took in this beautiful sight: the puppet of *The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar A. Romero of El Salvador*.

Project Description

My fascination with Archbishop Romero the martyr, as well as the puppet, and radical theatre practices like that of Bread and Puppet Theater and its relationship to Central America, lingered well into my undergraduate and master's career, as well as my professional work and now, my doctorate education. So persistent was this interest in Romero's social justice legacy, theatre as activism, and Central American history and politics, that it led me to this dissertation, which investigates the manifestation of Romero's "resurrection" through performance, specifically the role of performance in upholding Romero's legacy. In particular, I document/analyze the unexplored Latin American influence on the Bread and Puppet Theater through an analysis of my Bread and Puppet apprenticeship of 2016, as well as *The Nativity* Nicaraguan tour of 1985, a Bread and Puppet cultural arts exchange between the American-based theater and the Nicaraguan Movimiento de Expresión Campesina Artística y Teatral (MECATE).⁶

The Bread and Puppet Theater (1960-present) is one of the oldest most significant protest theatre groups in North America. The company was one of the most active theatre

⁶ English translation: *Farmworkers Movement of Rural Artistic and Theatrical Expression*.

collectives during the anti-war movement of the 1960s, condemning U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War as well as civil wars in Central America. With a series of transnational alliances alongside domestic and international theatre groups, the Bread and Puppet Theater helped shape both American and international protest theatre history.

MECATE, a theatre movement consisting of over 80 farm worker theatre groups, was founded in Nicaragua in 1980 following the victory of the Sandinista National Revolutionary Front against the oppressive regime of Anastasio Somoza (1936-1979). Led by the Farm Workers Union, MECATE was formed to promote the farmworkers' expression, community education, and national reconstruction. Unlike neighboring theatre groups in El Salvador and Guatemala, MECATE successfully mobilized farmworkers through protest theatre without constant repression by the Nicaraguan National Guard—a militia created during the U.S occupation of Nicaragua in 1909—whose main function was to repress leftist political ideology by the Nicaraguan people, including all forms of political protest and artistic expression like protest theatre.⁷ MECATE soon gained notoriety for dramatizing the human rights violations of the Somoza regime, and was once investigated by the National Guard, but thanks to local civilians, the theatre troupe was able to burn all their props and costumes before the National Guard's arrival. In 1985, the Bread and Puppet Theater joined forces with MECATE to bring the outdoor theatre production *The Nativity* to Nicaragua. The tour formed a critical relationship with MECATE founder and cultural activist Nidia Bustos, who is a primary source for my study.

Purpose and Research Questions

⁷ Nidia Bustos, "MECATE, the Nicaraguan Farmworkers Theatre Movement," in *Adult Education and Development* 23 (1984):129-139.

This study explores the “resurrection” of Archbishop Romero through performance, centering on Bread and Puppet Theater’s 1985 performance of *The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Romero of El Salvador* in Nicaragua, as well as the meanings of the performance for those involved, and the theatre’s subsequent actions. The Bread and Puppet Theater’s performance of *The Nativity* examined the life and death of Archbishop Romero, but also invokes the metaphor of his “resurrection” and dramatizes the possibility through performance. Inspired by *The Nativity*, this project investigates manifestations of Romero’s “resurrection” by analyzing various actions and behaviors through a performance lens: Bread and Puppet’s production tour of *The Nativity* in Nicaragua 1985; the company’s social justice praxis today; transnational collaboration and ideological solidarity between Bread and Puppet and MECATE; and Archbishop Romero’s feats as a priest through my contemporary dramatization of his "resurrection" and legacy.

This study aims to increase understanding of Romero's claim to resurrection and the role of performance in upholding Romero’s spirit and legacy by examining the personal, social, and political significance of Bread and Puppet Theater's performance of *The Nativity* in 1985, as well as my Bread and Puppet apprenticeship of 2016 through a hybrid methodological approach drawing from critical ethnography, oral history, theatre historiography, and dramatic writing. My research is guided by the following questions: How has the life and legacy of Archbishop Romero been “resurrected” through performance? In what ways can the Bread and Puppet Theater preserve Romero’s teachings years after his death? How does a performance about Romero’s life, death, and resurrection like *The Nativity* influence solidarity between Bread and Puppet Theater and

MECATE during times of civil unrest? What were the unique circumstances in which Romero's "resurrection" through *The Nativity* occurred and how did the participants interpret the political and personal significance of the performance? And lastly, how can the act of performing Romero's resurrection in a contemporary context through dramatic writing help interpret his claim to "resurrection"?

Justification

This study contributes to the limited knowledge of protest theatre history within the Americas and offers a transnational perspective of theatre as activism through political puppetry. It also expands understanding of the Bread and Puppet's legacy (which has yet to fully unpack its Latin American influence), preserves the contributions of Central American theatre groups like MECATE, and offers new insight into transnational radical theatre practices between the U.S. and Central America as a model for future transnational partnerships. The most notable publications about protest and street theatre include *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology* by Jan Cohen Cruz, a premier scholar of theatre for social justice. Yet even Cohen-Cruz's comprehensive volume is restricted to Mexican or South American theatre groups when referencing Latin America, inadvertently omitting Central American theatre models like MECATE. Overlooking cultural and political contributions from less developed countries like El Salvador and Nicaragua is a common and unfortunate occurrence within Latin American discourse. My research fills an existing gap in transnational protest theatre literature and accounts for some of the work derivative of Central American nations. This study also highlights the often-overlooked contributions of Central American theatre practitioners and activists like peasants and farmworkers as valuable contributors, which

can offer new perspectives to Latin American studies of regional and transnational arts activists.

There are only two prominent publications on Bread and Puppet in the context of Latin America, one an article by Dr. John Bell (puppeteer, theatre scholar, long-time Bread and Puppet company member, and one of my primary sources) and the other an interview by Dr. Rosa Marquez (theatre scholar and professor of Drama at the University of Puerto Rico, performer, puppeteer, and another one of my primary sources). Bell's article, titled "The Bread and Puppet Theater in Nicaragua, 1987," is an interview between Bell and Bread and Puppet co-founder Peter Schumann about the U.S. Tour of *Emergency Exit Circus* two years after *The Nativity* tour of 1985. Although MECATE co-founder Bustos, MECATE, and the Romero performance are mentioned throughout as a catalyst to the *Emergency Exit Circus*, Bell's article focuses on work conducted in 1987 and does not specifically address Bustos' direct participation or the collaboration with MECATE in 1985. Nonetheless, Bell's article is one of few publications that briefly addresses Bread and Puppet's relationship to Latin American politics. Similar to Bell, Marquez published a critical short interview, also with Schumann, about Bread and Puppet in Nicaragua titled "The Bread and Puppet Theatre in Nicaragua, 1985." The interview focuses on the significance of Bread and Puppet's work in the context of Nicaragua but does not mention collaborative efforts made with any other organizations in the country, including MECATE. This dissertation not only complements Bell and Marquez's interviews on the implications of the Bread and Puppet's *Nativity* tour in '85 and '87, but also expands on their scholarship and highlights the contributions made by Nicaragua's MECATE, centering Bustos as a noteworthy voice in the narrative. Both Bell

and Marquez are instrumental to this research; their scholarly work, first-hand knowledge and insight into the company are invaluable.

Rare journal articles on MECATE focus solely on its inception in the 1980s, including “Testimony from Nicaragua” in *Theatre Work Magazine* (September/October 1982) and *Puppetry Journal*’s “Puppetry in the New Nicaragua” (Winter 1984). Both publications were printed prior to MECATE’s work with Bread and Puppet Theater and the Romero performance of 1985. My research offers new insight into the development of MECATE since these publications. Also, the legacy of Bustos, founder of one of Nicaragua’s most lasting political theatre groups since the revolution, has yet to gain the same recognition as that of her male counterparts, another unfortunate trend in theatre history scholarship of the Americas.

Green and Guma’s *Bread & Puppet* is the only publication that discusses the Romero performance explicitly. However, this book only focuses on the performance when it premiered in the U.S in 1982. My research not only complements and extends that of Green—who died in 2019—and Guma’s documentation of the Romero performance in Vermont, but also offers the reader new knowledge of the extraordinary tour and performance in Nicaragua post-revolution and the events that led to Bread and Puppet’s lasting partnership with MECATE after that.

This project builds on existing literature across multiple disciplines, including Latin American Studies, Social Justice Studies, as well as Peace Studies in the Americas. This study also proposes a unique sociological understanding of cultural art exchanges between American and Latin American people from different social-economic backgrounds that inspired collaboration and camaraderie across borders. Also, this

project also contributes to our understanding of the role of faith in direct social action within the fields of Peace and Religious Studies, as well as Social Justice Studies, especially the relationship between the teachings of liberation theology and activism. This project offers insight into radical theatre practices of solidarity by the U.S. with Central American partners that may serve as models for future transnational alliances.

The subjects of my study sustained solidarity for over 35 years through a cultural arts exchange that took place during times of violence and conflict in Central America, a series of civil wars directly funded by the U.S. This study shifts the national discourse on foreign relations with our southern neighbors that is currently driven by xenophobia, hate and racism to one of transnational solidarity. This project is particularly significant, as inhumane U.S migration policies towards asylum-seeking migrants from Central American countries -- many of those fleeing poverty and organized violence fueled by U.S intervention in the 80s -- has reached a critical high⁸. Despite U.S intervention in Central American politics during the Nicaraguan tour, differences in language, social and economic status, as well as geographic locations, Bread and Puppet and MECATE collaborated across national and cultural borders. Furthermore, this study highlights Bread and Puppet's longstanding collaborative relationship with Latin American counterparts and their significant influence on the company, including its alliance with Latin American communities in Central and South America, as well as in the Caribbean.

Romero's canonization to sainthood by the Catholic Church in 2018 and the overwhelming support by the worldwide community, particularly those working towards social justice and equality, demonstrates Romero's lasting impact and the need to

⁸ Mark Tseng-Putterman, "A Century of U.S. Intervention Created the Immigration Crisis," Medium, June 28, 2018, <https://medium.com/s/story/timeline-us-intervention-central-america-a9bea9ebc148>.

continue to document his legacy. Both Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity*, as well as my study, further honor, expand on, and celebrate Romero's work as martyr, social justice leader, and now first saint of Central America and the Caribbean. As a Salvadoran American theatre practitioner, it is my personal mission to contribute to this necessary scholarship.

Key Terms

Performance

My use of the term "performance" relies on broad definitions of performance explicated by performance studies scholars, most importantly including those from Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor. For example, in *Performance*, Taylor argues for performance as a social and cultural practice, whether political or artistic, incorporating a "wide range of social behaviors," not limited by a single action.⁹ Specific to this study, Taylor views performance, both in the U.S. and in Latin America, as a means of political intervention, which is similar to Bread and Puppet's motivation to create and first present *The Nativity* in 1982 in Vermont shortly after Romero's murder.¹⁰ She further classifies performance as continuous actions or gestures as part of everyday life, not limited to a single performance on stage. These repeated actions, and the very sense of its performative accomplishments, thus create a sense of identity and shared knowledge among its performers, comparable to the progression of Bread and Puppet's collective praxis. Specifically, I use performance as both artistic and repeated actions and behaviors that express political and moral ideologies.

Praxis

⁹ Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Performance*, 51.

For an understanding of "praxis," I turn to two works, the first by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,¹¹ and the second text by Margaret Ledwith's *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire in Practice*.¹² Freire argues that praxis in educational settings -- like Bread and Puppet's apprenticeship program -- is a process that merges both reflection (theory) and action (practice), which influences participants' efforts towards self-liberation and the creation of a more just society. Praxis, like performance, not only reveals social, behavioral actions, but it also demonstrates how these performed actions are influenced by, and manifest, philosophical and social justice ideals.

Furthermore, I refer to Freire's dialogical pedagogy as part of my analysis of praxis. Dialogical pedagogy is an educational process characterized by its use of communication that promotes mutual exchange and fosters relationship building between participants through dialogue.¹³ Freire defines dialogical pedagogy within the context of the human spirit. He further adds that dialogue cannot exist without a "profound *love* for the world and for people;" it should not be "an act of arrogance" but must be driven by *humility* and be based on *faith* in humankind's ability to 'create,' 're-create,' and transform their own lives. Dialogical pedagogy, under the three values of *love*, *humility*, and *faith* establishes mutual trust between 'dialoguers.'¹⁴ Similarly, Ledwith applies Freire's dialogical pedagogy to community development work which she argues results in "mutual, reciprocal, trusting and cooperative work."¹⁵ What is unique to Freire's

11 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979).

12 Margaret Ledwith and Nita Freire, *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire into Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2016).

13 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 61-64.

14 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 61-64.

15 Ledwith, *Community Development*, 57-58.

dialogical pedagogy is that it involves horizontal communication between equals, thus resulting in a mutually engaged process of critical inquiry.¹⁶

Resurrection

I interpret Romero's claim to resurrection as a metaphor manifested through various forms of performance, including, but not limited to, the theatrical production of *The Nativity*. For my interpretation of "resurrection" as metaphor, I draw from Nicaraguan Father Ernesto Cardenal's concept of life after death. He argued that the "main message of Jesus" was that the kingdom of heaven was promised to the poor, not found in the heavens but as a happy and just society on Earth.¹⁷ According to Father Cardenal, Jesus Christ discussed resurrection and connected the phenomenon to "the victory over death" and even compared resurrection to a falling wheat grain, which Jesus claimed could not produce a rich harvest had it not been for its sacrificial death.¹⁸

Resurrection thus is the defeat of death when the death occurs out of service and sacrifice for the greater good. Additionally, Cardenal, a proclaimed and celebrated liberation theologian, defines resurrection through a Marxist lens and argues that those who give their lives for the people live on *through* the people.¹⁹ Comparably, Romero sacrificed his life to defend the rights of the poor. I add that Romero's claim to resurrection after receiving death threats by the right-wing military became his "victory over death." Romero's essence and social impact remains alive *through* the people which fulfills his prophecy of "resurrection." This study refers to Romero's resurrection, embodied through performance on and off the stage, as manifesting his legacy.

16 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 65.

17 Blase Bonpane, *Guerrillas of Peace: Liberation Theology and the Central American Revolution* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1985), 125-126.

18 Bonpane, *Guerrillas of Peace*, 127.

19 Bonpane, *Guerrillas of Peace*.

Transnational Solidarity Activism

In *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* Jessica Stites Mor defines transnational solidarity activism as “a key site of political encounter, negotiation, exchange, and sometimes empowerment in the struggles that came to characterize the re-emergent left and new social movements of the post-Cold War period.”²⁰ According to Mor, long-term direct actions of political collaborations are sustained between transnational allies when uniquely engrained in Latin American leftist ideologies and activism, similar to that of both Bread and Puppet and MECATE.

Methods and Procedures

I utilize a hybrid methodological approach throughout, drawing from autoethnography, theatre historiography, oral history, and dramatic writing. Research conducted during the apprenticeship includes personal photo and video documentation, interviews with Bread and Puppet staff, and field notes. I analyze these sources through autoethnographic and phenomenological methods to identify the influence of Central American politics on the Bread and Puppet Theater, specifically liberation theology; my first inquiry about the Bread and Puppet farm and its relationship to Latin America stems from my first encounter with the Romero puppet on the cover of Green and Guma’s book. Through autoethnographic methods, primarily photo autoethnography—a form of autoethnography that utilizes visual images like photographs as a vehicle for self-reflexivity and analysis of a lived phenomenon²¹—I identify the implications of my experience alongside the Bread and Puppet Theater community throughout the five-week

20 Jessica Stites Mor, *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 16.

21 Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, "Artful and Embodied Methods, Modes of Inquiry, and Forms of Representation" in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, Carolyn Ellis (Routledge: New York), 443.

apprenticeship program. More specifically, I rely on D. Soyini Madison's method of critical ethnographic research that challenges the existing canon of knowledge. Madison advocates for conducting research that disputes the standards of academic literature which often prioritizes Western and male-centered histories, and instead "contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourse of social justice," thus offering more critical and diverse perspectives.²² In the case of protest theatre in the Americas, Bread and Puppet Theater, Teatro Campesino, and San Francisco Mime Troupe—the three most recognized protest theatre groups in protest theatre literature—are all recognized as companies spearheaded by men despite having women co-founders. My study centers the voices and roles of women in protest theatre, including Bread and Puppet co-founder Elka Schumann, additional company members, and lead MECATE organizer and founder Nidia Bustos as key figures in protest theatre history of the Americas.

In order to fully understand the correlation between Bread and Puppet and Central American politics, specifically historical and cultural figures like Romero, I approach my research through an autoethnographic lens; I immersed myself in the praxis of the company through the apprenticeship, which would be my first of many visits to the Bread and Puppet farm and archives, as well as the beginning of my relationship with the company. My third analytical chapter, "Cheapicity, Communal, 'Collaborate': Bread and Puppet Perform Liberation Theology," is driven by a phenomenological analysis of Bread and Puppet praxis, where I transcribe and code all interviews conducted during my summer apprenticeship, as well as analyze field notes and photographs taken through phenomenology as defined by Bert O. States in "The Phenomenological Attitude."

22 D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 5.

According to States, phenomenology urges us to uncover the real “essence” or meaning of a work, based on our initial encounter with the object (or moment) and the implications we encounter behind it. States argues that the first encounter through a phenomenological lens presents a “more personal form of critical commentary.”²³ In Chapter III, I critically analyze my phenomenological experience and interpret the Bread and Puppet’s relationship with liberation theology and Romero through physical interactions of visual data documenting my experience as a member of the company, a qualitative research process known as Artography. According to Rita L. Irwin and Stephanie Springgay in “Artography as Practice-Based Research,” artography is a research methodology that interprets the critical meaning of a work through embodied encounters *with* the work, including “recursive, reflective, responsive yet resistant forms of engagement.”²⁴ Throughout this study, I engage with my apprenticeship photographs and videos through collage and other forms of visual art-making to unpack the significance of my experience as a participant and researcher.

I investigate the circumstances of *The Nativity* performance through feminist oral history with data collected from primary and secondary sources, including interviews with Bread and Puppet members—who played key roles in the tour—from the U.S., as well as MECATE members in Central America. Thirty-six years after its first appearance, there is still no public script or comprehensive publication of the Bread and Puppet’s performance of *The Nativity* in Nicaragua, 1985. In this analysis, I also rely on Kamala Visweswaran’s methods of feminist ethnography from her book, *Fictions of Feminist*

²³ Bert O. States, “The Phenomenological Attitude” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992.)

²⁴ Rita L. Irwin and Stephanie Springgay, “Artography as Practice Based Research” in *Arts-based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice*, ed. Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Ethnography, in which she argues for first-person narratives as legitimate and critical forms of qualitative data.²⁵ Like Visweswaran, I draw from oral history as a reliable and substantial source alongside news articles, photographs, and documentaries from MECATE members and rare Bread and Puppet archives. I incorporate data from these narratives to construct the first performance history, and its meanings, of *The Nativity* tour in Nicaragua. These narratives consist of recollections from the original scriptwriters, puppeteers, performers, and community organizers who experienced the performance firsthand.

Feminist oral history/ethnography methods provide new and comprehensive insight into *The Nativity* from contributors who were left out of the already limited documentation of the tour, including a focus on women who played significant roles. Existing documentation on the performance focuses primarily on the production in Vermont and was compiled of mostly secondary sources to be presented to American audiences only. In addition to Madison's critical ethnography and Visweswaran's feminist oral history methods, I employ interview methods discussed in Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack's "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses" from *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. In this article, Anderson and Jack present a new form of feminist research and "listening" that prioritizes the process of the interview over the finished project as qualitative data.²⁶ They argue for a new approach to conducting interviews that is based on relationship building, prioritizes the process over gathering of

25 Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

26 Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 18.

information, requires flexibility, and is rooted on genuinely listening and developing trust with the interviewee. I incorporated this form of listening for the first time when I interviewed Bustos in her home in Costa Rica in winter 2019. I applied Anderson and Jack's interview process—combined with rapport building methods inspired by my work as a community organizer under the RBCO model, that recognizes relationship-building as a key marker in all joint efforts with marginalized people. This fusion of feminist interview methods and relationship-building resulted in a series of robust and meaningful interviews with Bustos. Bustos, who played a significant role in the Bread and Puppet and MECATE partnership, has never been included in any published interviews on *The Nativity* tour in Nicaragua. Another interview I conducted through feminist oral history methods occurred during my second visit to Bread and Puppet farm in 2019. It was during this interview that I facilitated a public forum and collected rare information from company members gathered in front of the original Romero puppet at the Bread and Puppet Museum.

I employ post-positivist historiographic methods of data collection and analysis proposed in Bruce McConachie's "Towards a Post-positivist Theatre History."²⁷ McConachie argues that a theatre performance functions and can be evaluated as not only an artistic event, but also one with significant cultural, social, and political implications. He further states that in order to examine the implications of a social event in history—like *The Nativity*—a researcher should evaluate the event beyond the particulars of the occurrence, but more importantly, through "the eyes of the participants."²⁸ With this method in mind, I examine primary and secondary historical sources of the performance,

27 Bruce McConachie, "Towards a Postpositivist Theatre Historiography," *Theatre Journal* 37, no.4 (1985): 465-486.

28 McConachie, "Postpositivist Theatre Historiography," 469.

including oral history interviews, textbooks, newspaper articles, and two documentaries to interpret the social and cultural meaning(s) of *The Nativity* for participants within the geopolitical context of El Salvador and Nicaragua in 1985.

My investigation of transnational solidarity activism between the Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE draws from Stites Mor's *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America*. Evidence for Bread and Puppet and MECATE's collaboration as transnational solidarity activism comes from published articles and interviews I conducted with participants during visits to Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont and Bustos's home in Costa Rica. Through social movement theory, specifically collective identity and symbolic interaction, I further analyze solidarity building between Bread and Puppet and MECATE. Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE belong to a rare category of activists that integrate radical theatre as a means of intervention and direct social action. We can appreciate the distinctive features of radical theatre and its influence in transnational solidarity activism through the integration of master frame concepts, specifically tactical innovation like peaceful protest through theatre. This framework offers a unique perspective on understanding the value of political theatre strategies in comparison to traditional direct action. Similar to master frames, symbolic interactions that took place throughout the tour between participants and the Romero puppet help us recognize ways that symbolic interaction can occur through theatre and the benefits of political puppetry as a vehicle for meaning-making and consequent solidarity building.

I include a dramatic script on the topic of Romero and resurrection as part of my dissertation. I chose to include a creative imagining of Romero "rising again" in the

people of El Salvador through the form of a dramatic script after reading McConachie's "Reenacting Events to Narrate Theatre History."²⁹ In the article, McConachie highlights "imaginative reenactments" of performance history as an effective approach to unpacking theatrical history. Specifically, McConachie discusses historiographer Mary Fulbrook's argument for utilizing empathy as a "neutral tool" and strategy in exploring historical figures and their actions.³⁰ According to Fullbrook, the narration (or recreation) of a historical event as an "imaginative reenactment"—in this case the murder of Romero and his subsequent claim to resurrection in the people—allows the historian a unique opportunity to "get inside" the mind of the historic figure.³¹ By dramatizing Romero's claim to resurrection in the people of El Salvador through radical theatre, I can better understand the significance of this claim in a political context. The dramatic script—submitted for consideration at various new play festivals—is adapted from articles and interviews specific to Romero the man and puppet and is subject to the imagination. This imaginary resurrection of Romero in 2021 will reveal the implications of his resurrection through theatre in a contemporary global context. I incorporate methods of dramatic writing from the genre of Magic Realism, a non-realistic form of literature that originated and is rooted in Latin American history and culture. The finalized dramatic work of political puppet theatre will contribute to the limited canon of theatre history on historic Central American figures.

Finally, a necessary procedure in my research includes the translation of data from Spanish to English, including journal articles on MECATE, newspaper articles from

29 Bruce McConachie, "Reenacting Events to Narrate Theatre History" in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, ed. Charlotte Canning and Thomas Postlewait, Studies in Theatre History and Culture (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 378-403.

30 McConachie, "Reenacting Events," 378.

31 McConachie, "Reenacting Events," 378.

Central America, transcripts of Spanish documentaries and online interviews, as well as conducted interviews with Bustos, MECATE and other Spanish-speaking Bread and Puppet members.

Literature Review

For this project, I identify six significant categories of publications and works, including ethnography, autoethnography, performance studies, historiography, social movement, and oral history. One of the most significant works of ethnography includes Madison's *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance*. Madison's work serves as a structural model for my project because of its hybrid format of oral history, autoethnography, and performative writing on protest theatre in Africa. I approach photo autoethnography as discussed in *The Handbook on Autoethnography*, a comprehensive work on autoethnography edited by Stacy Holman Jones. This book consists of a collection of articles and essays by leading scholars and artists in ethnography and performance studies. Photo autoethnography, unlike traditional autoethnography, is still a relatively new concept in the field. There are limited published resources on the topic, in comparison to text-based autoethnographic work. *The Handbook on Autoethnography*, however, offers several chapters written by notable scholars and visual art practitioners that examine the unique contributions of visual media (like photography) as substantial qualitative data, which I consider for my research. Two of the most useful chapters include Barbara Tedlock's "Braiding Evocative with Analytic Autoethnography"³² and "Mindful Autoethnography, Local Knowledge: Lessons from Family" by Jeanine M.

32 Barbara Tedlock, "Braiding Evocative with Analytic Autoethnography" in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. by Stacey Jones, Stacy Holman, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (New York: Routledge, 2016.), 357-362.

Minge³³, which provide new insight into the practice and theory of autoethnographic research that “weaves” textual works with visual mediums, similar to film and multimedia.

The most pertinent publications on historiography include *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography* edited by Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait. In *Representing the Past*, Canning and Postlewait present a series of fifteen essays from leading scholars in the field that offer ways to capture and write about the significance of past events, specifically performance historiography research. I incorporate these case studies as models for my production history of *The Nativity*. When dealing with primary *and* secondary sources, I subscribe to Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier’s *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. Howell and Prevenier argue that in order to create reliable narratives for the reader, the ethical “historian of the past” has a responsibility to seek, read, investigate, and interpret *only* reliable sources. One of the chapters centers on the technical analysis of the form and content of primary and secondary sources and offers the historian ways to rate its level of comprehension, locate the source within a specific frame in history, as well as confirm its authenticity. A useful section of the book details the barriers and problems faced by “the classic and conservative” historians as they make conscious decisions of what stories are preserved and told, and the benefits of seeking nontraditional sources to verify information. With this in mind, I incorporate their methods of seeking and analyzing the authenticity of nontraditional sources—like oral history and photographs—and seek to incorporate diverse perspectives in my production history of *The Nativity*.

33 Jeanine M. Minge, “Mindful Autoethnography, Local Knowledge: Lessons from Family” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. by Stacey Jones, Stacy Holman, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (New York: Routledge, 2016.), 425-442.

Significant theoretical works on puppetry and performance include *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* edited by Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell. In this publication, Posner, Orenstein, and Bell present a comprehensive international perspective on puppetry in the twentieth century. The book includes over 60 images and commissioned articles from prominent theorists, practitioners, and scholars (including Bell, a long-time Bread and Puppet scholar) on the history, practice, theory, and cultural significance of puppetry, as well as new and exciting developments in the field. This is one of the most recent scholarly publications revealing a broad scope of cultural and artistic perspectives on puppetry that argues for puppetry and material performance as a noteworthy scholarly discipline. To this date, the most comprehensive publication on Bread and Puppet Theater's early history --1960s through early 1980s -- is *The Bread and Puppet Theatre Volumes I & II* by scholar, theatre critique, and poet Stefan Brecht.³⁴ This anthology is the most wide-ranging text on the *early* stages of the company, which is essential for my analysis of the company's performance of liberation theology, specifically its relationship with Christianity. Brecht includes a comprehensive array of interviews from Bread and Puppet company members, photographs of its early productions, as well as timelines and other invaluable information that preserves the company's early history. Unfortunately, Brecht's anthology, though it mentions Bread and Puppet's early collaborations with the Puerto Rican community in New York, largely overlooks the significance of Latin American politics on the company. My study complements that of Brecht, a German male, and his early documentation of Bread and Puppet's formative years, and further expands on the company's trajectory from the 80s to today. What is more, my study further contributes to

³⁴ Son of Bertolt Brecht, playwright, poet, and prominent theatre practitioner of Epic theatre.

Brecht's most extensive analysis of Bread and Puppet Theater history through my feminist perspective as company member and woman of color.

Useful scholarship on Bread and Puppet Theater's performance of *The Nativity* tour of 1985 and MECATE consists of two film documentaries: *Bread and Puppet Theater: A Song for Nicaragua*, a rare Canadian documentary film of the tour by Ron Levine and René De Carufel,³⁵ and *Nidia Bustos on MECATE: How Campesinos are Creating Theater and Art in Revolutionary Nicaragua*, a documentary by Paper Tiger TV with Bustos. *Nidia Bustos on MECATE* includes a rare interview with Bustos (in Spanish) and discusses the history of MECATE with rare footage of the group's work within Nicaragua before and after the revolutionary victory of 1979. Both of these documentaries are critical to my study, particularly *A Song for Nicaragua*, as it is the *only* documentation of the performance tour in 1985, with a series of stunning images, footage of the actual performance, and series of important interviews (including a conversation with Schumann and Cardenal), while *Nidia Bustos on MECATE* includes rare footage of the theatre group in action, as well as Spanish interviews from current and former MECATE members, some of whom are no longer with us.

A groundbreaking publication within the limited canon of literature on radical theatre performance is L.M. Bogad's *Tactical Performance: The Theory and Practice of Serious Play*. Unlike most publications on theatre, Bogad's work presents examples of theatre practice *as* direct action, nonviolent tactics, and civil disobedience—what he refers to as radical theatre. Bogad's interpretation of theatre for social change as direct action is critical to my analysis of *The Nativity*—explicitly political puppetry analogous to

35 "Bread and Puppet Theater: a Song for Nicaragua," YouTube video, 57:03, posted by René de Carufel, October 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRbecb8Nlbs&t=3021s>.

the Romero puppet—as a form of nonviolent protest. Bogad interprets demonstrations in public spaces as “the most basic social movement performance form” through several theoretical frameworks in theatre, including Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of Carnival and Augusto Boal’s dialogical performance.³⁶ Bogad weaves social movement theory throughout the chapters as a vehicle to appreciate the social, cultural, and political significance of public demonstrations through innovative activism. Bogad’s unique and firsthand experience as a member of The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, founder of the Center for Tactical Performance, and writer/performer/collaborator of many performing arts activist groups make him a leading figure in the field of contemporary radical theatre and arts activism.

During my examination of El Salvador and Nicaragua's geopolitical context and history, specifically their impact on Romero and *The Nativity* tour of 1985, I draw from Hugh Byrne's *El Salvador's Civil War*, and *Romero: '¡Cese La Represion!' 1977-1980* by Miguel Cavada Diez and Carlos Melgar.³⁷ Both publications offer critical analysis of the development of El Salvador's violent twelve-year civil war, dating back to longstanding systems of institutional and systemic oppression in the region during the early nineteenth century and its foreseeable civil unrest of the 1970s, as well as the murder of Romero in 1980. For my investigation on the impact of U.S. involvement in Central American civil war, specifically El Salvador and Nicaragua, I draw from distinguished American philosopher and activist Noam Chomsky's *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, and his comprehensive critique of U.S. intervention in Latin American

36 L. M. Bogad, *Tactical Performance: The Theory and Practice of Serious Play* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 77.

37 Miguel Cavada Diez, *Romero: “¡Cese la represión!” 1977-1980* (San Salvador: Asociación Equipo Maíz, 2006). My English translation: Stop the Repression!

foreign policies.³⁸ U.S. intervention in Central American civil unrest and its devastating and enduring impact in the region is a largely ignored chapter of U.S. history. Chomsky's short and concise text is part of The Real Story Series, and a must-read for understanding the explicit role of U.S. intervention in the 1970s and its correlation to the migration crisis from Central America to the U.S. today. For my investigations of Nicaragua during *The Nativity* tour of 1985, I refer to David Nolan's *FSLN: The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, as well as *The Nicaraguan Revolution* by Gary E. McCuen. Specifically, I utilize Nolan and McCuen's political and philosophical analysis of the Sandinista revolution to interpret its impact on fostering transnational solidarity between Bread and Puppet and MECATE during the tour.

When examining the U.S. role in Romero's murder investigations, I refer to Matt Eisenbrandt's 2017 *Assassination of a Saint: The Plot to Murder Oscar Romero and the Quest to Bring His Killers to Justice*. For my analysis of Romero's legacy and work, including his homilies and public speeches during his tenure as Archbishop, I draw from three texts: James R. Brockman's *Romero: A Life, The Essential Biography of a Modern Martyr and Christian Hero*³⁹, a comprehensive biography on Romero's life since birth in 1917 to his murder in 1980; and *Oscar Romero: La Violencia del Amor*,⁴⁰ a definitive collection of his homilies categorized by subject matter and timeline with prologue by Henri Nouwen; and Michael E. Lee's *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Oscar Romero*⁴¹ (for my examination of Romero's dramatic conversation and

38 Noam Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants* (Berkeley, CA: Odonian Press, 1992).

39 James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life, The Essential Biography of a Modern Martyr and Christian Hero* (New York: Orbis, 1989).

40 Oscar A. Romero, *La Violencia del Amor* (New York: Plough Publishing House, 2001).

41 Michael E. Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Oscar Romero* (New York: Orbis, 2018).

complicated relationship with liberation theology). Throughout the study, and as an integral part of my full-length play, I integrate recent information on Romero's murder investigation, biographical background on Romero's early life, and his work and legacy in the Catholic church, as well as his homilies and speeches as part of several characters' dialogue and narrative.

For works on liberation theology, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and Beyond* is most useful. In this text, American priest and scholar Phillip Berryman examines the relationship between liberation theology and the revolutionary movements of Latin America, specifically in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Brazil. He traces the origins of liberation theology from its early developments in 1950s Colombia to contemporary interpretations and parallel theologies including Third World, Black, Hispanic, and Feminist theology. Berryman investigates the role of faith and religion in direct social action during prominent leftist-led movements in Latin America through firsthand accounts and examples of Christian-based communities from the field. I incorporate Berryman's examination of the parallels between faith and leftist-led action in my analysis of Bread and Puppet Theater's praxis and its relationship to Central American politics. His insight as a Roman Catholic priest contributes to a concise argument for liberation theology as a necessary Marxist interpretation of Jesus and the gospel in solidarity with the poor. In my investigation of Bread and Puppet's performance of liberation theology I refer to analysis of Romero and his association to liberation theology from revolutionary priest and author Blase Bonpane's *Guerrillas of Peace: Liberation Theology and the Central American Revolution*; Berryman's *Liberation Theology*, as well as feminist liberation theology

from Denise Ackerman's article "Meaning and Power: Some Key Terms in Feminist Liberation Theology." Liberation theologians like Brockman argue that the basic idea of liberation theology as declared through the Medellin documents was "...God does not will social injustice, but rather the opposite, that people must work and struggle with God's help to bring about justice."⁴² Comparably, Berryman argues that many theologians consider the biblical and theological significance of the word "liberation" tied to how we experience the presence of God, which he claims manifests in the people's struggle for liberation.⁴³

Additionally, I draw from pioneering feminist liberation theologian and Brazilian Catholic nun Ivone Gebara's, and feminist scholar Denise Ackerman's use of liberation theology to critique society. Gebara and Ackerman have analyzed structural systems of oppression through the lens of women's experiences. Both Gebara and Ackerman recognize that women's experiences are not universal, and subject to race, class, and economic status must include diverse and multifaceted points of views. Feminist theologians like Gebara and Ackerman recognize that "patriarchy," more than other systems of social and political power within Capitalist societies, significantly contributes to the ongoing suppression of women worldwide. For Ackerman, "...'patriarchy' denotes the "legal, economic, and social system that validates and enforces the sovereignty of the male head of the family over its other members."⁴⁴ She further argues that there is no single feminist theology, but instead a multitude of approaches that reveal and "grapple

42 Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 45.

43 Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 151.

44 Denise Ackerman, "Meaning and Power: Some Key Terms in Feminist Liberation Theology," *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 44 (1993), 21.

with what it means to have faith in a sexist world.”⁴⁵ I integrate their analyses to assess my observations of Bread and Puppet’s power structures during my apprenticeship. Thus, Gebara and Ibarra's feminist analysis of liberation theology provides the groundwork to identify existing tensions of distribution of power within institutional structures like the Bread and Puppet Theater.

In my analysis of *The Nativity* through social movement theory, I refer to *Symbolic Interactionism* by Herbert George Blumer, a prominent figure in the field of sociology. This comprehensive and straightforward text is a collection of his leading articles and essays on Symbolic Interactionism and its methodological analysis. The series of essays explores the particulars of symbolic interaction utilizing Blumer's three principles: the meaning of an object influences human interactions; our social interactions and experiences establish meaning-making; and meaning-making of an object is not permanent and can change over time through an interpretive process.⁴⁶ This text is useful in the research and understanding of how to interpret daily interactions and solidarity building among diverse groups of people (like Bread and Puppet and MECATE) as shared experiences through interactions with symbols or objects (including the puppet of Romero).

Additionally *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, edited by sociologist Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson, includes a comprehensive collection of groundbreaking essays from leading scholars and activists of social movement theory.⁴⁷ The book defines social movements and includes the origins of a wide range of examples

⁴⁵ Ackerman, “Meaning and Power,” 19.

⁴⁶ Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 1-60.

⁴⁷ Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson, *Waves of Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

in American history from the 1960s, including the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Movement, Animal Rights Movement, and Environmental Activism, among others. Each section provides a critical analysis of key figures, methodologies, structures, and tactics from each movement through contexts of social movement theory, including concepts of collective identity, mobilization, and recruitment. This book includes the most recognized publications of twentieth-century social movement scholarship including Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier's "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization" which defines *collective identity* as "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity."⁴⁸ Taylor and Whittier present a theoretical framework for analyzing the construction of collective identity inside the lesbian feminist movement. I refer to Taylor and Whittier's work as a model to examine MECATE and Bread and Puppet Theatre as a politicized identity community during post-revolution 1985.

Organization of Dissertation

My dissertation will consist of five analytical chapters, as well as this Introduction and my Conclusion. In this Introduction, I have established my relationship with Romero's story and my positionality as a Salvadoran American theatre practitioner and arts activist. This Introduction also includes the justification, purpose, methods, and procedures utilized in the study, as well as a literature review. In the Introduction, I define relevant terms used throughout the study, including performance (Diana Taylor), praxis (Paulo Freire), resurrection (Ernesto Cardenal), and transnational solidarity activism (Jessica Stites).

48 Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties, People, Passions, and Power* ed. Jo Freedman and Victoria Johnson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

Chapter 1: To understand the implications and significance of the various performances of Archbishop Romero's "resurrection" more fully—both the theatrical production of *The Nativity* as well as various behaviors between participants—we must first understand the geopolitical context of Central America during Romero's life and the tour. "Setting the Stage: Geo-political Context and Historical Background" offers historical context on El Salvador in the 1980s—Archbishop Romero's native country and where he served for most of his career as priest and Archbishop. In Chapter 1, I rely on primary and secondary sources including books, articles, documentaries, video recordings, and photographs to offer historical context. I also introduce Archbishop Romero as a central character and provide the reader with contextual background information on his life leading to his death in 1980, two years before *The Nativity* was first performed in Vermont. I also examine how the geopolitical stage of El Salvador influenced Archbishop Romero's own performance of spiritual and political praxis, specifically liberation theology, in El Salvador.

Chapter II, "Bread and Puppet Performs The Nativity, Nicaragua 1985" investigates the meaning(s) of preserving and "resurrecting" Archbishop Romero's history through a theatrical performance, specifically political puppetry, by constructing a comprehensive production historiography and script of the 1985 production. The chapter documents the narrative text and dramatic structure of *The Nativity* as performance historiography, which interprets the legacy of Archbishop Romero's life and death through a performance. Questions addressed include, "What were the unique circumstances of the creation The Nativity?" and "How did the participants interpret the political and personal significance of its conception, creation and performance?" To date,

there is no comprehensive account or literature on the play as performed in Nicaragua, which was the first time the performance was presented outside of the U.S., and only five years after Archbishop Romero's death. Through methods of feminist oral history, which centers first-person narratives as qualitative data, I interpret information about the performance through interviews I conducted with Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE members who wrote, performed in, and volunteered for the event. The oral histories collected discuss participants' recollection of the performance, details of their involvement in the tour, and personal and political impacts of their participation. The collected data will be used to assemble the original performance historiography of *The Nativity*, 1985. Through post-positivist theatre historiography methods, this Chapter helps us analyze the performance, not only as a historic theatrical event -- the first documented performance to interpret Archbishop Romero's "resurrection" through political puppetry -- but also one of personal and political impact on its participants.

In Chapter III, "Cheapicity, Communal Work, 'Collaborate': The Bread and Puppet Performs Liberation Theology," I examine the Bread and Puppet Theater as a collective through participatory observations conducted during my apprenticeship in 2016, addressing the question of how Bread and Puppet's praxis can "resurrect" and preserve Archbishop Romero's teachings and spirit. Specifically, this chapter explores Bread and Puppet's company praxis as a performance of liberation theology, a direct Latin American influence tied to Archbishop Romero's ethical stance and teachings, and therefore a performed manifestation of his moral spirit. This Chapter reveals how Bread and Puppet Theater—a performance group with a mostly atheist membership—has developed countless performances that reflect ideals and practices commonly associated

with the teachings of Jesus Christ as well as Karl Marx, and how these moral and political traditions interact with and translate to their work as a theatre collective. Liberation theology itself, though not a direct political movement, was often aligned with Marxism and leftist politics, a divisive aspect of the theology among religious leaders within the Catholic institution. Chapter II employs feminist autoethnography, participatory observations conducted during the apprenticeship (including interviews, photo and video documentation, and field notes), as well as over 24 interviews with Bread and Puppet volunteers, performers, and staff to investigate the relationship between Bread and Puppet praxis and liberation theology. Questions asked during my investigation include, “What is your overall experience as a member of the theatre group?” “What are the unique and special qualities of this theatre collective?” and “What was your previous involvement in arts activism prior to joining the company?”

In Chapter IV, “Bread and Puppet Theatre and MECATE Perform Solidarity,” I investigate relationship-building between the Bread and Puppet and MECATE during the performance tour in the context of post-revolution Nicaragua. How does a theatrical performance about Archbishop Romero’s life, such as *The Nativity*, influence the performance of brotherhood and solidarity across transnational lines during times of civil unrest? The time of the tour, otherwise known as the era of a New Nicaragua, was the first, and only, revolutionary leftist victory of a Central American country. The year 1985 also marked a particular time in history fueled by U.S. intervention in Central American politics, a challenging time for the American-based Bread and Puppet theater group to attempt to achieve solidarity with the Nicaraguan people, thus increasing the significance of the collaboration and efforts to unify the Americas. Through social movement theory,

specifically *collective identity* and symbolic interaction, I analyze a series of original interviews conducted with members of Bread and Puppet Theater who participated in the tour of 1985, as well as with Bustos, founder of MECATE. The interviews consisted of questions regarding Bread and Puppet and MECATE's engagement during the tour and their subsequent relationship. Chapter IV centers on Bread and Puppet and MECATE's performance of transnational solidarity during these times of civil unrest, which was manifested during *The Nativity* Central American tour as a "resurrection" of Archbishop Romero's legacy and moral values of brotherhood and camaraderie with the poor. In exploring the nature of this collaboration, I am also interested in investigating tensions and areas of conflict that surfaced between the companies because of the tour.

Chapter V, "Voice of the Voiceless: Dramatizing Romero's Resurrection," is a full-length original play, written by me, that serves as a performance vehicle to explore Archbishop Romero's claim of "resurrection": "I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador." Forty years after his murder, and shortly after his canonization by the Catholic Church, how can the act of dramatic writing (which, in addition to that of researching and writing this study, is a performative act in itself) help interpret Archbishop Romero's political claim to "resurrection" through a contemporary context? Through methods of performance historiography, and similar to the functions of *The Nativity*, I utilize the act of playwriting, assuming its realization through theatrical performance, to imagine the fulfillment of his promise of "resurrection" through the people and to explore Archbishop Romero's legacy as present throughout the years. The dramatic script (which incorporates live actors and puppetry, in direct homage to *The Nativity* and Bread and

Puppet) is developed through primary and secondary sources, including data collected from Archbishop Romero's biography, the investigations of his murder, the canonization process of sainthood by the Catholic Church, as well as documentaries and articles of other topics of social and cultural relevance to the ongoing struggles of Central American people. The fact that Archbishop Romero continues to be revered by people across the world as a revolutionary figure and was declared a saint in October 2018 confirms the timeliness and relevance of his legacy.

In the Conclusion, I will summarize my findings, analyze their significance, and discuss implications of my research within the field.

CHAPTER II.

Setting the Stage: Geopolitical Context and Historical Background

In order to appreciate the significance of Bread and Puppet's tour of *The Nativity* in 1985 and the significance of Romero's work and legacy, we must first understand the geopolitical and historical context that inspired the performance and its subsequent tour, including U.S. intervention in Central American politics, the life and assassination of Archbishop Romero, as well as the emergence of liberation theology in Latin America.

In 1985, the year of the tour, El Salvador and neighboring Guatemala were in the midst of two of the most devastating civil wars in Central American history. Thus, *The Nativity*, which centers on El Salvador's Archbishop Romero and the plight of its people, was toured by the Bread and Puppet Theater in Nicaragua and not in El Salvador. Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front had recently won the revolutionary war and successfully ousted the oppressive Somoza regime. Because of Nicaragua's historic win and optimistic political climate, as well as existing relationships between Bread and Puppet staff members and Nicaraguan theatre activists, it was chosen for the performance tour. In this chapter, I focus primarily on the geopolitical context of El Salvador as it was a significant influence on the performance and its aftermath. A more in-depth analysis of Nicaragua's Sandinista movement is included in a later chapter. The following background information sets the stage for my analysis of Bread and Puppet's 1985 performance of *The Nativity* in Nicaragua and the role of performance in upholding Romero's spirit and legacy.

Civil War, Communism, and the Church

The Salvadoran civil war began in 1980, but its origins date back to El Salvador's oligarchic rule of the nineteenth century. Prior to that time, land was considered communal property but was transferred to private ownership after laws favoring the wealthy passed in 1879. As a result, campesinos, who cultivated the lands, were forced to leave the previously collective property and became a "cash-crop labor force."⁴⁹ The oligarchic government maintained its power for a century, and by the early 1970s El Salvador was known as "the country of the fourteen families," in which a small number of wealthy families owned the vast majority of land where coffee, cotton, and sugar was cultivated and exported.⁵⁰ According to author Miguel Cavada Diez, these families maintained economic wealth and power for years through economic exploitation of campesino workers and support of military repression by the right-wing Salvadoran government.⁵¹ Diez argues that by 1970, campesinos had become more socially conscious and had begun to mobilize for better living conditions, working wages, equal distribution of land, and economic equality. The wave of peasant political consciousness inspired the formation of farmworker unions and leftist guerrilla organizations across the country. The movement also sparked an interest in learning to read and write among the peasant community. Campesinos understood that through literacy, they could better advocate for themselves and prevent worker exploitation, read and understand work contracts, and calculate numbers for proper payment of crops and labor.

⁴⁹ Hugh Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War: A Study of Revolution* (Lynne Rienner, 1996), 18.

⁵⁰ Miguel Cavada Diez, *Romero: "¡Cese la represión!"*, 10.

⁵¹ Diez, *Romero*, 10.

The campesino uprising was supported by outside agents, including students, teachers, and activist church clergy, while wealthy landowners and the right-wing National Guard publicly opposed the movement; for the elite, the campesino uprising was a significant threat to maintaining their capital power and to the stability of the country. The right-wing opposition argued that the peasant revolution was promoting subversive radical views that would inevitably plague the country with communism.

The 1970s also saw a surge in popular group organizations, including "peasant associations, cooperatives, unions, church-based Bible study groups that evolved into self-help groups, etc."⁵² Some of these groups had origins in Marxist teachings, involvement in community organizing, and workers parties, while others stemmed from youth movements, or social justice work spearheaded by the Catholic Church like liberation theology. In 1980, five of these prominent popular organizations⁵³ joined forces to create the *Farabundo Marti Liberacion Nacional* (FMLN).⁵⁴ Leaders of the FMLN guerrillas fighting against El Salvador's right-wing military government were often led by young people from early teens to mid-twenties, from middle-class families, many times high school or university students, and young professionals who abandoned their careers for the cause, while the FMLN's base consisted of armed peasant workers, women, and the poor mobilizing and fighting to improve their living and economic conditions.⁵⁵

52 Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, 34.

53 The (PCS) Salvadoran Communist Party, the Popular Liberation Forces-Farabundo Marti (FPL), the Central American Revolutionary Workers Party, the Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ERP), and The Armed Forces of National Resistance.

54 My English translation: The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front.

55 Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 34-35.

The Salvadoran right-wing military, wealthy families, and even top officials of the Catholic Church worked towards dismantling the campesino “communist” movement through election fraud, military repression, government intimidation, and violence against the poor.⁵⁶ Thus, the *Esquadron de la Muerte* (death squad⁵⁷), a paramilitary vigilante group known for intimidation, disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings was formed to suppress the peasant movement and its supporters.⁵⁸ The death squad, self-nicknamed as *La Mana Blanca* (White Hand⁵⁹) or *Union Guerrera Blanca* (White Warriors Union⁶⁰) was known for making surprise visits to the homes of campesino union organizers and killing, torturing, or raping those accused of subversion, their family members and their supporters. As a warning to the neighborhood, the death squad members would often decapitate their victims and display their heads or body parts, sometimes attached to wooden posts outside the homes.⁶¹ The death squad was known to leave threatening messages on the walls inside the homes of the wounded using the victims’ blood.

Activist members of the Catholic Church, specifically Jesuit priests and followers of liberation theology, supported the peasant revolution and were soon accused of subversion by the opposition, including fellow members of the Church. Jesuit priests who spearheaded faith-based communities throughout the country worked closely with the campesino community, sometimes teaching them to read and write through the gospel. The social justice-based ministry was deemed “communist” for supporting campesino

56 Diez, *Romero: “¡Cese la represión!”*, 10-11.

57 My English translation

58 Matt Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint: The Plot to Murder Óscar Romero and the Quest to Bring His Killers to Justice* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), xvi.

59 My English translation

60 My English translation

61 Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Wants*, 22.

rights. Jesuit priests and missionary nuns were threatened, tortured, raped, and even killed by right-wing military and death squads for their affiliation with the movement.⁶² Two of the most notorious cases include the rape and murder of four Catholic missionary nuns from the United States by the Salvadoran National Guard in 1980 and the execution-style murder of six notable Jesuit priests, their maid and her daughter at their residence within the Central American University of El Salvador in 1989.

U.S. Involvement in the Salvadoran Civil War and Romero's Murder

The U.S. has a long history of interference in Central American policies, including their significant role in the Salvadoran war *and* in the murder of Archbishop Romero. According to renowned philosopher, linguist, author, and political activist Noam Chomsky, U.S. interventions in Latin American affairs, in the name of protecting “democracy,” prevented the development of Third World Nationalism which favored anti-fascist movements and indigenous peoples’ resistance.⁶³ Chomsky argues that the U.S. relied on the use of military force to dismantle social revolutions and leftist, or “communist,” movements, strategies enabled by its strong alliance to Latin American right-wing militaries.⁶⁴

Chomsky further argues that for the U.S. the threat of communist influence from neighboring Latin American countries was so significant they were determined to “crush independent nationalism” regardless of the size of the country.⁶⁵ He argues that richer countries would view a poorer country’s successful efforts for a people’s social reform as

62 Caroline Linton, “Pope Francis Is a Jesuit: Seven Things You Need to Know About the Society of Jesus,” *The Daily Beast*, March 14, 2013, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/pope-francis-is-a-jesuit-seven-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-society-of-jesus>

63 Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, 19.

64 Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, 29-33.

65 Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, 21-22.

a model, which a rich country could then easily replicate because they had more resources. The poorer country turned “communist” thus becomes the “bad apple” that would eventually spoil the bunch. Chomsky’s “rotten apple” theory maintains that the poorer and weaker the country, the higher “the threat of a good example” for the U.S. The fact that Nicaragua was winning the fight to overthrow the oppressive Somoza regime in the 1970s, and that the peasant movement and popular organizations in El Salvador were on the rise, made the threat of El Salvador following in Nicaragua’s footsteps even greater for the U.S.

Small and poor countries fighting for social justice reform like El Salvador, Nicaragua, or Guatemala in the 70s and 80s were not the exception and were faced with the full force of U.S. military power and influence. Chomsky unpacks the strong correlation between U.S. military aid and human rights violations in Central America based on human rights studies, revealing that U.S. aid is disproportionately distributed to Latin American countries, not based on the country’s needs but favoring countries that torture their citizens and cater to the wealthy.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the *United States Institute of Peace: Truth Commission El Salvador Report*, documents that the United States of America was responsible for financial backing, military intervention, war crimes, and other acts of human rights violations during the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, including the death of Romero.⁶⁷

Romero's Life and Assassination

Romero was appointed as El Salvador’s Archbishop by the Catholic Church in 1977, and supported by the wealthiest families in the country, who claimed Romero as

66 Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, 29.

67 United States Institute of Peace, “Truth Commission: El Salvador,” accessed April 5, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/1992/07/truth-commission-el-salvador>.

“our bishop” because they believed he would be loyal to the needs of the right-wing elite.⁶⁸ Left-leaning Catholic Salvadoran priests and followers of liberation theology objected to Romero’s appointment as Archbishop insisting on nominations of more progressive priests who had demonstrated a commitment to the people’s struggle, and more importantly, would not be bought by the wealthy or right-wing military. As a symbolic protest, those opposed to Romero as Archbishop refused to attend his inauguration. Several of the same Catholic clergy who first objected to Romero’s appointment would soon work alongside him.

Ironically, Romero was appointed specifically because of his centrist and conservative views which made him a safe and reliable option for the wealthy families and government in power. Romero’s previous record revealed that he did not engage in political activities nor confront political or military leaders. Early in his career, he believed that the country could trust its government to resolve any issue and would often criticize religious leaders who became politically involved. Naturally, the assumption was that Romero would not participate in any political movements, much less cause any significant trouble for the Church or state. Little did they know that Romero, who did not identify as either a liberation theologian or communist, would become an integral part of the campesino movement, inspire countless of human rights activists across Latin America, and transform into one of the El Salvador’s most beloved social justice figures.

Romero’s radical transformation is largely due to the murder of one of his closest friends, Father Rutillio Grande, by the National Guard. Father Grande was a prominent and outspoken liberation theologian who taught and directed social action projects in the ministry, worked closely with the campesino movement, and publicly denounced military

⁶⁸ Diez, *Romero: “¡Cese la represión!”*, 11.

repression throughout his sermons. Grande was one of many liberation theologians accused of communism and terrorism by the right-wing military and wealthy elite. Romero first met Grande in the Jesuit Seminary and even asked Grande to be the master of ceremonies for his appointment in 1970 as Archbishop. Although Romero and Grande differed in their political views, especially when it came to the role of the Catholic Church, they maintained a meaningful personal relationship, which many argue greatly influenced the politicization of Romero.⁶⁹ Father Grande, along with an old man named Manuel Solórzano, and a young boy named Nelson Rutilio Lemus, was traveling to Aguilares, El Salvador, when they were ambushed by the right-wing military and shot to death in their car. Grande's assassination became the tipping point for Romero, who thereafter shifted his approach from "defending the status-quo, to actively working against it," and like Grande, Romero began denouncing military repression and reporting human rights violations in his sermons.⁷⁰ Shortly after receiving the news of Grande's murder, Romero demanded the government investigate, proclaiming that "whoever touches one of my priests touches me."⁷¹ In honor of Grande, and in order to collectively mourn Grande's death and celebrate his legacy, Romero suspended all Sunday Masses throughout the diocese and instead called for "*la Misa unica*," the one Mass. Romero facilitated "*la Misa unica*" as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with Grande and the people of El Salvador.

Romero maintained his promise to Grande and continued his dear friend's legacy.

During his tenure as Archbishop, Romero advocated for the poor and publicly denounced

69 "Rutilio Grande: Priest & Martyr Who Influenced Óscar Romero," Interfaith Peacemakers, accessed January 19, 2020, <https://readthespirit.com/interfaith-peacemakers/rutilio-grande/>.

70 "Rutilio Grande," <https://readthespirit.com/interfaith-peacemakers/rutilio-grande/>.

71 Lee, *Revolutionary Saint*, 73.

all human rights violations by *both* the Salvadoran right-wing military and leftist guerrilla movement members. Through his sermons, public speeches, and radio talks, Romero condemned the extrajudicial killings and disappearances by members of the death squad. He convinced five radio stations to air his sermons every Sunday. Soon Romero's message of faith and peace was heard across the entire country through the archdiocese radio stations. Romero believed that through the radio he could reach the campesino community, especially those who could not attend Mass or who felt ignored by the Church.⁷² It is said that one could walk the streets of the poorest villages in El Salvador and hear Romero's sermons blasting from people's homes.⁷³ In Romero's radio talks, he reported the atrocities committed by the right-wing military and death squads, sometimes calling out military and government officials by name.⁷⁴ Romero's homilies and radio reports became the only reliable source of information for the Salvadoran people. In an attempt to silence Romero, several of the radio station transmitters for the radio stations were destroyed by bombs. One station was bombed during the last month of Romero's life.⁷⁵

Romero also paid visits to several poor communities, conversing, working, walking, and interacting with the people. Joining other Jesuit priests and followers of liberation theology, Romero supported the rights of campesinos to mobilize and form organizations for social reform. Romero also blamed the "institutional violence of the

72 "School Resources | Caritas Australia," Oscar Romero Biography, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.caritas.org.au/resources/school-resources/>.

73 Linda Cooper and James Hodge, "Romero, El Salvador's News Source," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 21, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/archbishop-oscar-romero-el-salvadors-most-trusted-news-source>.

74 Cooper and Hodge, "Romero, El Salvador's News Source."

75 Cooper and Hodge, "Romero, El Salvador's News Source." The transmitter had been bombed at least 10 times in 3 years.

state” for the country’s social and economic crisis.⁷⁶ Fellow Salvadoran Jesuit priest and later martyr Ignacio Ellacuria praised Romero for his direct engagement with the people, claiming that through Romero “God passed through El Salvador.”⁷⁷ Nine years after Romero’s murder, Ellacuria was one of six Jesuit priests brutally murdered by the right-wing National Guard on university grounds.

Archbishop Romero called for *Socorro Juridico*, a no-cost legal aid office composed of young lawyers, human rights advocates, and student volunteers, to work under the archdioceses. Under Romero’s leadership, *Socorro Juridico* investigated cases of killed, or disappeared people.⁷⁸ *Socorro Juridico* evolved from a legal counsel office to a human rights organization where victims’ families could report their cases. Romero listened to every person who came through his office. His sermons included the accounts of violence against the Salvadoran people learned from encounters with the people as well as those revealed through legal counsel. Romero was known for informative and inspirational homilies that lasted 2-3 hours. Witnesses claim that during one of Romero’s homilies, people were on their feet for the entire sermon and that Romero was interrupted at least ten times by their thundering applause.⁷⁹

Unlike previous religious leaders, Romero refused to partake in extravagant lifestyles; instead, he chose to live a life of humble means alongside the poor. He even utilized his own resources, and those of the Archdiocese, to help those in need.⁸⁰

76 Byrne, 31.

77 Matt Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint: The Plot to Murder Óscar Romero and the Quest to Bring His Killers to Justice* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 169.

78 Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint*, 50.

79 Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint*, 56.

80 Unknown author, Oscar Romero Biography, “School Resources | Caritas Australia,” accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.caritas.org.au/resources/school-resources/>.

According to professor and historian Kathleen Manning's "A Struggle for Sainthood," Romero's saintly actions as Archbishop warrant his canonization by the Catholic Church:

He traveled great distances along narrow and dangerous roads to say Mass and offer villagers the sacrament in remote parts of El Salvador. He arranged medical care for people who lacked the resources to get it themselves, especially the elderly. When he learned that migrant coffee harvesters often did not have places to sleep and were spending nights on the ground in the public square, Romero housed them in church buildings.⁸¹

Romero's selfless and generous behavior towards the poor was uncommon for someone in his position. Previous Catholic Archbishops during the era of the fourteen families were often rewarded for their loyalty to the elite through expensive gifts and privileges, including luxurious clothing, cars, and homes. Romero chose instead to live in a one-guest bedroom outside the Divine Providence Hospital in San Salvador. He also refused to have bodyguards despite countless threats and often drove himself in his car (a beige 1970s Toyota Corolla) to prevent further casualties should there be an attempt on his life.

After hearing that President Jimmy Carter would increase military aid to El Salvador by billions per day, Romero made attempts to interject through a public letter to President Carter, imploring that the U.S. cease military aid and funding as soon as possible. In his letter, Romero described the dire situation of military violence experienced by the Salvadoran people, particularly the poor, farmworkers, students, and activists opposing the war. Romero read the letter to President Carter during Mass in San Salvador, receiving the blessing and support of his parishioners who met him with thunderous applause, interrupting him eight times with standing ovations. Meanwhile

81 Kathleen Manning, "Oscar Romero's Saintly Struggle for Justice," *U.S. Catholic Magazine*, Faith in Real Life (blog), October 1, 2018, <https://uscatholic.org/articles/201810/oscar-romeros-saintly-struggle-for-justice/>.

Salvadoran government leaders were angered by Romero's actions, which further fueled their hate. President Carter never responded to Romero's request, and instead sent the increased military aid as promised. When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, he chose to further *increase* military aid to El Salvador.⁸²

As Romero's influence among the poor and supporters of the campesino movement increased through his radio talks, politically charged sermons, and grassroots work with the peasant community, so did the threats against his life. Romero received death threats by the death squad and right-wing National Guard, including hundreds of threatening letters, attacks by the national press, and the "Be a Patriot; Kill a Priest" campaign which (through flyers posted throughout the country) encouraged people to kill "communist" priests.⁸³ During his final sermon, Romero made an appeal to the National Guard and the police urging them to disobey orders to kill their fellow Salvadorans. He pleaded that instead enlisted men follow the orders of God's law, which states, "Thou shalt not kill."⁸⁴ He ended his sermon with a final plea to the military army, "I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!" Romero's final words during Mass were followed by thunderous applause, which had interrupted the appeal at least five times, and concluded with a final one-minute-long ovation. Romero's final sermon became one of his most recognized, inspiring, and controversial speeches, what many consider his ultimate death sentence. The conservative press, National Guard and right-wing government quickly accused Romero of treason for encouraging army men to defy government orders. Despite recommendations from his closest advisors, legal

82 Karen Zraick, "Óscar Romero, Archbishop Killed While Saying Mass, Will Be Named a Saint on Sunday," *The New York Times*, October 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/13/world/europe/oscar-arnulfo-romero-saint-canonization.html>.

83 Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint*, 48.

84 Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 241.

counsel, and personal friends not to make the controversial speech, Romero chose to follow through with his homily. He believed it was his moral obligation to do so. Shortly after making the speech, he met with his legal advisors for counsel and was prepared to defend himself against government retaliation.

Two weeks before his final sermon, Romero addressed numerous death threats through a phone conversation with a Guatemalan journalist. According to the reporter, Romero proclaimed that he did not believe in death without resurrection and that should he be killed, he would “resurrect” through the Salvadoran people.⁸⁵ On March 24, 1980, shortly after that final speech, a man entered the church carrying a .223 caliber Roberts rifle, aiming at Romero while he celebrated Mass. He shot Romero several times in the heart and escaped in a Volkswagen car waiting outside. Romero fell behind the altar and below a bloodied crucifix of Jesus Christ.⁸⁶ He bled to death on the church floor as clergy members, including nuns and Mass attendants, rushed to his side.

Liberation Theology

By the late 1970s liberation theology, a Marxist interpretation of the Christian gospel, had spread throughout Latin America, including Central America. The moral and spiritual teachings of liberation theology -- fueled by social-economic analysis and geared towards liberation of the oppressed through the Christian gospel-- emerged in South America during the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Liberation theology advocates for spirituality that interprets the teachings of God through the struggle of the poor. According to Berryman, liberation theology functions as a social critique of systemic and ideological forms of oppression, while challenging the Catholic Church to

85 Dear, “Romero’s Resurrection,” <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/romeros-resurrection>.

86 Dear, “Romero’s Resurrection,” <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/romeros-resurrection>.

act on its spiritual and moral service to the oppressed, from the “angle of the poor.”⁸⁷

Because Jesus Christ himself embodied these ideals of selflessness and service throughout the Christian gospel, liberation theologians believe it is a moral and ethical responsibility to follow in Jesus Christ’s footsteps.

Liberation theology as a faith-based social justice doctrine was not without criticism or debate. Feminist liberation theologians argued that patriarchal structures within the Catholic Church and in society were systems of oppression equal to those of economic inequality and should be addressed as such; they challenged patriarchal systems of power within the Roman Catholic Church, including, but not limited to, advocating for recognition of women’s contributions within the institution and recognizing the lack of female representation in positions of leadership and power. According to Berryman, feminist liberation theologians envisioned a woman’s liberation that placed them as participants on equal footing when “building a new kind of society.”⁸⁸

Several other leading liberation theologians first opposed Romero's appointment to Archbishop but would later support him, and yet, Romero never identified as a liberation theologian. According to Martin Maier SJ, Romero nonetheless “became a great source of inspiration for renowned proponents of liberation theology.”⁸⁹

Particularly important was Romero’s concern for the poor (a foundation of liberation theology); he advocated for equality and dignity of the oppressed, walked alongside them in their quest for liberation, and ultimately found God in the poor.

87 Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 6.

88 Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 173.

89 Martin Maier, “Mons. Romero and Liberation Theology,” Lecture, University of Central America, San Salvador, ES, August 2015, Accessed February 12, 2021, <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/>

Romero's relationship with liberation theology was, in fact, much more nuanced than imagined, beginning with Romero's public criticism of liberation theology during his tenure as director of the diocesan weekly magazine, *Orientación*. Romero often published opinion pieces opposing the radicalization of the church. It was not until Father Grande's murder that Romero experienced a significant shift of political ideology, what many refer to as Romero's "conversion" towards liberation theology. According to Maier, the death of Father Grande and his companions (and old man named Manuel Solorzano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus a young boy) deeply inspired Romero to reimagine his role as Archbishop and to continue in Grande's footsteps. In discussing Father Grande's canonization process during an interview (which requires verification of a miraculous act), Pope Francis argued that Father Grande's great miracle *was* Romero.⁹⁰ Indeed, it was the violent death of close friend at the hands of the right-wing military that transformed Romero to the radical social justice leader he was destined to become.

After Romero's Death

Romero's murder in 1980 was said to have "polarized the country" and ultimately sparked the violent civil war of El Salvador.⁹¹ Even Romero's funeral service, with over 50,000 mourners in attendance, was met with guns and violence from the National Guard, resulting in thirty deaths and hundreds of injuries.⁹² Romero's murder was a political and symbolic act that demonstrated that no one, even the country's beloved Archbishop, was

90 Rhina Guidos, "Forty Years after St. Romero's Assassination, El Salvador May See More Beatified Martyrs," Grandin Media (blog), March 24, 2020, <https://grandinmedia.ca/forty-years-after-st-romeros-assassination-el-salvador-may-see-more-beatified-martyrs/>.

91 Kate Doyle and Emily Willard, "'Learn from History', 31st Anniversary of the Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero," National Security Archive, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB339/>.

92 Angel Vicente Peiro, "Así fue el sangriento funeral de Monseñor Óscar Romero," *Infobae*, October 14, 2018, <https://www.infobae.com/america/historia-america/2018/10/14/asi-fue-el-sangriento-funeral-de-monsenor-oscar-romero/>.

impervious to extrajudicial violence by the right-wing government for insubordination. The twelve-year civil war, which lasted from 1980 to 1992, displaced a half million, and took the lives of 75,000 innocent Salvadoran people, including women, children, and the poor.⁹³ According to the United Nations-created *Truth Commission: El Salvador in 1993*, and based on collected testimonies, 85% of violence of the war was directly incited by state and military officials, while the FMLN was liable for only 5% of reported acts of violence.⁹⁴ The majority of acts of violence targeted poor and urban communities. The report also concluded by directly naming the people -- army officers, government employees, among others⁹⁵ -- responsible for a number of human rights violations, including disappearances, torture, rape, extrajudicial killings, and other acts of violence. A week after the UN reports, the Amnesty Law was established by political leaders in El Salvador (especially those involved in acts of violence during the war), to protect themselves against future legal actions for violating human rights during the war. According to one testimonial from the "Unfinished Sentences: Justice" documentary project, the Amnesty Law was created to "cover up assassinations, deny the truth, and impede justice...their purpose is to deny dignity to the poor, the victims and the common person."⁹⁶

One of the most notorious perpetrators of violence was Roberto D'Aubuisson, the Neo-liberal, far-right politician and death squad leader. He would often appear in

93 "El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords," United States Institute of Peace, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2001/01/el-salvador-implementation-peace-accords>, 7.

94 "Truth Commission: El Salvador," United States Institute of Peace, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/1992/07/truth-commission-el-salvador>.

95 After its findings, the truth commission recommended the direct dismissal of civil servants in government service affiliated with violations of human rights.

96 Jose Maria Tojeira, "Testimonial," accessed March 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpeGdYRvR1g>, Jose Maria Tojeira is the former rector of the University of Central America, San Salvador.

television programs accusing people of communism and other forms of political insubordination, after which these individuals would be murdered. It was reported by *The Washington Post* that D'Aubuisson would openly discuss his willingness to "kill 200,000 to 300,000 Salvadorans" as necessary in restoring peace in the country.⁹⁷ In 1981, he established ARENA (*Alliancia Republicana Nacional*⁹⁸), El Salvador's far-right political party. The Truth Commission, as well as subsequent investigations of Romero's murder, have identified D'Aubuisson and his death squads as orchestrating Romero's murder, which they referred to as "Operation Piña."⁹⁹ D'Aubuisson died of throat cancer in 1992, which the Salvadoran people refer to as "God's revenge."¹⁰⁰

Finally, in 1992, the Salvadoran right-wing government and the FMLN, the leftist guerrilla Army, signed a Peace Accords to end the country's vicious war. The United States Institute of Peace reported the treaty included the following goals:

a cease-fire; the demobilization of military and guerrilla forces; the establishment of the FMLN as a political party and the reintegration of its combatants into society; changes in the nature, responsibilities, and size of the country's armed forces; creation of a new national civilian police force and an intelligence service separate from the military; human rights measures; electoral and judicial reforms; and limited social and economic programs primarily benefiting members of the demobilized forces and war-ravaged communities.¹⁰¹

The Peace Accords cleared a path for peace in El Salvador, allowed for the FMLN to form its own political party, and achieved other democratic, social, and structural achievements, and yet they did not fully eliminate government corruption, military violence, and economic disparities among Salvadorans, all remnants of the country's

97 "Roberto D'Aubuisson," Wikipedia, accessed March 19, 2021,

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roberto_D%27Aubuisson&oldid=1013031947.

98 My English translation: National Republican Alliance.

99 English translation: Operation Pineapple.

100 "Roberto D'Aubuisson," Wikipedia.

101 "El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords," United States Institute of Peace, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2001/01/el-salvador-implementation-peace-accords>, 5.

most violent civil conflict to date. A notable aftermath that best exemplifies the consequences of the Salvadoran civil war was the formation of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS) gang in Los Angeles during the 1980s¹⁰² -- originally created to protect recent Salvadoran migrants from other gangs in Los Angeles and directly tied to U.S. intervention, training and funding of the death squads. MS members in Los Angeles were young people who migrated to the U.S. fleeing the violence of a U.S.-funded war, many of them recruited as child soldiers by the military, who were also firsthand witnesses to the torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings by the death squad and right-wing military of their families.¹⁰³ It is not surprising then that the MS gang would adopt torture tactics similar to the death squad when conducting its own business of extortion, drug smuggling, rape, and murder, among other criminal acts. MS gang members are formed in Los Angeles and were then deported to El Salvador where they recruited and expanded throughout the country. In the 21st century, El Salvador and neighboring countries like Guatemala and Honduras continue to experience social and economic disparities, government corruption, extreme poverty, and gang violence, all residues of civil conflict in the late 1970s, and a direct result of U.S. intervention in Central American politics and policy.

Overwhelmingly, the international community supported the Peace Accords and cease-fire between the right-wing military and the FMLN. According to the U.S. Peace Accords report, the war and its subsequent human right violations and countless civilian casualties -- especially after the murder of the six Jesuit priests, their maid and her

102 "From U.S.-Funded Death Squads to L.A.-Bred Maras," *Generation Progress* (blog), May 27, 2005, <https://genprogress.org/from-us-funded-death-squads-to-l-abred-maras/>.

103 "From U.S.-Funded Death Squads," *Generation Progress* (blog).

daughter – “shook public opinion” and was met with worldwide opposition.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, nearly one million Salvadoran migrants, who fled to the United States during the war,¹⁰⁵ were overjoyed with the positive news, and remained hopeful that positive changes would occur in El Salvador, and they too could return in the near future. The United States, who had invested massive amounts of military aid in El Salvador during the war, threatened to reduce military funding after the murder of the Jesuit priest, maid and her daughter by the death squads-- a direct result of US intervention and military aid -- and thus, advocated for an end to the war and peaceful transition. The U.S. also supported the Amnesty Law, which gave Salvadoran government and military leaders full impunity over war crimes, only interjecting when victims of war crimes were U.S. citizens.¹⁰⁶

Returning to the production of *The Nativity*, and till the time of this writing, the U.S. has denied responsibility tied to its direct involvement in fueling the twelve-year war, and in Romero’s murder. But according to Tom Gibbs, a reporter for London’s *The Guardian*, recent evidence proves that the U.S. had existing knowledge of the killing but refused to investigate further because of concerns that an investigation could interfere with existing war efforts.¹⁰⁷ What is more, Romero was murdered by members of the death squad. The U.S. CIA trained members of the death squad in the U.S.-based School of the Americas, including several of the most notorious and violent Latin American

104 “El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords,” 7

105 “From U.S.-Funded Death Squads,” *Generation Progress* (blog).

106 “El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords,” 13.

107 Gibb, “The Killing of Archbishop Oscar Romero Was One of the Most Notorious Crimes of the Cold War. Was the CIA to Blame?” *The Guardian*, March 23, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/mar/23/features11.g21>.

military leaders, like D'Aubuisson, and are suspected of coordinating Romero's murder and countless other acts of military repression, killings, torture, and violence.¹⁰⁸

Over thirty years after Romero's assassination, newly appointed Pope Francis, an Argentine Jesuit priest and the first Pope of Latin American descent, propelled the beatification process of sainthood for Archbishop Romero. Romero was canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church in October 2018, becoming the first Catholic Saint of Central America and the Caribbean. As a symbolic gesture, Pope Francis wore Romero's blood-stained belt during the Vatican's canonization ceremony in Rome. Tens of thousands of people from all over the world attended Romero's canonization ceremony in the Vatican. Meanwhile, thousands of people in El Salvador gathered in the streets all over the country to hold their own religious and cultural celebrations honoring their beloved Romero, the first Catholic saint of El Salvador.

The year of Romero's canonization marked twenty-five years since the civil war of the 1980s. However, there were still countless war crimes, including murders (of Romero and others) disappearances, and other acts of violence by the right-wing military, which due to the amnesty law, were left without due justice. Pope Francis's decision to advance Romero's canonization as one of his first official acts as Pope was a symbolic victory for the Salvadoran people, particularly for those whose families were impacted by the war and those inspired by Romero's work to follow in his footsteps. For El Salvador's people, Romero's physical body was murdered, but his spirit and legacy would remain alive in the people's hearts long after his death and long after the war. Although Pope Francis declared Romero a saint, it was El Salvador's people who first declared him holy, and now that Romero was a saint, his legacy and memory were destined to live forever.

108 Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint*, 85-86.

CHAPTER III.

Bread and Puppet Performs *The Nativity*, Nicaragua 1985

The Bread and Puppet's *the Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador* Nicaraguan tour of 1985 differed significantly from its North American premiere in Vermont 1982; *The Nativity* of Vermont was intended to educate North American audiences on U.S. intervention in Central America and its role in the murder of Romero, while *The Nativity* toured in Nicaragua was an act of solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution in honor of Romero's life and legacy. Both premiers of *The Nativity* were historic theatrical, cultural, and political experiences, but the *Nativity* tour of 1985 posed extraordinary circumstances, during a historic time in the Americas, for those involved.

In this chapter, I construct the first performance historiography of Bread and Puppet's Nicaraguan tour of *The Nativity* in 1985 by examining responses from the tour's performers, documenting and analyzing the play script, and exploring locations in which it was performed. Although documentation of the 1982 Vermont performance exists, there is no comprehensive literature or analysis of the Nicaraguan tour to date. Furthermore, unlike most traditional theatre groups, the Bread and Puppet Theater does not produce written scripts of its performances. Therefore, spoken dialogue, if any, within a Bread and Puppet performance is rarely documented, and if so, only by one or more members and for rehearsal purposes only. *The Nativity* of 1985 was no exception.

For my analysis of this rare and historic theatrical event, I draw from a series of primary and secondary sources, including mail and email correspondence, oral history

interviews with participants of the tour, journals, diaries, newspaper clippings and photographs. Of special significance, I utilize *Bread and Puppet Theater: A Song for Nicaragua*, a rare Canadian documentary of the tour by Ron Levine and René De Carufel to construct a script of the show. The Levine and Carufel documentary is the only video documentation of the tour prior to my study, and thus plays a central role in my analysis. For example, all images in existence of *The Nativity* in performance for this study are drawn from *A Song for Nicaragua* as still shots from the film. According to participants interviewed, the film captures the performance in its actuality and is an authentic record of its dramatic structure. What is more, the film crew for *Song for Nicaragua* played a critical part in the touring company and followed Bread and Puppet to most, if not all, of its performances, workshops, and rehearsals.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, I incorporate data collected from a participant's personal journal used in the tour. The journal documents crucial information regarding the circumstances of the production, including order of scenes, spoken dialogue, and section titles, as well as important commentary about the experience, all handwritten by the journal author. The journal also includes a hard copy of the original promotional poster for *The Nativity* that was distributed throughout Nicaragua. Also, I examine two rare articles about the tour including promotional ads from *Baracada*, a Nicaraguan newspaper, as well as an article draft "Bread and Puppet Theater Visits Nicaragua" by Steve Karian for the *Liberation News Service*, a leftist underground news organization, sent to Bell during the tour.¹¹⁰

109 For some locations, the film crew was not allowed to film due to safety reasons. Interview of Romanyshyn with the author, November 4, 2020.

110 A typed manuscript of the news article before it was sent to print was given to me by John Bell, December 2020. Liberation News Service was an underground Left-wing news press. The article is not found in print form.

In addition to Schumann and the tour organizers, Michael Romanyshyn, renowned musician, composer and long-time Bread and Puppet puppeteer, and Elia Arce, a Bread and Puppet company member and celebrated Latin American multimedia performing artist, tour participants interviewed for this chapter include: Dr. John Bell, puppeteer, professor and premier scholar of puppetry in America; musician, puppeteer and founding member of Great Small Works, Trudi Cohen; Dr. Rosa Luisa Marquez, puppeteer, performer and theatre professor emeritus from the University of Puerto Rico. Other Bread and Puppet staff interviewed were puppeteer, theatre historian, trumpeter, teacher and community organizer, Amy Trompetter; puppeteer, stilt dancer, and painter, Barbara Leber; Peter Hamburger, performer and musician; and trumpeter and musician, Ralph Denzer. Dr. Fernando Vinacour Ponce, actor, director, dramaturge and professor of Theater at the University of Costa Rica along with Dr. Marco Guillen, *La Trama* company member, actor, dramaturge, and also professor of theatre in Costa Rica, joined the *Nativity* tour as performers and were also interviewed for this study.

In this chapter, I document the extraordinary circumstances of the *Nativity* tour and interpret participants' experiences to understand the following: what were the distinctive circumstances of the tour in which it was conceived, created, organized, and carried out? What personal and political significance did it hold for those involved in the Nicaraguan tour versus its premier in Vermont? How did the show portray Romero, and how was it received by Nicaraguan audiences and performers?

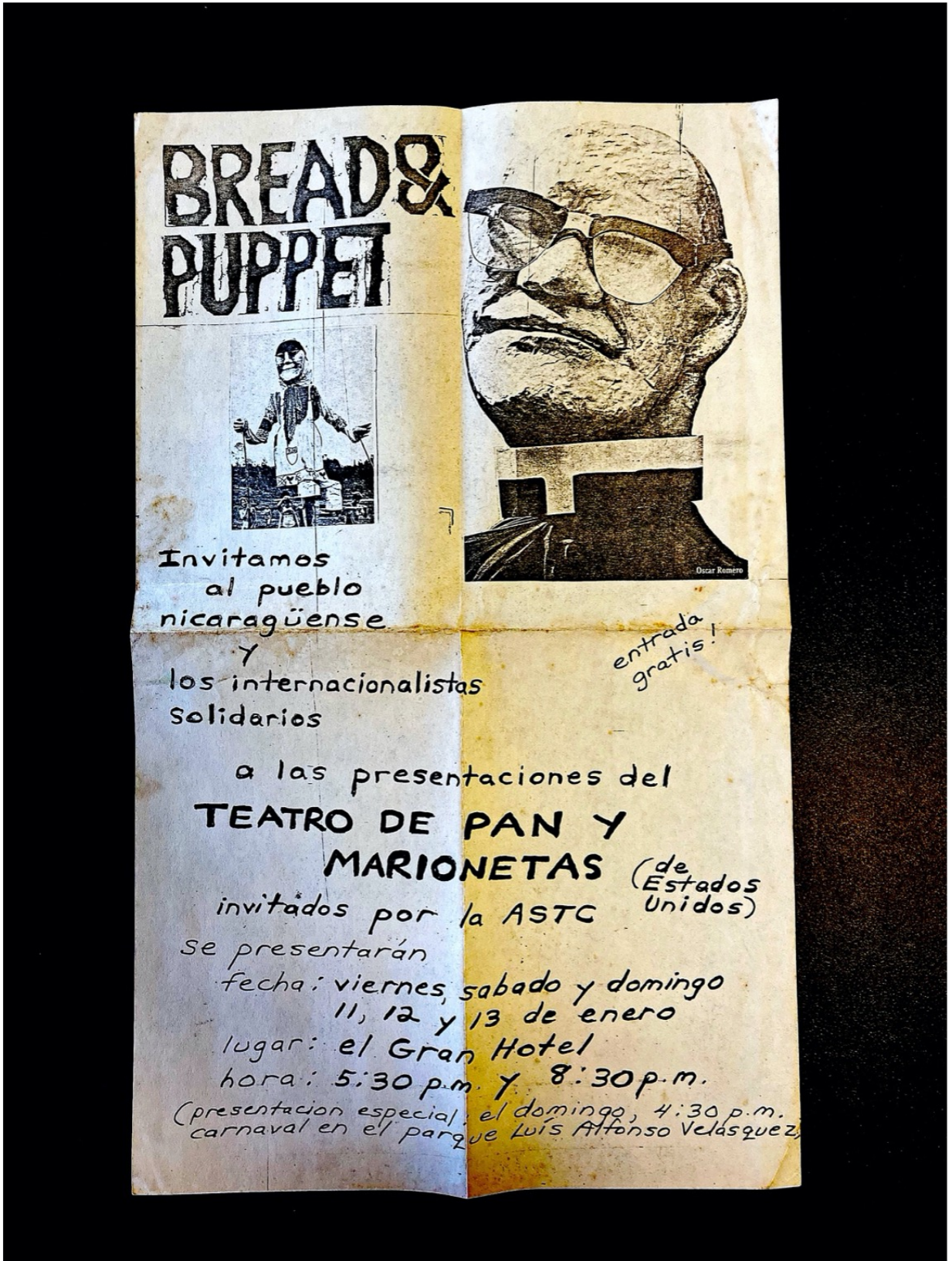


Figure 2. The original Nicaraguan poster advertising Bread and Puppet Theater's *The Nativity*.

5) VARIOS.

Se requiere a los(as) interesados(as) acudir con la conformidad con el Art. 12 de las Regeneración Estatutaria de la Cámara, del 19 de febrero, de 1985, a enterarse de las condiciones y requisitos de la misma, los mismos que se encuentran en el 2º de las Regeneración Estatutaria.

Para más datos, las personas que se interesen en la ASOC, ASANDINO en representación de las entidades que se les otorga el título de afiliado, sus señas son: representantes oficiales de la ASOC, en la Cámara, además de acudir al teléfono con una carta. Managua, 4 de Enero de 1985.

GUSTAVO A. TUERINO MEDRANO
Secretario Ejecutivo

ASOC La Unión de Artistas de Teatro

Presenta
AL FAMOSO COLECTIVO ARTISTICO

"BREAD AND PUPPET"

(De Estados Unidos de Norteamérica)
con

RENACE EL CIRCO

Espectáculo de marionetas, canciones, máscaras y música que recoge lo mejor de la tradición del Carnaval Popular.

Funciones:
Hora : 11, 12 y 13 de Enero
Local : 5:00 p.m. y 8:00 p.m.
 : Centro Cultural Plumas del Gran Hotel

(Boletines a la venta en la Casa "Fernando González")

OTRAS FUNCIONES

Sábado 13	Calle Sancho (Plaza) 10:00 a.m.
Domingo 13	Parque "Los Altos del Cerro" 4:00 p.m.
Martes 15	San Justo (Centro Comercial) 5:30 p.m.
Miércoles 16	Calle Reina (Centro Comercial) 5:30 p.m.
Jueves 14	San José - Managua 5:00 p.m.
Viernes 18	Parque Central - León 5:30 p.m.
Domingo 20	Parque Zoologico - Managua 10:00 p.m.

ASOC ASOCIACION SANDINISTA DE TRABAJADORES DE LA CULTURA
CARTELETA CULTURAL

Actividad	Fecha	Hora y Local
Artes Plásticas Exposición Art. Contemporáneo de Nicaragua (Managua y Cateduc)	11 de Enero al 28 de Febrero	Plumas del Gran Hotel 11:00 a.m. a 6:00 p.m.
Fotografía "ROSTRO DE UNA PAZ" Nacional Exposición personal del artista Ruydon Viedal	8 al 22 de Enero Luz y Verano Sábado	Casa "Fernando González" 10:00 a.m. a 6:00 p.m. 8:00 a.m. a 4:00 p.m.
"CAFARINA" Exposición personal del artista norteamericano Kevin Duffley	7 al 20 de Enero Todos los días	Colección de Nicaragua 745 "Blanca Arriador" 2:30 a 9:00 p.m.
Arte Circense Temperado de Circo Nacional	Todos los días (excepto miércoles) Sábados y Domingos	Circo Nacional Plaza 19 de Julio 7:00 p.m. 4:00 y 7:00 p.m.
Fiesta Presentación del famoso grupo norteamericano "BREAD AND PUPPET" "Renace el Circo"	Domingo 13 de Enero Del 11 al 22 de Enero (Ejército 16, 17, 18 y 20)	Parque "Luis A. Velásquez" 6:00 y 7:50 p.m. Plaza de Toros 7:30 p.m.

Figure 3.1. An Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores de la Cultura (ASTC) ad for a Bread and Puppet production presented by La Unión de Artistas de Teatro (Union of Theatre Artists).

ASOC La Unión de Artistas de Teatro

Presenta
AL FAMOSO COLECTIVO ARTISTICO

"BREAD AND PUPPET"

(De Estados Unidos de Norteamérica)
con

RENACE EL CIRCO

Espectáculo de marionetas, canciones, máscaras y música que recoge lo mejor de la tradición del Carnaval Popular.

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Miércoles 16	Calle Reina (Centro Comercial) 5:30 p.m.
Jueves 14	San José - Managua 5:00 p.m.
Viernes 18	Parque Central - León 5:30 p.m.
Domingo 20	Parque Zoologico - Managua 10:00 p.m.

Los Artojitos

Admisión gratuita los días de 7:00 P.M. a 12:00 P.M.

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Organizaciones de Masas, Empresas

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C.A. Sandinista, P.O. Box 1000, o llamar al teléfono 76664. Depto. de ventas y mayoreo.

CINES DE HOY

Ultimas presentaciones en Managua del famoso grupo artistico norteamericano

"BREAD AND PUPPET"

con

"NACIMIENTO, CRUCIFIXION Y RESURRECCION DE MONSEÑOR OSCAR A. ROMERO"

Plumas del Gran Hotel - Sábado 13 de Enero - 5:00 y 8:00 p.m.
Entrada: C\$20.00 - Unión de Artistas de Teatro
ASOCIACION SANDINISTA DE TRABAJADORES DE LA CULTURA

Figure 3.2. Ad in *La Prensa* newspaper for Bread and Puppet. (Bottom: "The Birth, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Monseñor Oscar A. Romero.")

Conception and Creation

The Nativity is one of the few Bread and Puppet Theater productions based on a real-life character. Thus, the 20-foot Romero puppet is part of a small and select group of puppets including the puppets of the founding fathers of North America. While the storyline for *The Nativity* draws from the Christian nativity, it was adapted to tell the story of Romero's life, death, and dramatized "resurrection" through music, circus and puppetry. During a 2016 interview at the Bread and Puppet farm, Peter and Elka shared the initial inspiration for *The Nativity*:¹¹¹

Xiomara: What inspired you to create the Romero puppet and the performance? Other than what was happening in Central America at the time --

Peter: No, that *is* what inspired this puppet. The news about Monsignor Romero and his wonderful speech at the time when he was killed, this incredible address to the soldiers, to drop their weapons and to *not* follow orders, what a *courageous*, incredible thing for a preacher to say! And he addressed the soldiers, the National Guard and the police, all of them. And just told them... We learned a lot of things about El Salvador and the priests and many others.

Elka: And Guatemala...

Peter: Yes, the Liberation Theology people, they were being wiped out, a lot of them, they were assassinated all over the place, and a lot of that was done by CIA-trained, *American-trained* special forces.

According to the Schumanns, it was Romero's courageous appeal to the Salvadoran National Guard and his subsequent murder that inspired Peter and the Bread and Puppet company to tell his story. Thus, one year after Romero's murder, *The Nativity* premiered

111 Peter and Elka Schumann, Interview with the author, Bread and Puppet Farm, Glover, Vermont, July 1, 2016.

in Vermont to North American audiences as part of Bread and Puppet's *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* in 1982. This circus was dedicated in solidarity with the Central American struggle and was developed in collaboration with Central American theatre artists (who visited the farm) and activists who shared their testimonials and performed alongside the Bread and Puppet Theater.

Bread and Puppet's longstanding relationship with Central American theatre artists and activists during the 1980s built the foundation for *The Nativity* to be toured in Nicaragua three years after its premier in Vermont. Specifically, Romanyshyn was invited to Nicaragua in 1984 by the *Asociación Sandinista Trabajadores de la Cultura* (ASTC), a labor union group formed during the revolution in 1978 representing over 50,000 workers and cooperatives in Nicaragua.¹¹² During the trip, Romanyshyn led a series of circus workshops as part of a Bread and Puppet cultural exchange with the Nicaraguan circus community. According to Romanyshyn, his plan was to return to Nicaragua in 1985 with a Bread and Puppet circus, but Schumann chose to tour *The Nativity* instead.¹¹³ In an interview with Romanyshyn, he later revealed that touring *The Nativity*, which still incorporated circus elements, was the better choice.¹¹⁴ Arce, who was working on a film in Nicaragua in 1984, is also largely responsible for coordinating collaborations between Bread and Puppet members and Central American artists prior to *and* during the actual tour. Additionally, it was because of Romanyshyn and Arce's

112 "Nicaragua. Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo: comemos lo que cultivamos," *Resumen Latinoamericano* (blog), accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2020/08/13/nicaragua-asociacion-de-trabajadores-del-campo-comemos-lo-que-cultivamos/>.

113 Michael Romanyshyn, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

114 Michael Romanyshyn, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

relationship with the Nicaraguan theatre and circus community during the Nicaragua trip of 1984 that Bread and Puppet was invited back by the ASTC.¹¹⁵

Other examples of intercultural collaborations that took place during the tour of 1985 include personal invitations by Arce to several Central American theatre artists to join Bread and Puppet during the tour. Because of Arce's efforts, members of the Costa Rican theatre group *La Trama* (a political street and theatre company) participated in all aspects of the tour alongside Bread and Puppet. At the time of the tour, Dr. Ponce was the company's director. Arce also connected Bread and Puppet to MECATE who participated as performers, puppeteers, and musicians during the tour.

The Nicaraguan tour, not limited to the dramatic play, began with week-long rehearsals, puppetry and circus workshops, street carnivals, side-show performances, and

115 English translation: The Association of Sandinista Workers Union of Culture.



Figure 5. Black and white poster card with the Romero puppet being used in rehearsal. (Unknown author. Courtesy of Bread and Puppet Press)

cultural exchanges in the form of meet-n-greets with prominent artists and political figures. Initially, the tour began with Bread and Puppet holding free public workshops underneath large circus tents provided by a local circus and the ASTC. During rehearsals Bread and Puppet company members, their Nicaraguan partners, and community volunteers also constructed puppets and costumes for the show. It is important to note that the 20-foot Romero puppet of the Nicaraguan tour, although similar to the one used in Bread and Puppet's 1982 *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*, was constructed in Nicaragua with Nicaraguan volunteers as part of these workshops. Once *The Nativity* was ready to be performed and toured throughout the country, participants led *pasa-calles*, popular Latin American street parades, throughout the towns. The carnivalesque *pasa-*

calles featured Schumann and Leber on three-foot stilts dancing to the Bread and Puppet brass band with flag dancers and puppeteers moving throughout the crowd. In typical circus fashion, the *pasa-calles* were effective in announcing the company's presence in the town and drawing locals to the *Nativity* performance at the end of the parade.

As word spread throughout the country of Bread and Puppet's arrival, and more and more connections were made within the Sandinista movement, significant figures of the revolution arrived to witness the theatre group in action. One of the most important figures of the Sandinista movement, and a frequent visitor, was Ernesto Cardenal, a Catholic priest and liberation theologian who joined the armed revolution. At the time of the tour, Cardenal was the country's ASTC prime minister of culture and arts programming. He was heavily involved in the tour, often speaking with company members, and attending several performances. Cardenal, a published poet, would often sit in a folding chair and observe the Bread and Puppet rehearsal process.¹¹⁶ At one point during the rehearsal period of the tour, Schumann and the entire Bread and Puppet company met with Cardenal to discuss Romero, liberation theology, and *The Nativity* performance.¹¹⁷ Marquez remembers Cardenal's presence during Bread and Puppet performances, during which she served as a translator, as an enjoyable and "lovely" experience.¹¹⁸

A memorable image is sitting at the table with Peter, Ernesto, and all the puppeteers surrounding them and listening at the same time, being a medium through which language could be shared and to translate. That moment for me was very moving.¹¹⁹

116 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, September 9, 2019.

117 Parts of the interview are documented in Levine's film, *A Song for Nicaragua*.

118 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

119 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

A small portion of the historic interview between Cardenal and Schumann is captured in *A Song for Nicaragua*, as well as commentary from other political or religious Nicaraguan figures with personal connections to Romero and to liberation theology, and who witnessed *The Nativity* firsthand.

Performance Locations

The Nativity was performed throughout Nicaragua in various outdoor locations. Some of these makeshift performing spaces included coffee plantations, the steps of a cathedral, town squares, mountain areas, a cattle-farm cooperative, remote villages, a liberation theology church, and farm fields. According to participant interviews, the puppetry workshops, parades, rehearsals, and performances of *The Nativity* took place throughout Nicaragua in cities including Granada, De Leon, Managua, Buaco, Matagalpa, Saya, Las Lagunas, Masatepe, and Somoto among others.¹²⁰ On one occasion, the Bread and Puppet even made a short presentation during a demonstration outside of the U.S Embassy in Managua; there were over 300 North Americans protesting U.S. violence against Nicaragua.¹²¹

Bread and Puppet would perform throughout the country, traveling by foot, hiking through mountains, and crossing dangerous forest terrain to reach remote villages. The touring company would often modify the performance depending on the location and only present portions of *The Nativity*, if not the full play. In some cases, the company would instead perform a *Cantastoria*, stilt and circus acts, or smaller side shows from the

120 Locations gathered from both participant interviews in 2020, news articles, and Karian's report.

121 Steve Karian, *Liberation News Service*, typed manuscript, 4. No published copy was found during this investigation.

pasa calles.¹²² Performances were mostly held mid-day in the scorching Nicaraguan heat, though participants recall performing late at night in remote locations:¹²³

Arce: I wanted to make sure we (Bread and Puppet) made a connection with a local group that was doing theatre in the mountains. I remember I wanted to make contact with MECATE.

Denzer: Nidia (smiling)

Arce: And so, I recall us going to that community in the mountains. I remember the community was far and we were carrying stuff --

Denzer: We carried our instruments up the mountain.

Arce: Right. Up the mountain.

Ralph: It was at night, and it was certainly dark when we got there. They had no electricity; it was all lit by candles and it was a very beautiful experience. I remember we played and there were singers with guitars and there was this whole movement of people who were encouraged to write songs about Sandino and the Sandinista Movement. They even performed and after that it got really late and there was an old gramophone they cranked up and played dance music. People were dancing!

122 My English translation: street shows.

123 Elia Arce and Ralph Denzer, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.



Figure 6. The Romero puppet used in rehearsal in front of the Cathedral De León Nicaragua, 1985

(Photograph by John Bell).



Figure 7. Still shot from *A Song for Nicaragua*. The sign reads “The Nativity, the Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador.”

Most notably, *The Nativity* was performed on stage at The Ruins of the Grand Hotel in Managua, Nicaragua. The outdoor plaza of the destroyed hotel was a visually striking and effective performing space for *The Nativity*. Bell recalls the unique layout of the space:

It was a big plaza, but everything around it was rubble. Everything was falling apart. Only some of the rubble was taken away. You could walk around but there was no roof, no doors, and no windows. But it was a very flat paved open area, so it was really for the performing arts. There were columns on the sides that we used for entrances, and rooms offstage were used as dressing rooms and storage rooms.¹²⁴

The performance itself took place on a platform, what was once an old swimming pool before the earthquake (see below). Audiences at the Grand Hotel, mostly middle-class Nicaraguans, local theatre artists, and internationalists, sat outside in chairs in typical theatre seating. The Ruins of the Grand Hotel was a fusion of both indoor and outdoor performing spaces fitting for a Bread and Puppet outdoor spectacle like *The Nativity*.

According to Karian, the Grand Hotel was destroyed by an earthquake in 1972. The hotel was never restored to its original form despite the country receiving international emergency aid allocated for reconstruction during the Somoza dictatorship.¹²⁵ Instead, the Grand Hotel was appropriated and converted into a cultural and performing arts space by the *Sandinista* revolutionary movement. Karian further states that prior to the earthquake, the Grand Hotel was a popular space for convening of the powerful and elite in the country, including rich international visitors. For the average poor and working-class Nicaraguan, the Grand Hotel was inaccessible. Thus, the *Sandinista* revolutionary movement reclaimed the once-exclusive hotel and transformed it into a free public cultural arts space accessible to all. The Ruins of the Grand Hotel --

124 John Bell, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

125 The oppressive Somoza regime was an autocratic family dictatorship in Nicaragua from 1936-1979.

specifically, its outdoor plaza area -- housed several of Nicaragua's "experimental revolutionary theatre groups."¹²⁶ Performances that occurred on site were heavily attended by Nicaraguans, as well as internationalists in solidarity with the revolution. The Ruins of the Grand Hotel was a visual representation of Nicaragua's hopeful transformation, amidst the harsh remains of a devastating past, what Karian describes as "...a setting for the New Nicaraguan culture rising from the ruins of *Somocismo*."¹²⁷ Levey remembers her initial shock when arriving in Managua, "...to see a city that had been so abused, I don't think I had ever been any place where people had recently been bombed out of empty buildings."¹²⁸ Despite some of the visual remnants of the revolution and its destructive aftermath, places like the Nicaraguan Ruins of the Grand Hotel symbolized the positive change and evolution in the country.¹²⁹ The Grand Hotel was an outdoor theatrical space with significant political and cultural significance to the Nicaraguan people and to the Bread and Puppet touring company.

Performers

The *Nativity* tour of Nicaragua 1985 was the first Central American performance tour for the Bread and Puppet company. The theatre group had previously toured internationally throughout Europe, North Africa, and other Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Argentina. For most of the Bread and Puppet puppeteers, musicians, and performers who participated in the tour, it was their first visit to Nicaragua. Once in Nicaragua, the three-week tour included participation from a total of sixty performers, including eighteen Bread and Puppet staff

¹²⁶ Karian, *Liberation News Service*, 2.

¹²⁷ Karian, *Liberation News Service*, 2.

¹²⁸ Levey, Interview with author, 2020.

¹²⁹ Karian, *Liberation News Service*, 1.

from the U.S., twelve invited Costa Rican theatre artists, one Puerto Rican, and thirty Nicaraguans.¹³⁰

Participants in *The Nativity* played a variety of important roles throughout the tour; for example, Marquez became Bread and Puppet's primary Spanish translator, with Guillen assisting from time to time. Both Marquez and Guillen also performed as puppeteers in the shows. Arce and Ponce, along with the rest of the *La Trama* members, were performers and puppeteers. Cohen, Hamburger, Trompeter, Bell, Romanyshyn and Denzer, along with several Nicaraguan volunteers, were musicians for each performance of *The Nativity* and circus parades.

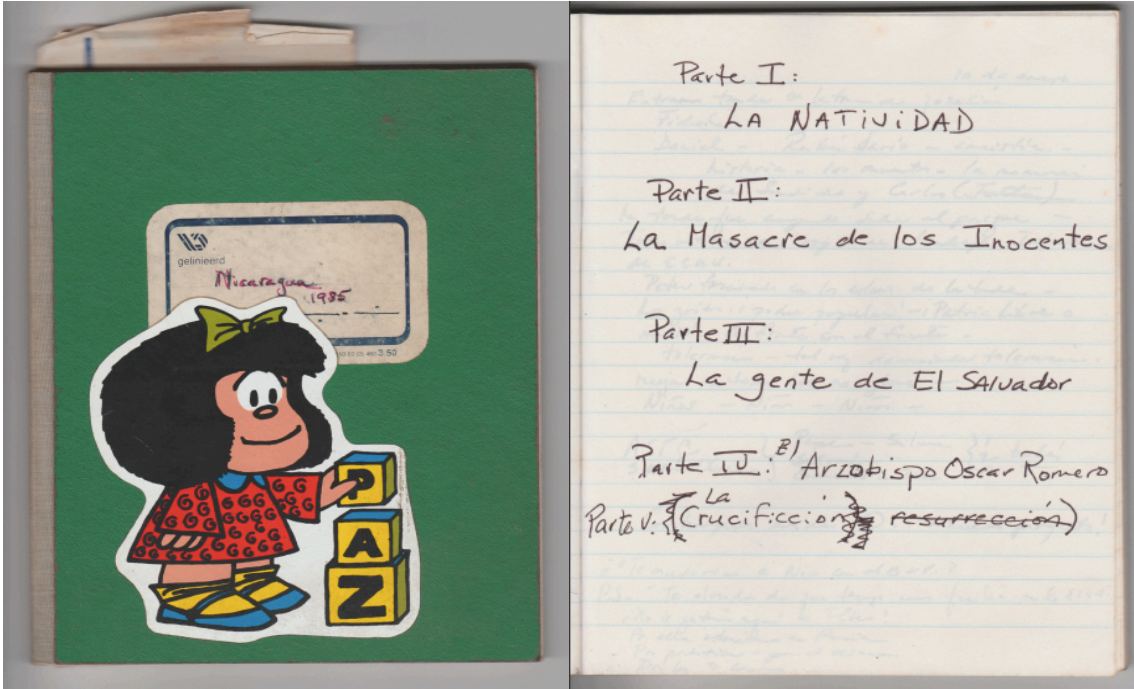


Figure 8. Bread and Puppet musicians play while a child dances (Courtesy of Michael Romanyshyn).

130 These numbers are drawn from Trudi Cohen's letter from Nicaragua to her mother in the U.S. dated January 19, 1995 as well as several interviews with participants in 2020.

Ponce and Leber were stilt performers throughout the tour. Ponce performed on stilts (for the first and last time) as one of the black gorillas during the show. Leber joined Schumann in three and a half feet stilts as they danced through the town processions prior to every performance. Guillen performed the role of Romero during the only spoken word section of the show and Leber puppeteered the Romero puppet's left hands. Romanyshyn, Bell, Hamburger, and Trompetter were also puppeteers and performers in the show. In addition to performing, participants also facilitated puppetry and circus workshops and, with the help of Nicaraguan volunteers, constructed and painted all of the puppets for the show. During a recent interview, Bell proudly recalls constructing Archbishop Romero's signature glasses and collar for the puppet.¹³¹

¹³¹ John Bell, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.



Figures 9.1 and 9.2. Rosa Luis Marquez' journal from the Nicaraguan tour, 1985 (left). A scanned page from the journal that reads: "Part 1: Nativity. Part 2: The Massacre of the Innocents. Part 3: The people of El Salvador. Part 4: Archbishop Oscar Romero. Part 5: Crucifixion" (right).

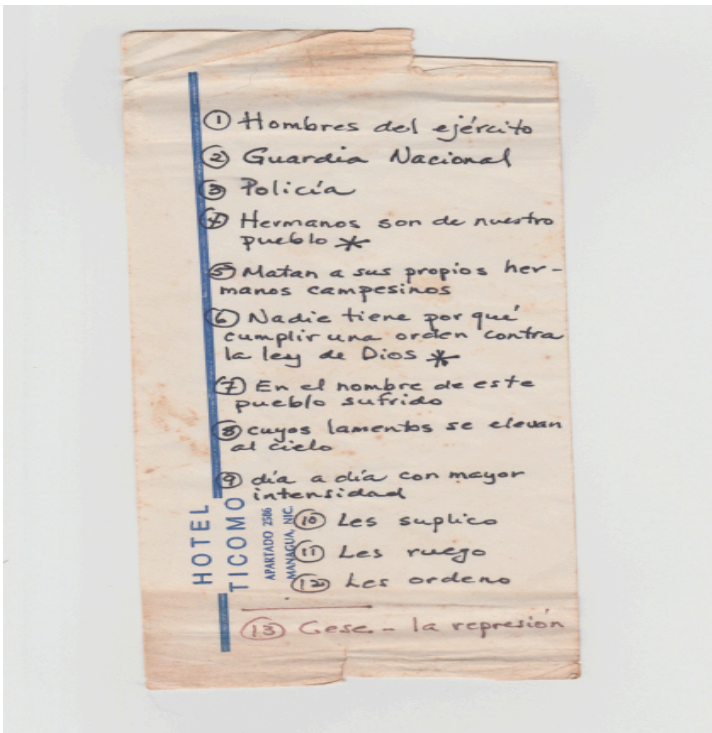


Figure 9.3. Napkin from Nicaragua Hotel Ticomo with Romero's dialogue for the play written on it.

Realized Performance and Play Script

The following is a re-constructed script of *The Nativity* using Levine's documentary, including still shots from the film, as well as excerpts from Marquez' journal.

Introduction:

The play opens with a large painted banner on stage displaying the following words in Spanish: *The Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador*.¹³² Two performers with large puppet heads and hands enter the stage to the sound of the Bread and Puppet brass band playing offstage. The puppets represent Mary and Joseph from the Christian Nativity. The Mary and Joseph puppets are followed by another performer on hand stilts as the donkey. (See Figure 10)



Figure 10. A documentary still of Joseph and Mary in puppet heads with a puppeteer in a donkey mask.

Part I: The Nativity:

The trumpet sounds as the performer with the sign goes US behind the banner leaving the scene. Mary, Joseph and the donkey remain in front of the banner. A performer wearing a top hat and suit enters from behind the banner as the Master of Ceremonies. He tips his hat to Mary and Joseph. The master of ceremonies then blows a whistle, which cues the entrance of the blue horse puppets who dance, trot, and frolic throughout the stage for Mary and Joseph as the band continues to play. The Master of Ceremony orchestrates the blue horse puppets like an orchestra conductor at a symphony. A cymbal crashes and the horses make a sound. The Master of Ceremony tips his hat to the audience and receives a thundering applause. The blue horse puppets make their exit along with the Master of Ceremony. (See Figure 11)

¹³² Original Spanish text: La Navidad, La Crucifixion, y La Resurreccion, del Oscar A. Romero de El Salvador.



Figure 11. Emcee with his back to audience with blue horse puppets prancing.

Another Master of Ceremony, as lion tamer, enters with a whip in his hand, accompanied by three pairs of performers in yellow tiger costume and tiger puppet heads. They walk across the stage and sit in front of Mary and Joseph as the tiger tamer begins to give them orders. The yellow tigers roll on their backs to the left and once again to the right as the lion tamer slams his whip on the stage floor. The tigers then huddle together at the command of the lion tamer. The lion tamer then kneels in between as the tigers place their paws on the lion tamer's shoulders and back. The lion tamer then rolls back down stage. He gives the yellow tigers "meat" in the form of red pieces of cloth which the tigers quickly devour. The yellow tigers continue to dance to the rhythm of the brass band who plays the whole time. The yellow tigers then sit to the left and right of the Mary and Joseph puppets as the next animal puppet enters the stage. (See Figure 12)



Figure 12. Lion tamer throws his arms open as yellow tigers stand in the background.

This time it's two enormous black gorillas on large leg and arm stilts and a smaller gorilla without stilts. The adult black gorillas walk circles around the stage in front of the Mary and Joseph, while the small gorilla rolls on the ground, claps with its feet, and dances to the sounds of the drums and cymbals crashing. The gorilla family finish their dance number and take a seat next to Mary, Joseph, the donkey and the yellow tigers. . (See Figure 13)



Figure 13. Documentary still of three gorilla puppets on stage.

Next three musicians enter playing trumpets and horns followed by a performer on stilts wearing a three-headed puppet mask and a large flowing skirt. The puppet is the three kings who come to visit Mary and Joseph. (See Figure 14)



Figure 14. Men playing trumpets and saxophones lead a tall puppet with the head of the three wise men.

A man (played by Bell) enters the stage carrying a cardboard top hat and begins a magic trick. He hums several “tadums” waving his hand around the hat like a magic stick building anticipation when suddenly he pulls something out of the black cardboard hat. It is a small cardboard cutout of Archbishop Romero. The trumpet sounds as Bell holds up the cardboard Romero for the audience to see. The magician gifts the cardboard Romero to the Mary and Joseph to symbolize the birth of Romero. They all exit the stage. (See Figure 15)



Figure 15. John Bell takes a cardboard depiction of Archbishop Romero out of a hat.

Part II: The Massacre of the Innocent

Two musicians strumming guitars enter the stage singing a song in Spanish. Behind them comes a group of performers as houses from the village stomping their feet to the music. The puppeteers dance in a circle on stage. The houses are flat pieces of cardboard with a roof, a door, and a window that opens. The houses huddle together and form a village in front of the large banner. At the end of the song the performers, mostly children, pop their heads through the cardboard house windows and scream. Another group of performers enter, led by a woman playing a flute, followed by women cradling bundles in their arms like newborn babies. The woman walks around and behind the people as houses until they the women are no longer in sight. (See Figure 16)



Figure 16. Two men play guitars with two puppeteers wearing blue house puppet masks.

As the flutist continues to play, in marches a man leading a group of performers in a military stomp on the stage. The performers carry large sticks with cardboard puppet heads and sticks for arms representing the death squad and right-wing military. Each puppet holds a cardboard military rifle. Once the death squad puppets are in formation, they turn facing the houses forming a village. The windows of the cardboard houses open once more revealing the faces of the child puppeteers who scream. Cymbals crash and whistles are blown. . (See Figure 17)

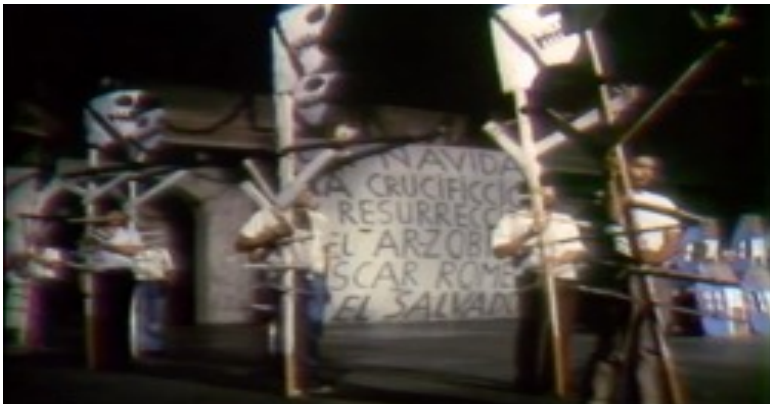


Figure 17. Three members of a death squad step on stage with masks.

The next scene features four performers wearing wolf masks with large teeth and red costumes as feathers and fire. They dance around the cardboard village as the whistle blows, the drums beat, and the cymbal continues to crash. They huddle together grunting to each other. The grunting gets louder and louder until the red wolves come out of their huddle and run toward the cardboard village. The village houses run around the stage as they are attacked by the red wolves. The puppeteers drop their cardboard houses and reveal themselves. The wolves drop their sticks and remove their masks. (See Figure 18)



Figure 18. Red coyotes wave their arms.

All performers recite the following in English and Spanish, as indicated:

"In a speech on Central America...

En un discurso sobre America Central. 22 Nicaraguenses fueron asesinados en una emboscada ante ayer alas 8 de la manana.

On May 9th, 1984 President Reagan said...

El nueve de Mayo de 1984 el president Regan dijo

Cuando subiyen en un camion la cuesta del Pericon hubicada entre Telpaneca y San Juan del Rio Copo.

We Americans...*Nosotros los Americanos.*

Para dirijirse a las fincas donde cortarien el café

Should be proud of what we are trying to do...

Devemos estar orgullosos de lo que tratamos de hacer

200 contra revolucionarios trans lansar fuego de Cohote Lar, RPG7 y Fal

...In Central America

En America Central sobre el vehiculo donde habian cinco vacas y transportaban 3 lunas personas

To support democracy, human rights, and economic growth...

Respaldar la democracia, los derechos humanos, y el crecimiento economico

Consiguieron ocupar el camion con los heridos

While preserving peace...

Mientras preservamos la paz

*Tras robar a las victimas regardon dicen en el bloque y procedieron en fuego con la jente adentro. "So close to home...Tan cerca de nuestra casa."*¹³³

133 From "Song for Nicaragua," and direct text from Marquez journal. This text was written specifically for The Nativity tour of 1985 with contributions by La Trama, the Nicaraguan performers, and volunteers.

Part III: The People of El Salvador

The scene begins with the band playing and people running on stage carrying large, colorful banner flags followed by performers with large cardboard faces and hand puppets. The green and blue flags march on stage in two rows below the title banner followed by a musician playing the bass drum, while the yellow and orange flag performers dance in the background above the banner and closer to the US area. The yellow and orange flag performers march in front of the banner as the green and blue flag performers had before them. All the flag performers march their way on stage creating a snake-like movement. Suddenly the green and blue performers position themselves SR to the banner while the yellow and orange flag performers stand on the sides. Once they are in position, they begin marching towards each other until both groups merge into a large colorful group in front of the title banner. They continue marching in place throughout. Suddenly a performer with a black flag begins to blow a loud whistle and we hear the sound of the band playing drums and other instruments. The flag performers begin a large, continuous moving circle as they continue to wave their flags on stage. The circle continues for a few laps until the performer with the black flag kneels in front of the title banner as the rest of the flag performers follow her lead. The rest of the performers then kneel beside her with their flags in their arms. Once everyone has joined the performers with the black flag she jumps up, waves her flag in a circular motion, and kneels down and prepares to jump again. For the second jump she is followed by all the flag performers as they jump in unison, hold their flags high, and shout, “Hey!” (See Figure 19)



Figure 19. Performers in white march with green flags.

The next scene is a series of performers with large cardboard puppets of brown faces downstage from the title banner. The band begins to play a marching beat as the performers position the puppet faces in front of them. The puppet faces cover their bodies except for their legs. The performers bob the puppet faces up and down along with the beat, raising the puppet faces up high and shouting “Hey!” at certain points in the rhythm. Slowly they march backwards continuing the bobbing movement of the puppet faces until they are SL of the title banner and stage. (See Figure 20)



Figure 20. A large group of people with large head cut outs in front of the Romero banner.

From SR enters a new group of performers with large cardboard puppets of hand fists. The performers aim their cardboard fists at the group of performers with brown-faced puppets. The hand fist puppets move towards the crowd of cardboard face puppets. They stop, position their cardboard fist puppets above them in an angle, and run the cardboard fist puppet back to the cardboard face puppets as if making contact. There is a drum roll and the sound of a cymbal when they make contact with the faces. The performers in cardboard faces drop their cardboard puppets. We see the performers standing behind the puppets dressed in white. We hear the sound of the cymbal crash. The performers with face puppets run off backstage while the fist puppets march their way back to SR. (See Figure 21)



Figure 21. Group of people with large fist puppets charge from stage right to stage left.

Suddenly there is a group of performers SL with large cardboard puppets of open hands. They march left and right in a small group chanting "Hey!" as the puppeteers with cardboard fist puppets begin to move towards them ready to attack them like they had before with the cardboard face puppets. This time the cardboard fist puppets move in circular motion ready to punch as the group of hands continues to march in position. Together they move the hands up and down when we hear the sound of a whistle. The

cardboard fists rush towards the cardboard hands and we hear the sound of a cymbal crash. The cardboard hands scream and drop to the ground as if dead. The performers lie on stage with the cardboard hand puppets over their bodies. A group of cardboard hands appears behind them, bobbing the hands up and down. A performer with a cardboard hand puppet enters the stage kneeling towards the group on the floor, standing back up and moving the cardboard hand up and down as we hear her scream and wail in pain. The cardboard fists return to SR.

Part IV: Archbishop Oscar Romero

We then see the performers without puppets sitting in two groups in front of the title banner humming in unison. The women are SL of the banner and the men are SR of the banner. They are all chanting a long “Ahhh” sound until one member of the group on the left jumps up and stands in front of the group. The performer shows a sign to the rest of the group and begins to shout out the word “*valor*.”¹³⁴ She continues chanting the word as the rest of the members stand up and begin chanting with her. The performer with the sign turns around to face the audience showing us a white cardboard sign with the word “*valor*” in black letters. Everyone in the group jumps up and down repeating the word in unison. One person from the group stands in between both groups and raises their hands up, as the performer with the sign hangs the sign on the performer’s neck. It hangs on the performer's body. (See Figure 22)



Figure 22. Group of people in white with man holding sign that reads “*valor*.”

The same is repeated from the group SR when one performer turns to the group and shows them a cardboard sign with the word “*Corazon*.”¹³⁵ Like the previous group, this group begins repeating the word “*Corazon*.” The group repeats the word at least three times as the group SL joins in. Everyone applauds and cheers. The performer leading the chant places the sign on the performer in the middle directly on his neck. We see the

134 My English translation: courage

135 My English translation: heart

word “*Corazon*” in black letters on the sign. They repeat the same action including words like: *verdad, revolucion, amistad, amor, solidaridad, esperanza*.¹³⁶ (See Figure 23)



Figure 23. Close up of person in white shirt with signs reading “truth” and “heart.”

The performer in the middle now wears all the signs around his neck. After they place the final sign “*esperanza*” he climbs on top of a small ladder that is placed in front of the title banner. As he climbs, the performers on stage continue to chant “*esperanza*.” Suddenly three performers enter the stage with the 20-foot Romero puppet and place him standing up in front of the performer on the ladder. The cymbals crash as the Romero puppet is propped up with his arms stretched wide open. Once the Romero puppet is on stage everyone begins to chant and applaud with joy. (See Figure 24)



Figure 24. The Romero puppet with arms open and performers lifting him up with their hands.

We then hear the sound of a whistle blowing. The people gather in front of the Romero puppet as the performers with the death squad puppets enter SR. They remain on the SR side of the stage. Another performer from the group of people with Romero enters center stage holding a sign that reads *Part V: The Crucifixion*.

Part V: The Crucifixion

136 My English translation: truth, revolution, friendship, love, solidarity, and hope

We hear a whistle. Then we hear the Romero puppet speak, with the performers on stage repeating each phrase after him, first in small select groups of three people at different times, and then twice, together as a large group. (See Figure 25)



Figure 25. Romero puppet with puppets of death squad in front.

The puppet says the following:

Hombres del Ejercito...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
Guardia Nacional... (repeated by individuals and then large group)
Policia...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
Hermanos de nuestro pueblo ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)¹³⁷

As they continue to repeat the beginning of the speech the puppeteers with the death squad enter the stage and position themselves in military form SL and SR of the Romero puppet and the people. The death squad puppets turn and face the Romero puppet pointing their cardboard guns toward the Romero puppet and the people. We hear the sound of the snare drum and the people raise their hands in the air. We hear the beat of the snare drum again, this time several times like the bullets from a gun. The beats continue as the Romero puppet and people slowly fall to the ground. (See Figure 26-27)

¹³⁷ My English translation: Men of the military, the National Guard, the police, brothers of our country.



Figure 26. The Romero puppet falls to the ground, and death squad puppets face him.



Figure 27. Close up of Romero puppet fallen to the ground with people trying to hold him up.

The people then rise up and place the Romero puppet in an upright position. The performers hold their hands out to the Romero puppet supporting the puppet with their hands. While the performers hold their hands in the air, the Romero puppet begins to speak again:

Matan a sus propios hermanos campesinos...(repeated by individuals and then large group)

Nadien tiene que cumplir una orden contra la ley de Dios ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)¹³⁸

We hear the sound of the snare drum again as the death squad puppets shoot the Romero puppet and the people once again. The Romero puppet and the people fall to the ground. We hear the soft sounds of a bell ringing as the people rise up (yet again) and raise the Romero to an upright position. Once again, they hold their arms in the air as Romero continues his speech. The performers turn around and face the death squad puppets. The Romero puppet and performers speak:

En el nombre de este pueblo sufrido...(repeated by individuals and then large group)

138 My English translation: You kill your own campesino brothers and sisters. Nobody needs to take orders that go against the God's law.

Cuyos lamentos selevan al cielo ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
Dia a dia con mayor intencidad ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
Le suplico ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
Les ruego ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
Les ordeno ...(repeated by individuals and then large group)
*Cese la repression! (all together)*¹³⁹

The death squad puppets march toward the front of the people enclosing them in a large circle with the Romero puppet in the middle. You can hear the military chants of a performer ordering them to turn about face and then turn to their left. The death squads are now pointing their guns toward the Romero puppet and the people. We hear the whistling sound as a new performer in all black appears and begins to push the group of people SR and SL away from Romero.

We hear the sound of church bells as the Romero puppet is placed on the ground. We can see the performer still sitting on the ladder behind the Romero puppet speak the following lines: *Si me matan voy a reecitar en el pueblo Salvadoreño.*¹⁴⁰

A performer wearing black rushes to the performer on the ladder and begins to take off the signs from his neck. A group of women carrying buckets and blankets in the shape of a body gather around the fallen Romero puppet as an angel on stilts enters the stage playing the violin. The angel is played by Schumann. (See Figure 28)



Figure 28. Peter Schumann as angel with violin.

The angel plays a somber song on the violin as it walks across the stage. People on stage gather village people puppets laid in front of the Romero puppet. They move the village people puppets to the music of the violin, tilting them left and right and slightly bobbing up and down. (See Figure 29)

139 My English translation: In the name of a suffering people whose pain is felt in the heavens. Day by day with more intensity. I beseech you; I beg you; I command you. Stop the repression!

140 My English translation: If they kill me, I will resurrect in the people of El Salvador.



Figure 29. Peter Schumann as angel on stilts. Death squad members walk behind him.

The performer on the ladder is also holding one of the village people puppets. He holds the puppet still like Jesus on the cross as the group of women walk towards him carrying a wrapped life-size body in their arms. They kneel down and place the wrapped body at the foot of the ladder below the village people puppet. They stand up and raise their arms waving them slowly left and right. They bring their arms down to the ground and kneel before exiting.

The next scene includes the village people puppets standing in front of a parallel line of death squad puppets. (See Figure 30)



Figure 30. Death squad stands and faces a crowd of villager puppets.

They face each other, until the village people begin to slowly walk towards the death squad. As the village people approach the death squad the violin continues to play and a powerful and gently beaten drum is heard. Once the village people arrive close to the death squad, the performers slowly drop their death squad puppets on top of themselves as they lie down on the floor DS. The village people gather in a cluster, each puppet held at different heights creating a large group of people hovering over the death squad puppets on the ground. The village people are now standing in front of the title banner. (See Figure 31)



Figure 31. Romero puppet standing with the river water puppet held by people.

In the final scene, the entire ensemble is on stage forming a large square in front of the title banner. (See Figure 31) They are all holding a large blue banner with white images creating a 'boat' around the stage. Meanwhile on the inside of the boat, there are puppeteers who lift up a large blue banner with a white tree from the ground. At the same time, other puppeteers bring up the Romero puppet until it is standing upright and facing the audience. We can still hear the sound of the violin from the angel with stilts playing. The people with the blue banner begin to chant and walk along the edges of the stage while the Romero puppet and the tree banner remain in the middle. Suddenly a performer from inside the square crashes two cymbals together making everyone on stage stop in their tracks. There is a spotlight on Romero. (See Figure 32) Blackout.



Figure 32. Spotlight of Romero puppet in final shot of the play.

End of Play

Bread and Puppet's 1985 *The Nativity* script accomplishes three critical things that distinguish the performance as a historic event. First, the performance dramatizes Romero's claim to resurrection through political puppetry, circus, and music. Most if not all of the documented theatrical performances about Romero's life between the 1980s and mid 1990s focus on his legacy while alive, usually concluding with his murder.¹⁴¹ Bread and Puppet's script, however, offers a unique perspective on "resurrection" that not only includes Romero's life trajectory, but also explores Romero's ties to the Salvadoran people and its direct impact on keeping his spirit alive long after his death. Romero's claim to "resurrection" is approached as a performative act that is further unpacked and realized through *The Nativity*. What is more, the Romero puppet, once shot by the death squad, is physically lifted, and uplifted, by the villagers in the play demonstrating the strength of the people in upholding Romero's legacy. Second, *The Nativity* publicly condemns the U.S. and its ties to the murder of Romero, acknowledging the death squad as fully trained and funded with U.S. money and resources. Nicaraguan audiences were very much aware of the ties between the Salvadoran *Esquadron de la Muerte*¹⁴² and the Nicaraguan *Contras*, they also understood that the U.S. created, trained *and* funded both groups. Third, the 1985 version of *The Nativity* includes the perspective of Nicaraguan audiences and current political climate as it relates to the teachings of Romero. Thus, *The Nativity* of 1985 centered the struggles of Nicaragua and included the narratives of its people throughout the play making this a story not only about Romero, but the Nicaraguan people as well. In addition to the spectacular use of circus components

141 More detailed information about theatre productions on Romero since his death is included in subsequent chapters.

142 My English translation: Squadrons of Death or Death Squad

(stilted, puppetry, and live music), *The Nativity* was a stunning pageant performance with a powerful and emotional message that honored Romero's life and legacy.

Managua
Jan. 19, 1985

Greetings -

you won't believe this, but I wrote you a long long letter and gave it to ~~some~~^{an} American who ~~was~~ was flying back today. Yesterday, her bag was stolen with all our letters in it. I wonder if mine will ever find its way to you. Anyway, I don't see how I can possibly try to duplicate all the things I said in that letter. Alas. I'll try to start where I left off.

We have this morning off. We're sitting by the pool at our hotel eating an enormous papaya given us by one of the people performing in the show. Porfirio is singing songs and cracking us up. Hard life, no?

We have, in fact, been treated royally. The hotel is beautiful - comfortable, like a tropical garden. There's a cool breeze every night, and it is very hot in the day. We have a bus to transport us + all the others who are performing in the show. This is an incredible luxury in Nicaragua where there is a shortage of public transportation. It is common to see old buses so full that people are sitting on the roof and hanging off the back + sides. Or pickup trucks carrying 25 people.

We also were invited to the inauguration of Ortega + to a reception that night. We start to understand that our presence here is something really important.

Figure 33. A letter to Trudi Cohen's mother from Nicaragua dated January 19, 1995.

Personal, Cultural, and Political Impact

Bread and Puppet and *La Trama* members, as well as Nicaraguan performers, musicians, and volunteers, traveled from show to show in a refurbished Brazilian school bus. For many of the participants, the moments in between performances while riding on the bus were some of their favorites, as they embodied the spirit of ‘friendship and solidarity’ with the Nicaraguan people:

Thinking of working and traveling with folks; I remember bus rides in the big school bus and singing songs together, that was very jolly. There was a lot of traveling with the (Nicaraguan theatre) groups. Nicos and Ticos and Gringos! We would all sing.¹⁴³

According to Trompetter, dancing and singing on the bus were indeed typical occurrences while on the road, but on occasion, there were also moments of gravity and self-awareness. Trompetter claims that during one bus ride several Nicaraguan volunteers shared with Schumann how much they valued this type of diversion (singing and playing music in the bus) because it served as a release from all the suffering and “heartbreak” they experience in the midst of the war, especially after participating in an emotional show like *The Nativity*, with such “heavy content.”¹⁴⁴ For Trompetter, the Nicaraguan performers recognized the importance of self-preservation. Thus, the bus rides in between performances became much-needed moments of release and reenergizing for *all* tour participants, as well as bonding between the North American, Latin American, and international performers.

Romanyshyn recalls another instance when the company arrived at a small village accompanied by MECATE. Nidia Bustos, activist and director of MECATE, and her

143 John Bell, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020. “Nicos” is a known nickname for Nicaraguans in Latin America, and “Ticos” is a nickname for folks from Costa Rica.

144 Amy Trompetter, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

comrades were familiar with the region and its people through their campesino theatre work in the town. The performance was set up before nightfall and presented under a single light source:

It was a gravelly sandy place, and it was getting dark. We asked if they had any lights, and someone came and hooked up a single light bulb. People gathered around...there was a fence there and people sat on the fence looking down at the performance.¹⁴⁵

In Cohen's letter to her mother, she also describes one of these remote performances, this time in a MECATE member and tour participant's home village:

A highlight was a performance outside of the village where Lucas is from. We performed at a cattle-farm cooperative and a lot of people arrived on horseback. After the show, we were invited to spend the night in Lucas's village. No roads go up there as it is really in a rural mountain region. We hiked up in the dark for around 40 minutes, tripping and laughing. We had to cross a stream; half of us fell in. Then some people came with torches. We had no trouble. They fed us a great delicious meal, and then we had a fiesta *campesina*. We played music. They had a battery-powered record player with Latin music and we danced...¹⁴⁶

Guillen adds that the film crew, who followed the company to many of these performances, also struggled with crossing the stream and accidentally dropped their cameras in the river!

Despite the difficulties faced when performing in mountain areas, some of these visits turned into unexpected yet rewarding experiences during which the company engaged in stiling, brass band playing, or other smaller performances instead of performing the entire show. According to Guillen, one mountain visit turned into a cultural exchange between Bread and Puppet and an Indigenous theatre group. Another unexpected performance experience occurred when the company traveled to a coffee

¹⁴⁵ Michael Romanyshyn, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Trudi Cohen, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

plantation. According to participants, the audience included brigades of young people carrying guns and possibly belonging to military units. As Cohen asserted, “They (the audience) as a group were so deeply committed to the work they are doing in support of the revolution.” The performance at the coffee plantation was Cohen’s favorite. Shortly after arriving, company members were moved by the strong presence of hopefulness in the nation. Marquez states:

I remember the feeling that everything was hopeful...everything was filled with joy. We thought that if a revolution could happen here, it could happen anywhere. I felt goosebumps the whole time. It was quite emotional.¹⁴⁷

The *Nativity* tour was an extraordinary experience for participants on numerous levels, especially when considering Nicaragua’s political and cultural climate at the time of the tour which occurred in the *midst* of civil war. And though post-revolution Nicaragua was fueled by optimism and hope, U.S.-backed opposition was a constant threat to the movement throughout. For participants, touring and performing during post-revolution Nicaragua -- despite violence from the *Contras* -- made the experience that much more remarkable. Not only did the company inadvertently put their lives in danger while touring, but they also witnessed the fruits of Central America’s only successful revolution, in which the advancement and commitment to the cultural arts played a key role in national reconstruction efforts. Theatre in Nicaragua was a respected and welcomed art form, one that was already contributing to the mobilizing of hundreds of campesinos in the country. Creative expression and cultural programming were considered essential in revitalizing the country. Costa Rican participants, in particular, recall the role of popular theatre in post-revolution Nicaragua:

¹⁴⁷ Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

*Era un periodo de esperanza...la cultura esta siendo super apoyada, esta siendo leventada. El teatro en ese momento esta surgiendo en diferentes regiones y comunidades como una manifestacion popular...un gran apoyo a la cultura, una surgencia al teatro...la misma jira es un testimonio de ese gran apoyo y el lugar que se le estaba dando a la cultural en ese momento.*¹⁴⁸

North American participants were also inspired by the Nicaraguan spirit of ‘revolution’ they encountered throughout the tour, specifically for their discernible commitment to the cause. Ponce described the political consciousness of the Nicaraguan people, “*de mucha entrega y de mucha pasion,*”¹⁴⁹ and found it remarkable how enthusiastic and hopeful the entire country had become since winning the revolution. For Ponce, the *Nativity* tour was contributing to that optimism because the show’s message aligned with the revolution and its people. Arce further adds that the Nicaraguan revolution was an “incredibly hopeful experiment” and claims that the touring company was counting on, and looking towards, the Nicaraguan revolution as a successful model. She also clearly remembers that in post-revolution Nicaragua those in power were “kids,” and that it was young people who were running the country. Arce, like most others interviewed, was significantly impressed, and encouraged, by the young leadership of the country during the tour.

North American participants felt incredibly fortunate to have toured in Nicaragua post-revolution, and at the same time, their presence in the country put many things into perspective. For example, participants revealed the impact of participating in the tour as a

148 Fernando Ponce, Interview with the author, 2020. My English translation: “It was a time of hope... the entire culture was feeling supported, it was being elevated to new heights. In that moment, the theatre was thriving in various regions and communities and manifesting as a form of popular culture...there was a strong support for cultural events, an emergence of theatre...the tour itself is a testament to the support it received and the region in which it was creating at that moment.”

149 My English translation: giving of oneself and of much passion.

moment of self-reflection particularly during a time of civil conflict in Nicaragua directly funded by the U.S. military:

I was so naive in a way. I think my biggest challenge was to understand what was going on here. To experience something that was so different than anything I had ever seen before. And also have it be that kind of hopefulness...that they (the people of Nicaragua) would embrace us that way. Who were we to go there, at this hopeful moment and claim any connection to it at all...just figuring out, what was going on? And what was our part in it?¹⁵⁰

Even though the company aligned itself with the Sandinista movement, they were a (predominantly) *Gringo*¹⁵¹ group touring a U.S. puppet show in Nicaragua, *while* the country fought U.S. repression. Participants recall the weight of this unique aspect of the show and their commitment to demonstrating solidarity with the Nicaraguan people throughout the visit. Bread and Puppet thus turned the tour into a participatory experience and collaboration by inviting Nicaraguan volunteers and members of *La Trama* from neighboring Costa Rica to join the performance. The contributions of Marquez, Arce, Ponce and Guillen were also invaluable assets to the tour; not only did they contribute artistically, but their presence and input also served as the bridge between the U.S. company and Nicaraguan audiences. Similar to Bread and Puppet as an organization, several international activist groups from Europe and other Latin American countries had also traveled to Nicaragua during the time of the tour. According to Guillen, there was a fervent international comradeship, “*una solidaridad internacional con la revolucion Sandinista.*”¹⁵² Some international activists even joined the *Sandinista* revolutionary front and fought against the *Contras* while the company was there.¹⁵³

150 Cohen, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

151 My English translation: term for white Americans, like white boy/girl or blondie.

152 My English translation: international solidarity with the Sandinista revolution

153 Marco Guillen, Interview with the author, December 8, 2020.

For the North American Bread and Puppet staff, performing *The Nativity* -- a play about the life and death of Romero -- in front of Central American audiences gave the performance an entirely new meaning. Audiences for *The Nativity* were varied and diverse depending on the location of the performance and included adults, children, close friends, members of the artistic community, leftist government leaders, important figures of the revolution, middle-class, working-class, and poor campesino audiences. Performing for such varied audiences in a foreign country was a distinctive life-changing experience for all North American participants. Specifically, the *Nativity* tour of 1985 marked the first time the Bread and Puppet performed the show in Spanish. One of the most common participant accounts details the impact of performing the show in the Spanish language, specifically Romero's dialogue. North American participants were particularly taken aback by Romero's speech (and his final words "*Cese la Repression*") when performed in Spanish by Nicaraguan performers in a chorus:

Those words, '*I beg you, I implore you, I beseech you, stop the repression!*', those words are undoubtedly within each of us...that refrain that was repeated. It was the Romero puppet but also in those words, how much you give when you put yourself in front of the bullets. To say those words and the consequence is martyrdom.¹⁵⁴

Participants recall the emotional impact of hearing Romero's speech echoed in Spanish. Susie Romanyshyn states, "...hearing the Nicaraguans say those words and hearing the intention. What it was for them to say those words...I was so struck just hearing them say those words."¹⁵⁵ For Cohen, it was the impact of hearing *The Nativity* performed in Spanish throughout the tour that embedded Romero's dialogue in her memory. What is more, by the time Bread and Puppet toured *The Nativity* in 1985, Romero's legacy,

154 Trompetter, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

155 Susie Romanyshyn, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

including his famous final words, were well-known around the world. Consequently, Nicaraguan audiences in 1985 held a deeper understanding of the weight of Romero's famous words than North American audiences would have in Vermont in 1983. During the performance, participants bore witness to the impact of Romero's legacy on the Nicaraguan people, particularly poor audiences, who echoed and celebrated his dialogue during the shows.

The Nativity's story of Romero's compassion for the poor and oppressed peoples rang true for all Nicaraguans during the tour. Guillen adds his impressions of Nicaraguan audiences responding to Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity* coming to town:

*La gente de Nicaragua desde las pasa calles se metia y participaba. Siempre montones de gente y con mucha alegria, y recibia (la obra) politicamente con gran entusiasmo. Era una respuesta muyt comunitaria que en ese sentido creo que lograba mucho que Bread and Puppet planteaba en sus principios: comunion del teatro con la comunidad. Eso era muy vivo, muy, muy vivo. La gente estaba muy presente.*¹⁵⁶

The touring company, particularly its North American members, had also long acknowledged the story of Romero as a Central American story, and thus anticipated that performing for Latin American audiences would be different from performing for North American audiences in Vermont. When performed in the U.S., *The Nativity* was intended to educate American audiences on U.S. intervention in Central America and its direct role in the murder of Romero. Participants further argued that one of the greatest distinctions between the U.S. performance and the Nicaraguan tour of *The Nativity* was the audiences' reaction to the show. According to Bell, Nicaraguan audiences, who lived the

156 Guillen, interview with the author, December 8, 2020. My English translation: "The people of Nicaragua since the street parades would get involved and participated. Always large groups of people, with so much joy, they welcomed and took in the play with all its political enthusiasm. It was a collective response which in that sense helped Bread and Puppet cement its principles and goals: Communion with the people through theatre. It was so vibrant, so, so, vibrant. The people were very present."

conflict firsthand and held deep admiration for Romero, did not require the same schooling as American audiences. The Nicaraguan audience's familiarity with the context of the show made the performance that much more meaningful to perform. Romanyshyn adds that the artistic production when toured in Nicaragua embodied the spirit of liberation theology which aligned with several of the political ideologies of Nicaragua post-revolution. Specifically, Nicaraguan audiences demonstrated a deep connection to the image and message of Romero when he first appeared on stage. North American participants recall audiences also having a visceral reaction to the spoken dialogue in the show:

I remember people crying. It was so intense...to see the puppet. I mean it was still so fresh in their history, and everybody saying the words in Spanish. It was intense. Very intense. Very moving.¹⁵⁷

Despite the ongoing violence between the *Sandinistas* and *The Contras* during the tour, the beauty of the Nicaraguan countryside also made a considerable visceral impression on participants. The *Nativity* tour gave participants, especially the North Americans, a taste of Central America's diverse landscapes. According to Denzer, one of his most visceral memories stems from a company trip to view a volcano in the countryside. Denzer recalls, "We stood at the edge of the volcano, looking right into it, and that was a beautiful, beautiful moment."¹⁵⁸ Virtually all participants acknowledged the remarkable sights as they traveled throughout the small country. This was especially important for participants who had never traveled to Central America before the tour. Like most Americans at the time of the performance, participants of the tour knew little about the region, let alone one of its smallest and poorest countries. The trip for many

¹⁵⁷ Trompetter, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Ralph Denzer, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

participants revealed Nicaragua's rich natural resources. Romanyshyn identifies one of his best memories of the tour as witnessing Nicaragua's picturesque landscapes:

...when we climbed up the hill to perform in the town of Las Lagunas. We all carried our mattresses, instruments, and some puppets. We walked up that hill and we arrived to what seemed like this *paradise*. To me, at the time, it seemed like the most beautiful village I had never seen. It was just...amazing.¹⁵⁹

Though at the time of the tour, participants were younger and at various stages in their artistic careers, they still recall the tour's impact on their trajectory as artists. All interviews, particularly those conducted in group settings, reveal participants' profound gratitude for the unique experience. Guillen was specifically inspired by Bread and Puppet's ability to engage diverse audiences through puppet theatre, what Guillen refers to as "*el encuentro*."¹⁶⁰ He admired Bread and Puppet's elements of audience participation within each show. As a theatre artist, Guillen was stirred by the company's "*entrega enorme*,"¹⁶¹ a profound dedication to the performance despite all the challenges they faced throughout. He was also impressed with Bread and Puppet's simple aesthetic and use of found materials to create awe-inspiring and powerful images. What is more, *La Trama* incorporated several of Bread and Puppet's theatre techniques including stilting and its large-group rehearsal process shortly after the tour. Ponce maintains that as a Costa Rican participant and theatre artist he was mostly influenced by the political significance of the tour and the authenticity of Bread and Puppet's engagement with the Nicaraguan people through puppet theatre.¹⁶² He believes that Bread and Puppet's

159 Romanyshyn, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

160 My English translation: the encounter

161 My English translation: grand offering

162 Ponce, interview with the author, December 2020.

experience of *The Nativity* was driven by authenticity and a genuine joy for life, and he considers this to be the key to the tour's success.¹⁶³

For an established Latin American artist like Arce, her fondest experience of the tour was connecting Bread and Puppet with her Costa Rican colleagues. She was thrilled to have her friends and fellow Central American artists collaborate with Bread and Puppet and contribute to the performance. As a Bread and Puppet company member, she made substantial efforts during the tour to collaborate with popular theatre groups in Nicaragua which led to a relationship with MECATE. Both Arce and Romanyshyn are responsible for fostering working relationships with Nicaragua's artist community thereafter.

Collaborating with the Nicaraguan artist community was another significant outcome of the tour. Denzer recalls fond memories of collaborating with local, and very young musicians throughout the tour. Not only did Nicaraguan musicians sporadically join the tour, learning the show's music on short notice, but they also contributed to writing and composing original music for the tour. Local musicians were also invited to sing and perform in every show. Participants were highly impressed by the Nicaraguan local talent, but even more so by the people's ability to write and present exceptional public speeches. Bell recalls his experience with public speaking in Nicaragua:

Everything about that trip was strong but one thing was the rhetoric...the speeches they [the Nicaraguan people] made. Everywhere we went there was a nice formality where we would come and someone from the town would make introductions and people...just the rhetoric and the incredible statements. I love to hear the speeches at demonstrations with Union members. It was so eloquent, very beautifully spoken speeches, like the artform of rhetoric of speech. It was very striking to me.¹⁶⁴

163 Ponce, interview with the author, December 2020.

164 John Bell, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

Trompetter, also impressed by the oral tradition of Nicaragua, recalls the young people in particular as highly skilled and expressive oral speakers. She recalls young leaders earning wide respect from the Nicaraguan revolutionary movement through their ability to communicate with graciousness and knowledge.

The Nativity only lasted three weeks but the experience is forever embedded in the personal trajectory of everyone involved. Guillen, like several participants, was a young college student during the tour. He is now a tenure-track professor with a doctorate in theatre working in a prestigious university in Costa Rica. Similarly, other *Nativity* alumni (including Ponce, Bell, and Marquez) pursued and completed doctorate degrees and teach theatre in universities around the world. Other participants (like Romanyshyn, Trompetter, Arce, Denzer, and Leber) continued producing theatre, visual art, and even music. Some of the people interviewed for this study returned with Bread and Puppet to Nicaragua several times since the 1985 tour. Many of the participants involved in this study have since established careers as solo performers, puppeteers, musicians, educators, and cultural organizers. A majority of participants remained members of the Bread and Puppet company and are now senior members of the board.

Complexities and Challenges

1985 Nicaragua was a vibrant, hopeful time in which to perform *The Nativity* throughout the country, and yet civil war between the Sandinista revolutionary movement and the threat of the violent *Contras* persisted throughout the tour. Consequently, the conflict between the *Sandinistas* and *Contras* posed a threat to the safety of participants while touring and traveling on the bus to rural mountain areas. Ponce recalls the trips they

would take when performing through active areas of battle between the *Contras* and the revolutionary front:

*Estuvimos viajando en buses en esas regiones donde estaban los Contra...y participamos en balaseras donde nos decian 'aganchense en el bus... vamos atravesar por aqui...tranquilos que ay disparos.'*¹⁶⁵

Navigating through the dangers of nearby *Contras* while touring *The Nativity* became the norm for the North American participants, and a harsh reality of the day-to-day dangers of the Nicaraguan people, particularly those who were loyal to the Sandinista movement and revolution. Ponce further argues how critical it is to consider touring *The Nativity* amidst civil unrest and recalls a significant encounter on the bus when he realized how young the country and its revolution truly were. According to Ponce, they met with revolutionary leaders as young as 12 years old who, armed with rifles, gave orders to the company while touring in the bus including when to exit and enter, or when it was safe to drive through an area. He describes the young military leaders as “*chicos muy pequenos con una consciencia de adulto revolucionario.*”¹⁶⁶ Marquez adds that most of the leaders of the revolution were no older than twenty-three, many of them with young children of their own. In contrast, at the time of the tour Bread and Puppet staff ranged from mid-twenties to mid-thirties.

Conclusion

Bread and Puppet’s *The Nativity* tour experience of 1985 was a theatrical embodiment of the show and its central character’s, moral message. Similar to the

165 Ponce, interview with the author, December 2020. My English translations: “We were traveling in buses in the region where the *Contras* were...and heard shootings when they would tell us get down...‘we are going through battle grounds!...‘we will be driving through!...‘relax.’ I thought, relax? there are bullets flying!”

166 My English translation: young kids with an adult revolutionary state of mind.

painted words on cardboard signs used throughout the performance, the Nicaraguan tour captured the spirit of “truth, revolution, friendship, love, solidarity, and hope.” And though performing in Nicaragua during times of civil conflict presented a number of challenges for the largely North American theatre group, it also offered participants unique and historic touring experiences that allowed for personal, political and ideological growth, including publicly declaring solidarity with the Central American people through theatre in Latin American territory. The Nicaraguan tour also offered North American audiences an honest firsthand insight into the Central American revolution, the first and last revolution of its kind in the region, which served as a testament to the Nicaraguan people’s heart, courage and commitment towards a hopeful future. What is more, Romero’s legacy was upheld not only throughout the production’s themes of social justice, liberation theology and compassion woven throughout the text, but also within the process itself, specifically in coordinating, developing, rehearsing, performing and touring the politically charged and emotional play to Nicaraguan audiences five years after Romero’s assassination.

Though Bread and Puppet’s presence in the country was short-lived and concluded after three weeks, *The Nativity* tour of 1985 “set the stage for future collaborations” including a decades-long relationship with MECATE.¹⁶⁷ For Trompetter, MECATE and Bread and Puppet shared similar values, as both theatre groups honored the work of poor-peoples’ theatre subscribing to anti-consumerist philosophies and creating theatre from found or recycled materials. She believed the *Nativity* tour cemented their connection and respect towards each other.¹⁶⁸ A strong creative

¹⁶⁷ Romanyshyn, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

¹⁶⁸ Trompetter, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

collaboration had formed between Bread and Puppet and MECATE during the 1985 tour that led MECATE to invite Bread and Puppet to return in 1987 for another series of workshops and performances, this time developed in Nicaragua with the help of participants.¹⁶⁹ Participants overall agreed that one of the greatest takeaways from the tour was establishing these long-term relationships with the Nicaraguan people, what Bell refers to as “the breadth of this experience.”¹⁷⁰

Not only did North American Bread and Puppet participants develop new friendships with Nicaraguan audiences, but the *Nativity* tour solidified their special bond and love towards one another, which was apparent during my virtual group interview in the fall of 2020. The interview coincidentally took place the night before the 2020 presidential election, and a newfound sense of hope for a more just and equitable future was present throughout the conversation. Bread and Puppet’s Nicaraguan tour was for many the first and only time they toured with the theatre, and the last time many of them would work together. At the time of this writing, it has been nearly forty years since the performance tour of 1985, and about that long since participants have discussed the experience as a collective. And yet, despite the time that has elapsed, participants vividly recall and continue to draw from the number of meaningful experiences they shared during the tour. In general, participants could never single out one favorite memory of the tour as they felt it was such a wide-ranging series of equally meaningful and unique experiences they will forever hold dear to their hearts. When asked what he most valued about the tour Guillen responded:

169 Not all participants of the 1985 tour returned for the 1987 tour. Of those interviewed, only Schumann, Marquez, Elbow, and Romanyshyn returned.

170 Bell, Interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

*Que es lo que mas tesoro? No te podria decir, esque es todo! Es todo. El aprendizaje es enorme que ademas son experiencias que tienen que ver con un momento historica de Centro America...ademas tienen que ver con la historia personal de uno...*¹⁷¹

The extraordinary aspects of the *Nativity* Nicaraguan tour contributed to this exceptional historic event, beginning with its counterpart in Vermont for North American audiences to developing the show in post-revolution Nicaragua and its correlated influence on the personal and artistic lives of those involved. Thus, the heightened political climate of the *Nativity* tour only reinforced the show's message of "truth, revolution, friendship, love, solidarity, and hope," and elevated the significance of participation for the touring company and its volunteers. Though Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity* performance of 1982 was a significant event in itself, the Nicaraguan *Nativity* tour of 1985 deserves to be recognized as one of Bread of Puppet's most significant transnational political and theatrical collaborations, and a momentous theatrical and historic event in political puppet history; just ask the *Nativity* participants of 1985 and they would agree.

171 Guillen, Interview with the author, December 2020. My English translation: "What do I most treasure about this experience? I couldn't say one thing, because it was everything. What I learned, but also they were experiences that took place during a critical moment of Central American history...it is has to do with one's personal history..."

CHAPTER IV.

Cheapicity, Communal Work, 'Collaborate': Bread and Puppet Performs Liberation Theology



Figure 34. Romero puppet, Founding Father's puppets, and others in storage at Bread and Puppet, Glover, Vermont. Unless otherwise specified, photographs at Bread and Puppet are by Xiomara Cornejo, 2016.



Figure 35. Cardboard movie screening sign for Romero movie at Bread and Puppet.

I stand in front of the Romero puppet. In less than two hours, I will facilitate a talk on Saint Oscar A. Romero and liberation theology—a Marxist interpretation of the Christian gospel originating in Latin America. There are two Romero puppets, the one in front of me, which lives in the museum, and another one used for street performances. I stare at the Romero puppet in front of me with its large papier-mâché hands stretched out in a welcoming embrace surrounded by smaller to medium size puppets, masks, and other pieces around its feet, close to its chest, or next to its face while hanging from the ceiling.

I just got back from using the puppeteer's computer where I recorded the legendary speech Romero made to the National Guard (as portrayed by Raul Julia in the film Romero) urging them to disobey military orders to kill. I used the same handheld recorder I utilize to conduct my Bread and Puppet interviews. It took a few times to capture the speech without the sound of Squash, the summer cook's beloved dog, barking in the background. In the end, I decide a little bit of ambient noise won't be an issue; the important thing is that folks can hear the performance of the speech. At some point in the Romero talk I will play this for those who are present. It is one of his most famous and inspirational speeches. How powerful would it be to hear it echo through the museum's second floor while we gather around this magnificent puppet? According to my interview with Peter and Elka, Romero's speech was also one of the reasons why Peter Schumann held so much admiration for the slain priest.

I take advantage of the time to prepare for the talk, position some benches and pillows around the Romero puppet for seating, test out my recorder, sweep the floor, and go through my notes in private. I walk down the museum aisle carrying a wooden bench when in come a group of three white women, possibly in their late fifties or sixties. They walk straight towards the Romero puppet and start to read the sign posted just outside the Romero installation. I welcome them to the museum and make an effort to stay out of their way, before placing the bench near the Romero puppet. Suddenly, I overhear them talk about Romero, the man, as if they knew him. Who are these women? And how did they know Romero? I decide to introduce myself and invite them to the Romero talk happening later that day. According to the three women, they did missionary work in El Salvador during the war and though they didn't work with Romero directly, they worked closely with others who had. The women stood in front of the Romero puppet recalling how much of an impact Romero, the priest, had on their work in Central America. After a brief conversation, the women wished me luck on my presentation, excused themselves, and continued wandering about the museum. I couldn't believe what just happened. Surely, this short encounter with the three nuns was the motivational boost I needed before my presentation. I looked down at the installation sign the nuns were reading. The sign includes information about the Romero puppet; how Romero's legacy inspired Peter to create this "modern-day passion play" in solidarity with the Central American struggle.

It had been twenty-four years since the Romero puppet was performed in the final Bread and Puppet Our Domestic Resurrection Circus. Thirty-six years after Romero's murder I, a U.S.-born daughter of Salvadoran parents, stood in front of the Romero puppet. It was at that moment that my presence at the farm felt like a physical embodiment—similar to the Romero puppet—of a deep-seated connection between Bread and Puppet Theater and Central American geopolitics; what that relationship was precisely, was yet to be discovered.

Despite its mostly agnostic membership, the Bread and Puppet Theater has a surprisingly long and multifarious relationship with Christianity. It turns out that a vast selection of Bread and Puppet's canon of work—from its early Christmas plays to its circus acts and pageants—is influenced by religious and Christian folklore, and yet, the company has never directly affiliated itself with any religious institution. The Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador*—based entirely on the life and death of Romero, for example, was part of the *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* of 1982. A 20-foot large scale puppet of Romero was the central figure of the entire performance.

Neither Bread and Puppet nor Archbishop Oscar Romero were ever directly affiliated with liberation theology, and yet the company and Romero's teachings were consistently aligned with its core moral and political values. Romero truly embodied the spirit of liberation theology, so much so that he has inadvertently become among the most recognized and highly regarded figures of the movement, while Bread and Puppet (whose North American premier of *The Nativity* in 1982 was dedicated to liberation theology) have never outwardly claimed to be practicing theologians. Susan Green and Greg Guma discuss ties between liberation theology and the arts in *Bread and Puppet: Stories of Struggle and Faith from Central America*,¹⁷² the only publication documenting the *Nativity* performance in Vermont. Specifically, Guma parallels Bread and Puppet's antiwar street performances during the Vietnam War and other social protests with

172 Susan Green and Greg Guma, *Bread and Puppet: Stories of Struggle and Faith from Central America* (Burlington, Vt.: Green Valley Film and Art, 1985).

liberation theology's grassroot Church and people movement.¹⁷³ What is more, John Bell, renowned Bread and Puppet scholar and long-term company member, adds that it is no surprise the theatre developed such strong ties to liberation theology for they share "a similar combination of moral idealism, politics and the stories of popular religion" which is a common trait of Peter's work.¹⁷⁴

Though limited scholarship on the Bread and Puppet Theater and liberation theology exists, it primarily addresses Christianity's (and liberation theology's) influence on Bread and Puppet's stage performances. What remains unexplored is the impact of Christianity, specifically the teachings of liberation theology, on Bread and Puppet beyond its canon of theatrical work and onto its theatre praxis. Yet the company's performed actions, on and off stage, during my apprenticeship of 2016 demonstrate a deep-rooted affiliation to liberation theology's moral, political, and ethical principles.

In this chapter, I examine the Bread and Puppet Theater praxis observed during summer 2016 as a performance of liberation theology, and as a symbolic metaphor of the "resurrection," and manifestation, of Romero's spirit. I examine Bread and Puppet's theatre praxis as performances of liberation theology in relation to Blase Bonpane's work with the Guatemalan *Cursillo* program. I argue that Bonpane's three approaches to understanding liberation theology as a practice of democracy, a formation of community, and dialogical pedagogy parallel three fundamental aspects of Bread and Puppet theatre praxis: *Cheapicity*, communal work, and 'collaborate'. According to Peter, the Bread and Puppet Theater served as "a school, but *not* a school," during which one could learn the important lessons of *Cheapicity*, communal work, and collaborate.

173 Green and Guma, *Bread and Puppet*, 16.

174 Bell, "The Bread and Puppet Theater in Nicaragua, 1987," *New Theatre Quarterly* 5, no. 17 (1989), 8.

Through methods of photo autoethnography, I weave personal photographs with over 24 interviews conducted, recordings, and field notes on the Bread and Puppet to discover the relationship between the tenets of liberation theology as theorized by Bonpane and Bread and Puppet's practice of *Cheapicity*, *communal work*, and 'collaborate' during the apprenticeship of 2016 and how these performances contribute to preserving and "resurrecting" Romero's legacy on the farm.

Bread and Puppet Theater and Christianity

A fuller understanding of Bread and Puppet's performance of liberation theology may be gained by understanding the company's relationship to Christianity. Similar to Bread and Puppet, Christianity has played a critical role in the trajectory of several European and U.S. theatre groups. In general, theatre has maintained a varied and complex relationship with Christianity throughout its history. Elizabeth Schafer, the author of *Theatre & Christianity*, states that Christianity (depending on the time in history and specific to regions where Christianity is the dominant religion) has served to uplift and support theatre, or condemn and forbid it.¹⁷⁵ Schafer argues that Christianity—which at several points in history directly opposed theatre practice—is keen to incorporate "theatre techniques" into its institutional praxis, including staged dramas of the gospel with the most popular being the nativity.¹⁷⁶

As in the case of Bread and Puppet, Christianity, despite its fluctuating relationship with theatre and no direct affiliation with the company, is often center stage. Stefan Brecht, author of *The Bread and Puppet Theater Volumes I & II*—one of the earliest comprehensive books on the company's history from the 1960s to the 1980s—

175 Elizabeth Schafer, *Theatre and Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 2019), 1.

176 Schaffer, *Theatre and Christianity*, 2.

dedicates several sections of the first volume to unpack what he calls the “Christianism of Peter’s theatre.”¹⁷⁷ According to an interview with long-term puppeteer Palmer there was always a “spiritual dimension” to the content of Peter Schumann’s work, which she states Peter never specified, but based on her experience, always alluded to.¹⁷⁸ Schumann’s allusions to Christianity were evident in the company’s performances of the 60s and 70s. He featured and incorporated Christian mythology figures into his plays and pageants, including dramatized representations of God, Jesus Christ, and Mary.¹⁷⁹ It was during the same years that one fourth of Bread and Puppet’s canon of work consisted of religious observances, including its popular Christmas and Easter plays.

Brecht argues that Bread and Puppet upheld a sort of “religious air,” which manifests itself through Schumann’s puppet aesthetic, including the overall look and large size of the puppets, as well as its meticulously choreographed movements.¹⁸⁰ Brecht compares these movements to those found in religious ceremonies and rituals. He further argues that Bread and Puppet’s aesthetic choices were intended to inspire “awe” among the audiences, what Brecht considers a “religious sentiment” because of its emotional proximity to witnessing a supernatural event.¹⁸¹ He proposes that Peter’s fascination with religious folklore as content for his work could stem from Peter’s attraction to notions of “good” vs. “evil,” a dominant principle in most Christian mythology.¹⁸² The notion of a “good” character (or manifestation of an idea, system, or value) vs. an “evil” counterpart is a universal theme quickly recognized and understood by any theatre audience,

177 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 388.

178 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 216

179 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 404.

180 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 386.

181 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 386.

182 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*.

regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof.¹⁸³ Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity* is a prime example of its adaptations of well-known Christian storylines through a contemporary framework that dramatized the life, death, and imagined "resurrection" of Romero like that of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Brecht suggests that the company name, Bread and Puppet Theater—in addition to the subject matter of its most famous works—is another example of the company's reference to Christianity.¹⁸⁴ Peter bakes rye dough bread on an open-air baking shed and shares it with audiences after every performance.¹⁸⁵ Peter's breaking of bread after every performance shares a striking resemblance to that of sharing Christian communion at the end of Mass. For the most part, he distributes the free bread himself. The company's website opening states, "*We give you a piece of bread with the puppet show because our bread and theater belong together.*"¹⁸⁶ In the statement, Peter unpacks the relationship between bread and theatre, refers to bread and theatre as a sacrament, and argues they are essential in nourishing the human body and spirit.

183 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 390.

184 Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theater*, 169.

185 Sally Pollak, "Talking Rye With Bread and Puppet's Peter Schumann," *Seven Days*, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/talking-rye-with-bread-and-puppets-peter-schumann/Content?oid=8058721>.

186 "Bread and Puppet Theater | Puppeteers and Sourdough Bakers of Glover," accessed April 19, 2021, <https://breadandpuppet.org/>.

Cheapicity



Figures 36 and 37. People watch the apprentices work with a paper puppet (left). People under a tarp with stage lights move about the space (right).



Figure 38. People move a large, cardboard paper puppet.

Before arriving at the apprenticeship, I would daydream about my time on the farm, fantasizing about building Bread and Puppet's trademark larger-than-life puppets. Surely, I thought, the renowned Bread and Puppet had the means to produce new and grandiose puppets as part of the apprenticeship experience; unfortunately, that was never the case. It was not until the second day on the farm when the staff members gave us a tour of the farm that I realized the extent of Bread and Puppet's massive collection of masks, puppets, flags, and costumes preserved by the company through the years. Its collection was gigantic; there was never any need to construct new puppets. As apprentices, we rarely built new puppets but would instead repair or add on to existing puppets. If we were to build our own work, we were encouraged to use recycled or found material on the farm. The Bread and Puppet Theater also had its recycling center with various materials to choose from, including cardboard, plastic, trash, and foam. One of the most impressive puppets I encountered was built with the most unconventional materials; it was a flat puppet resembling something like a giant creature with a rectangular body and massive arms. The puppet, used in the performance of Faust III, was made of stapled brown paper bag material, and was painted only with black paint. Peter led us through a series of exercises to move the puppet and make it a multi-dimensional character despite its flat appearance. Who would have thought that this dormant creature could come alive with such vigor and grace? The brown puppet was not the only sustainably sourced material object in the show that surpassed my expectations. We would create another massive character using only a plastic tarp; we

would gather underneath this tarp, under dimmed stage lights, moving about in unison. It was a surprisingly effective use of sustainably sourced materials that maintained the tradition of Bread and Puppet's puppet aesthetic, but more importantly, its distinctive theatre praxis-- what Peter coined as *Cheapicity*.

Peter introduced the term *Cheapicity* to describe Bread and Puppet's process of making theatre through recycled, found, and refurbished materials. According to Peter, *Cheapicity* not only cut down cost and saved the non-profit theatre money in supplies, but also allowed for infinite creativity not limited by existing resources or prefabricated materials. My experience in the farm revealed Bread and Puppet's praxis of *Cheapicity* was much more nuanced than frugality or mere preference for sustainably sourced materials. What is more, in Natalie Hormilla's "Bread and Puppet Celebrates Half a Century," Peter proclaims *Cheapicity* as Bread and Puppet's "religion."¹⁸⁷ In addition to its pragmatic function, *Cheapicity* served as a moral and political ideology, which greatly influenced the theatre's practice.

Cheapicity, specifically the company's conscious application of Marxist analysis to its organizational structure, is another prime example of the theatre's performance of liberation theology. Akin to the Marxist teachings of liberation theology, *Cheapicity* also functioned as a critique of society's hierarchal power structures and capitalist ideals.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, we can interpret the Bread and Puppet's integration of *Cheapicity* as a practice of democracy—in the spirit of liberation theology—similar to that of the *Cursillos* in Guatemala. Thus, the Bread and Puppet Theater performed democracy, analogous to liberation theology's teachings, through its praxis of *Cheapicity*. Specifically, Bread and Puppet performed the spirit of *Cheapicity* through

187 Natalie Hormilla, "Bread and Puppet Celebrates Half a Century," *Barton Chronicle*, August 7, 2013, <https://bartonchronicle.com/bread-and-puppet-celebrates-half-a-century/>.

188 Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 6.

its anti-capitalist stance towards sustainability and the theatre's collective authority praxis. *Cheapicity* became an imperative way of living and being on the farm.

Cheapicity as Performance of Anti-Capitalism and Sustainability

As part of its anti-capitalist praxis, Bread and Puppet Theater's fundamental values are based on theatre making and not solely profit; Linda Elbow, longtime puppeteer and financial director, claims that though they welcome donations (and depending on the performance will charge admission) they will never deny audiences admission for lack of funds.¹⁸⁹ For every circus performance, apprentices were assigned to cover the entrances with large paper maché hats where audience members make monetary donations should they wish to do so. In addition to donations, the theatre also relies on non-private funding; it is one of the oldest nonprofit theatre companies in the U.S. Of course, city and education grants are employed to bring the theatre to communities and campuses nationwide. Yet the company itself has never applied for any private or corporate funding as part of its not-for-profit praxis.

¹⁸⁹ Linda Elbow, interview with the author, July 03, 2016.

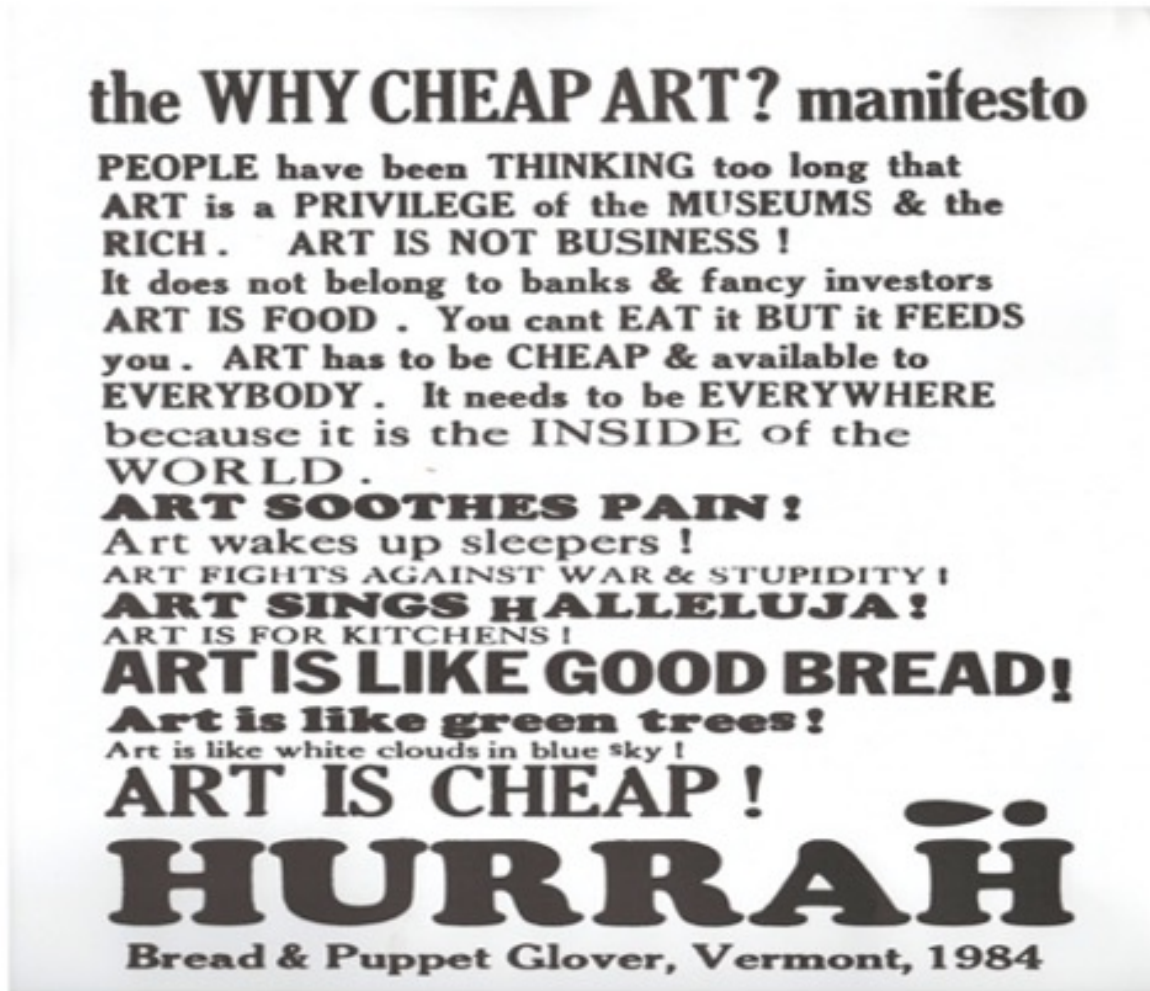


Figure 39. The “Why Cheap Art?” Manifesto. (Bread and Puppet Press 1984)

Bread and Puppet’s “Why Cheap Art? Manifesto,” a published declaration of the theatre’s anti-capitalist approach to art production, is a written testament of the group’s performance of liberation theology through the practice of democracy. Although the Bread and Puppet Theater could not exist entirely as a fully anti-capitalist entity while still being part of a capitalist society, its efforts remain in the spirit of *Cheapicity* as laid out in the “Why Cheap Art? Manifesto” of 1984. I further propose that the Manifesto also functions as a performance script, which enacted by the Bread and Puppet guides its performances of an alternative economic system through art.



Figure 40. A hallway at the Bread and Puppet Museum with three large white masks.



Figure 41. Various colorful masks in storage.



Figure 42. Cardboard canvas figures on a wall.



Figure 43. The Founding Fathers puppets stand with large, white floating lanterns.



Figure 44. Large face masks with a white sheet covering the body of one mask.



Figure 45. Crocodile puppet on a vintage wagon.



Figure 46. Big, mutant-like red puppet with multiple faces on its face and other puppets.



Figure 47. Six white figure puppets look as if they are flying on the ceiling of the museum.



Figure 48. Mother puppets in black garments with red full-faced puppet in the left corner.



Figure 49. Large puppet on stilts with other white-face puppets and horse puppets below.



Figure 50. Chubby face puppet in red shirt with large red-faced puppet and other puppets.



Figure 51. A massive brown puppet mask hangs by an exit door.

The Bread and Puppet Theater Museum, still active today, sets the stage for the company's anti-capitalist performance and decommodification of art. For instance, work is consistently produced through the Bread and Puppet Press—managed by longtime company staff member and artist Lila Winstead, with the help of company staff and volunteers—but Bread and Puppet did not produce work for the store solely based on profit. Instead, the company created an anti-profit, alternative economy based on public accessibility and an honor system. A prime example is the museum, which is free to enter (though donations are always welcome) and excluding the coldest months of the season (though one could still request it be opened through appointment) remained accessible for the majority of the year; all that is asked of museum visitors is that they “turn the lights off when you leave.”¹⁹⁰

Additionally, there is never anyone working the museum store; there is no official “salesperson” and no register in sight. Instead, there is a wooden container where folks can slip in payment (cash or check) for the items they purchase. All monetary transactions in the shop are handled through an honor system, contrary to the selfish and competitive spirit that ensues through capitalist markets. By participating in the company's honor system payment process, visitors of the museum become participants in Bread and Puppet's performance of *Cheapicity*.

Bread and Puppet's option for a natural decaying process is another example of its anti-capitalistic approach to the commodification of art. Unlike a traditional museum collection, the museum's puppets are not privately owned by major investors. Instead, the collection remains in the Bread and Puppet company's hands, which then makes it

¹⁹⁰“Museum | Bread and Puppet Theater,” Bread and Puppet, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://breadandpuppet.org/museum>.

available for free public viewing. According to the company’s website, the Bread and Puppet Museum “replaces the traditional museum’s ideal of preservation with acceptance of more or less graceful and inevitable deterioration,” allowing for a potential shutdown of the museum’s collection and welcoming the natural process of decay to take its place.

The spirit of Bread and Puppet’s *Cheapicity* manifests beyond the museum door, and through the Cheap Art Bus, a nonfunctioning school bus-turned-art-museum for apprentices, staff, and volunteers to produce and share their art. The items displayed in the Cheap Art Bus were made with sustainable material and often offered at extremely low prices or for free.



Figure 52. Foam animals for sale on Bread and Puppet’s Cheap Art Bus.



Figure 53. Paper drawings and other items on the Cheap Art Bus.



Figure 54. Black and white images for sale on the Cheap Art Bus.



Figure 55. The exterior of the Cheap Art Bus on the Bread and Puppet Farm.

Cheapicity as Performance of Collective Authority



Figures 56. Peter Schumann conducts a rehearsal at the Papier-mâché Cathedral.

The apprentices, staff, and volunteers gather on the Papier-mâché Cathedral's dirt floor and play musical instruments during a performance of Faust III. Like an orchestra conductor, Peter stands in front of the group spontaneously waving his hands up and down, left and right; pointing his fingers at specific instruments for us to play; telling us when to stop, slow down, or keep going; and leading the entire group in an original composition. I sit down at the front of the group, anxiously waiting for Peter to point my way so that I could play my miniature conga drum. There is an incredible amount of adrenaline rushing through my body as the sound of noise and strangely beautiful music fills the cathedral. It is quite a rewarding experience to be part of an unpredictable collective effort. My eyes remain fixated on Peter's hands the entire time. From where I am sitting, Peter looks like a giant silhouette, otherworldly as the theatre's lights frame his long, white hair. No matter his hand gestures on stage, I can always make out the details of Peter's aging hands, each line and wrinkle.

Despite Peter being in his early 80s, he held such a powerful presence. His movements and gestures were so graceful and silly at the same time. With Peter, it was always an unpredictable performance. You were never sure what he would do, but you knew it would never be boring. After all the years of reading about and researching the company, I could not believe that I was here, performing in a Bread and Puppet production while in the presence of greatness. For me, looking up at Peter during the Faust III performance was one of the most meaningful moments throughout the apprenticeship. It took me a few days to have the courage to speak to Peter and weeks before I would ask for an interview. Like most of the apprentices, I was completely star-struck whenever Peter would come by. In some way, we were all here because of his legacy as one of the theatre masterminds of the U.S.'s political theatre movement. It was not until he started spending more time with the apprentices, teaching us about the Papier-mâché process, showing us his goofy dances, or sharing funny anecdotes by the outdoor oven. I witnessed several layers of Peter's complex authority and leadership personality, including what some staff argued as a softening of his notorious temper, during the apprenticeship.

I was even fortunate to interview Peter and Elka in their living room, inside their private home located just uphill on the farm. Peter was incredibly humble and warm during the interview, serving me hot tea and making funny jokes throughout. Both Peter and Elka supported my Romero talk and offered me access to all the necessary resources I needed for it. Over the next few weeks, Peter would continue to push and challenge us during rehearsals. Midway through the apprenticeship, Peter's demeanor would gradually change as he became more relaxed, comfortable, and friendly with the farm's apprentices. Peter was no longer an intimidating, Godlike figure; he was less threatening and more approachable, human even.

Peter was held in high regard by apprentices while company staff revered his genius, and yet Peter's authority on the farm was much more nuanced than I imagined.

Joshua R. Krugman, a long-term staff member and puppeteer who permanently resides on the farm, shares his take on Peter's authority on the farm:

Peter Schumann is an incredibly brilliant man...He is the kind of artist that you get maybe a couple of them in a century...it is partly who he was born...it's partly his refugee history experience...not only is he an aesthetic genius and his work is pretty much completely stunning...I think there is a reason why he paints all the puppets and why he makes all the molds, it's because he is fucking amazing...and also because he has a really powerful warmth and force of a character. If he were an egotistical or self-aggrandizing shallow person, people would not have wanted to work with him no matter how good he was...Peter can sometimes be difficult, but he is an incredibly humane, generous, warm person that people want to be around.¹⁹¹

Krugman continues by discussing the complexities of Peter's artistry and authority as critical to the longstanding trajectory of the Bread and Puppet Theater:

He (Peter) is on the level of Beethoven or Michelangelo, some of the really good artists of history. Someone who is driven by an inner compulsion to create no matter what...Peter relies on collective...Peter's work relies on the people and therefore the theatre...we are creating Peter's work...Peter does not tell us what to do, it is a lot of experimentation, and we offer a lot to the process but it's basically Peter and his amazing unending productivity.¹⁹²

Krugman argues that despite Peter's influence the farm functioned as a sort of "collective authority," which placed company members in mutual positions of leadership and power. He further adds that Peter's sole influence on the farm is "not coercive authority" but instead entrusted upon him by the company. According to Krugman, the company trusts Peter's "aesthetic vision" granting him creative seniority while collectively taking on other responsibilities on the farm including hiring and firing of staff, booking, and fiscal management. Among those interviewed, there was also talk that Peter, now in his mid-80s, had taken more of a backseat as the company's artistic director and allowed the

¹⁹¹ Josh Krugman, interview with the author, June 2016.

¹⁹² Krugman, interview with the author, June 2016.

younger company members to take on more creative control over the performances.¹⁹³

Krugman's argument for Peter's authority on the farm was widely shared and while I can attest that during the apprenticeship of 2016 several staff members took creative leads in new performance acts, but always with final approval from Peter.

Complexities of Collective Authority

The Bread and Puppet performance of collective authority was based primarily on the redistribution of logistic and administrative power to members of the collective, including women, on the farm. Thus, Peter was not the only one in charge, nor did he oversee every aspect of the theatre. Similarly, the feminist liberation movement efforts within the Catholic Church worked to increase recognition of contributions by women in the Church by redistributing positions of power. And yet, Bread and Puppet Theater's performance of collective authority both honors feminist liberation theology's vision but also incorporates a feminist strain. For instance, though positions of influence and authority are distributed among women on the farm, Bread and Puppet's sole creative authority continues to be Peter. He has full artistic control and final say on all creative prospects. Thus, Peter remains the highest authority and most powerful individual in the Bread and Puppet Theater, despite the countless creative contributions among the staff.

Bread and Puppet maintains collective authority and does so with some limitations and while still upholding Peter's individual control, which is inconsistent with feminist liberation theology's concepts of equitable distribution of power. For instance, though Elka spearheaded Dancing Bear Theatre company, performed and even wrote her own puppet shows, the children's theatre group was handled separately from Bread and

¹⁹³ Interviews with several staff, July 2016.

Puppet's major productions. Thus, Elka had no official creative control at the level that Peter had regarding Bread and Puppet's circus, street parades, or indoor performances. Elka's collective authority was focused on administrative work as in the Bread and Puppet Museum or the Printing Press, while her authority in creative decision-making was allocated specifically to Dancing Bear, and other smaller-scale Bread and Puppet side projects and ventures. Still, Elka continued to produce the writing for printed material for years to come. And though Elka continues to be Peter's strongest sounding board and confidant, it is Peter who has the most creative autonomy within the company.

Another example includes Lila Winstead, co-manager of the Bread and Puppet Print Press, who was directly responsible for producing Peter's prints, but was also not involved in the creative decision-making. Despite Winstead having the printmaking training and specific skill set in the company, Peter is the only company member to design every product, including Bread and Puppet posters, postcards, banners, and circus flags. Instead, Winstead took on a managerial leadership role, overseeing the craftsmanship to bring Peter's artistic designs to life and training all other staff and volunteers in the process.

Linda Elbow, who also took on an administrative leadership role, was heavily involved in the live performative aspects of the company, much more consistently than even Elka or Winstead, and yet, Elbow did not have the same creative authority that Peter did. Even skits or artistic ideas brought forth by Elbow, a musician, performer and puppeteer in her own right, had to be approved by Peter, as was the case for all staff. Nonetheless, Elbow remains active in the company's live performances till today while at the same time balancing her responsibility as head administrator of fiscal accounts.

Elbow was one of the few senior staff members who also performed in most, if not all, of the live performances throughout the apprenticeship.

Certainly, since the beginning of Bread and Puppet history, it is Peter's creative vision that comes to fruition, including the design of all puppets and print work, and the writing of scripts for live performances, but not without the support of countless company members. Though women have always been a part of the Bread and Puppet company makeup, only a selected few wielded the weight of power and influence, like Elka, Winstead, and Elbow. Like their male counterparts, the women of the Bread and Puppet company in its early years were there to collectively support the visionary work of Peter. Now this does not mean that staff members did not produce their own work while working with the company or make critical contributions to the artistic direction of the company. It means that collective authority in the firm did not always include creative control. One might argue that maintaining Peter's single visual aesthetic has been an asset to the company, whose uniform puppet style is easily recognizable worldwide. The Bread and Puppet aesthetic is due largely to Peter's individual take on circus, street theatre and large-scale puppets, which has placed the company in an artistic league of its own and inspired countless other protest theatre groups in the world.

Through the years, Bread and Puppet Theater has encountered a number of changes, including Peter getting older and a younger generation of company members beginning to take rein. My participant observations and interviews conducted with several lead staff reveal that Bread and Puppet's notions of collective authority, though far from perfect, has evolved, and now includes more opportunities for sharing creative control. For example, women staff members interviewed were not limited to

administrative or supervisory roles but were also critical to the company's creative decision-making. On several occasions, women staff members spearheaded writing of scripts, directed entire rehearsals, and coordinated circus acts, while also leading through administrative roles. What is more, Peter is more welcoming and encouraging of creative contributions from staff members, though not without the occasional bumping of creative minds or compromises and negotiations. Women interviewed during my study, including Lily Lamberta (director of her own puppet theatre company in North Carolina) and Esteli Kitchen, discussed several instances where they have openly disagreed with or challenged Peter's creative autonomy. In these instances, staff members have come to mutual agreements with Peter, made compromises, and even learned to navigate his authority while still finding equal footing to make some creative decisions together. Perhaps it is not that Peter grants more authority now than before, but that staff members, women in particular, are also asserting creative power in their own ways. Bread and Puppet's collective authority today is not limited to administrative leadership but is paving the way for the sharing of creative control, all while simultaneously honoring its co-founder's unique vision and upholding the beloved Bread and Puppet aesthetic. Though there is still much work to be done regarding the ongoing patriarchal structures of institutions like the Catholic Church or Bread and Puppet Theater, the company is much closer to fulfilling a vision of equitable distribution of power throughout every aspect of its work than it ever has been.

Peter's authority on the farm has played a critical role in the trajectory of the company but it is not obsolete, and while authority is dispersed throughout the farm, particularly among highly instrumental women, little has been documented regarding

women's authority on the farm and their impact on the company. Elka Schumann's, Elbow's, and Winstead's positions of authority embodied the vision of feminist liberation theology in creating institutional change through distribution of power; the following performances highlight and recognize their contributions at the Bread and Puppet farm and demonstrate their critical role in the company's trajectory.

Elka Schumann



Figure 57. Elka Schumann. Photograph by Bethany N. Dunbar, June 10, 2015.

When they asked for volunteers to work with Elka in the Bread and Puppet Museum, I jumped at the opportunity to work with her in person. Elka not only curates the museum, but she also started and manages the Bread and Puppet Press while also authoring its publicity materials.¹⁹⁴ My only interactions with her thus far were during the morning meetings or shape sings on Tuesday, during which I tried to position myself as close to her as possible. Unfortunately, she is Soprano, and I am Alto; we rarely sang next to each other. In any case, I was utterly drawn to her, and unlike Peter, whom I had read and studied about, I did not know much about Elka.

194 Margaret Michniewicz, "Behind the Masks: Bread & Puppet's Elka Schumann," *Vermont Woman*, accessed August 25, 2020, <https://www.vermontwoman.com/articles/2010/0710/breadpuppet.html>.

I spent the entire apprenticeship as part of the museum crew, among other farm duties. Working alongside her in the museum was quite the privilege; on the first workday, Elka gave our small group (made up of myself and two other volunteers) a private tour throughout the two-floor museum, once an 18th-century dairy barn. Elka, who was in her early 80s then, was a Bread and Puppet historian, recalling the intricate details of hundreds of performances, puppet tales, or anecdotes for every puppet displayed from the company's more than-50-year trajectory. Elka then showed us the storage room, which was filled with old merchandise and overstock. We later headed downstairs, where she walked us through the museum shop, the first floor of the museum where you could purchase Bread and Puppet show flags, posters, postcards, books, and videos. The Bread and Puppet collection was impressive, with many original handcrafted, hand-painted items from various decades for sale. Once we covered the museum floors, she walked us to a wooden bench outside near the main entrance where a small wooden puppet covered in a small blanket lay "sleeping." According to Elka, this was the museum guard, and the museum was not officially open until we "woke" the puppet guard and put on his red hat.

During my final week at the farm, I offered to help Elka with any additional tasks she might have, and she invited me over to her house to help with some organizing. I was delighted and excited to spend quality time with her before the end of the apprenticeship. Peter and Elka lived in a quaint little house further up the hill from the main house, a reasonable distance from the staff's living quarters, company kitchen, and apprentice lounge. It was a modest and eclectic two-story cottage-style home. Elka insisted the first thing we do before organizing was to sit and have tea. She did not have to ask me twice! How many people can say they had tea with Elka Schumann in her home? And then we proceeded to fix a plant that was damaged from an early rainstorm the night before, hang Peter's laundry outside on the clothes hanger, and clean the kitchen area, all while sharing stories of our families, her grandchildren, the apprenticeship, and other random things. The apprenticeship was coming to an end, and I knew that I would miss our time together, so I made sure to take my time with all my tasks. Elka did not seem to mind; she simply carried on with all of her work, primarily answering several calls she received about the company, including questions about the circus that day, handling booking matters, the Bread and Puppet Museum, and the printing press. We then headed back to the museum to gather postcards, posters, and other items she graciously gifted the apprentices leaving that week. Elka made sure everyone had an equal amount of Bread and Puppet Press items to take home as a token of appreciation for their work with the company. She was a kind and generous leader.

A central figure in Bread and Puppet's performance of collective authority is its co-founder, Elka Schumann. Though she presented a quieter leadership style than Peter, she nonetheless wielded as much power and influence, beginning with the Bread and Puppet farm. It was Elka's family that purchased the Glover farm in 1970 and in 1974 gifted the land to Peter and Elka for the Bread and Puppet Theater when they first

relocated to Vermont.¹⁹⁵ At the Vermont farm, Bread and Puppet had acres of land to grow the company, house the staff, perform and workshop new acts, build an indoor theatre, host a circus, and store its puppets. Many of the staff interviewed consider Elka's family gift to the Schumanns as largely responsible for the company's longstanding trajectory. For a theatre group like Bread and Puppet, having full ownership of private land most certainly allowed for its more than 50-year longevity.

Elka's role in directly overseeing the Bread and Puppet Museum is one of great influence because it preserves the company's history and allows it to be shared with a wider audience. Together with Peter, Elka knew everything there was to know about Bread and Puppet's legacy. Thus, she leads most group and individual museum tours. Elka maintains control over the museum today, including its administration, curation and preservation of puppets, as well as museum sales. She even trains all Bread and Puppet Museum staff directly. Her firsthand accounts, multifaceted perspective, and fascinating company anecdotes are astounding. Elka's scope of Bread and Puppet knowledge is undeniable and reflects the weight of her authority on the farm. In addition to running administrative and curatorial business in the Bread and Puppet Museum, Elka was also responsible for managing the books, coordinating tours, and handling company accounts for years.¹⁹⁶

Elka, a puppeteer and performer in her own right, is a significant contributor to the Bread and Puppet Theater beyond its museum and includes leading creative

195 Leslie Rowell, "Oral History Interview with Elka Schumann," Digital Vermont: A Project of the Vermont Historical Society, March 11, 2016, https://digitalvermont.org/vt70s/AudioFile1970s-37?query=Elka+Schumann&query_type=keyword&record_types%5B%5D=Item&record_types%5B%5D=File&record_types%5B%5D=Collection&record_types%5B%5D=Exhibit&submit_search=Search.

196 Elka Schumann, interview with the author, June 2016.

projects.¹⁹⁷ According to Margaret Michniewicz, author of “Behind the Mask: Bread and Puppet’s Elka Schumann” (one of the few publications to focus on Elka Schumann) Elka was also a musician and performed in some of the major antiwar demonstrations in D.C., local holiday parades, and school functions. She even started the Dancing Bear Theatre in the 70s, a children’s theatre that performed versions of nursery rhymes for young audiences in schools and local libraries. Elka narrated and crafted her puppets for each performance. She also played the tenor saxophone and recorder in the circus brass band. During one European tour in 1970, Elka would also serve as the company translator; during subsequent tours, however, she decided to remain on the farm and take care of her children while simultaneously handling company business.¹⁹⁸

Elka, being one of many individuals with authority on the farm, has significantly shaped Peter’s, and the company’s, political consciousness. She is even recognized for politicizing Peter early on in their relationship and as the company’s co-founder continues to influence the company’s political subject matter. In an interview with Margaret Michniewicz, Peter and Elka’s daughter Tamar Schumann¹⁹⁹ claims it was Elka who pushed for the inclusion of women’s social issues in circus productions. She further added that her mother was the company “soundboard” and most “keen critic,” as the only other person who has remained with the company since the beginning.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, interactions with Elka during the apprenticeship proved she remained a powerful figure within the company. On several occasions, Peter would rely on Elka when making final

197 Michniewicz, “Behind the Masks”

<https://www.vermontwoman.com/articles/2010/0710/breadpuppet.html>.

198 Peter and Elka Schumann, interview with the author, July 20, 2016.

199 The eldest of the five Schumann children.

200 Michniewicz, “Behind the Masks,”

<https://www.vermontwoman.com/articles/2010/0710/breadpuppet.html>.

decisions, while the staff continued to consult and include her in most aspects of the farm. It was evident that Elka remained Peter's greatest collaborator and in an interview with the Schumanns, Peter himself credited Elka for the start of the company.



Figure 58. A table holds various paints and brushes.



Figure 59. Posters that read “Resistance of the Heart Against Business as Usual” rests on a table.



Figure 60. Paint brushes dry on a table.



Figure 61. A woman paints posters while finished copies hang from the ceiling or rest on a table.

Lila Winstead

The inclusion of women within Bread and Puppet's performance of collective authority also manifests in the work of Lila Winstead²⁰¹ I worked with Winstead on a few occasions that summer as part of the print shop volunteer group. She spearheads all matters related to the craftsmanship of printmaking. The Bread and Puppet Press produces printed and hand-painted banners, posters, books, flags, cards, curtains, and even costumes.²⁰² Several of these products are original print designs from past Bread and Puppet performances. The thousands of items produced at the Bread and Puppet Press under Winstead's and Elka's leadership provide audiences with pieces of Bread and Puppet Theater history.

201 Elka co-manages the Bread and Puppet Press with Lila Winstead.

202 "About Press | Bread and Puppet Theater," Bread and Puppet, accessed September 21, 2020, <https://breadandpuppet.org/about-press>.

Like Elka, Winstead's role as part of Bread and Puppet's collective authority wields power because of her unique skillset - in Winstead's case, expertise in printmaking. She trained every volunteer and apprentice, and under her skilled supervision we created relief prints and hand-painted posters which were then sold in the museum. Although Peter creates all of the original designs for the Bread and Puppet Press, Winstead and her printshop staff bring those designs to fruition. What is more, Winstead's capacity for traditional printmaking upholds Bread and Puppet's longstanding tradition of craftsmanship and exemplifies the integration of artistry *with* physical labor on the farm. Alongside Elka, it is Winstead's leadership and influence in the art of printmaking that has maintained the Bread and Puppet Press as an operational and generative entity since the late 80s.

Despite her countless years as co-manager of the Press and member of the company, there is little published information on Winstead's unique skillset and subsequent influence on the company beyond the theatre's website. Fortunately, a recent short video by filmmaker Andrew Ceen, "Vermont Ink," is now made available through Vimeo and the Bread and Puppet website. Ceen's beautiful video documents Winstead's craft and dedication to printmaking on the farm.²⁰³ In the short video, narrated by Winstead, she speaks about her professional training as a visual and printing artist who first started with the company as a touring puppeteer, trombone player, and circus and pageant performer before committing herself to printmaking. The first few video shots begin with Winstead entering the print shop and preparing for a day's work. We then see Winstead working the letter-printing press and teaching a group of apprentices and volunteers the relief printmaking process. Winstead argues that work produced through

203 Andrew Ceen, "Vermont Ink," Vimeo, accessed September 20, 2020. <https://vimeo.com/216775535>.

the printing press is a fusion of past and modern technology and considers the work not only creative but also “physical and mechanical.”

Linda Elbow

Another woman who exemplified power at the Bread and Puppet farm is Elbow. Like Elka and Winstead, little is published about Elbow’s authority in the company, nor the weight of her presence on the theatre. For years, she has remained head of fiscal matters and singlehandedly manages the financial sustainability of the company. Without Elbow’s fiscal expertise, staff members would not have a steady salary, performance tours would not be booked and paid for, nor would the company know how to navigate all types of logistical nightmares within the nonprofit sector.

Unlike other members of Bread and Puppet’s collective authority, Elbow maintained both a behind-the-scenes and onstage presence at the farm. She was involved in administrative work, attended staff meetings, *and* handled creative responsibilities like playing the ukulele in the circus, leading the *Cantastoria* during Friday shows in the Cathedral, and performing in all street parades. We saw Elbow in action as much as we saw Peter. Thus, she became one of the company’s most visible leaders. What is unique about Elbow’s brandishing of power is that it was multifaceted, revealing her range of leadership and demonstrating the extent of her influence in the company. In a one-on-one interview, Elbow discussed balancing the various aspects of her work at Bread and Puppet:

Xiomara: What is the most challenging aspect of your work at Bread and Puppet, and the roles you take on as part of the company?

Linda: Time...having enough time to do everything. I come down in the summer because I can really engage in all the theatre making, but in the meantime, I still have to handle payroll and taxes every month...every quarter, just had a disaster

with our workers' compensation insurance because they stopped covering us in Kenya...then we had this new policy...they want to sue us...blah, blah, blah...There is this new tax exemption? And I said, "Wait a second! Since we are an educational private 1C3..." So, I tried to call the woman back and she has been out of the office all week! You know, just that kind of baloney (we both laugh).

Elbow was an entertaining character. I first met her during the car ride from Burlington Airport to the Bread and Puppet farm. She personally picked me up from the airport, along with two other apprentices. It was evident during the car ride that Elbow was insightful, witty, warm, and down-to-earth. Rarely did she hold her tongue, and she always had a sarcastic remark that had everyone dying of laughter. She was unapologetically herself, which made her a favorite among the apprentices. Elbow first joined the company in the early 1970s as a costume designer, performer, and at one point, a gardener. Sometime in her career, she gained administrative work experience with a consulting firm and applied her expertise to administrative work with the company.²⁰⁴ According to Elbow, Elka managed company money in the beginning, while she mostly handled money from the *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* era. Elka then handed over fiscal responsibility to Elbow who became responsible for Bread and Puppet's financial matters like insurance, payroll, and taxes. Along with another staff member, Elbow also coordinated the booking of regional, national, and international tours for the theatre. On top of her administrative roles, she would also travel with the touring company and perform in the circus, pageants, the Papier-mâché Cathedral performances, and local parades.

Comparable to Elka and Winstead, Elbow is not just part of Bread and Puppet's collective authority but is also an established artist of her own merits. Elbow has directed and produced original puppet shows, including "Runaway Pond," which performed in

204 Linda Elbow, interview with the author, June 3, 2016.

Glover every year. She has also showcased her work (within and outside of Vermont) including her work as a performer and puppeteer in New York during the 80s.²⁰⁵ In 2017, Elbow had a solo exhibit of her puppetry at the Bread and Puppet Woodshed Gallery. As one of the oldest members, Elbow has remained a critical contributor to the administrative, and sometimes creative, collective authority on the farm.

Communal Work



Figure 62. “Yellow Act” performers stand in front of a bus and circus backdrop.

205 “Exhibit of Linda Elbow’s Puppet Shows Opens at Bread and Puppet’s Woodshed Gallery,” *Caledonian Record*, August 4, 2017, https://www.caledonianrecord.com/features/entertainment/exhibit-of-linda-elbow-s-puppet-shows-opens-at-bread-and-puppet-s-woodshed-gallery/article_fae44e04-3f3a-5df7-be1e-e4f7e4770fcb.html.



Figure 63. "Yellow Act" performers in front of bus with tiger puppet waving large flag.



Figure 64. "Yellow Act" with all its performers moving alongside puppeteers behind three yellow circular props.



Figure 65. "Yellow Act" performers runs on stage.



Figure 66. "Yellow Act" performers with puppeteers behind three yellow circular props.

The closing act of Bread and Puppet's "What Forward?" outdoor circus is called the "yellow act." It includes most, if not all, of the apprentices, some staff, and community volunteers. We all wear various yellow masks, puppet heads, and costume pieces while dancing to choreographed movements as the band plays. At the end of the act, we gather close to a giant circular yellow sun. For me, the "yellow act" was one of the most high-energy, elaborate (and confusing) acts of the circus, mainly because there were so many people on stage at the same time, all wearing oversized puppet heads or masks with very minimal visibility. I selected a large yellow papier-mâché lion with a long neck and fabric headdress flowing from its side. The puppet was an older piece and a stunning work of art but was also very heavy, and difficult for me to stabilize and see through. Two small eyeholes were placed in the mask's center, making it impossible for me to see to my right or left. How was I supposed to wear this thing? I realize early on that I had so much to learn about the art of movement with large puppets, and to recognize when a puppet was meant to be worn as a mask or carried. Nevertheless, I chose this puppet for the grand finale. The first time I perform in the "yellow act" is a

complete disaster. By the time we approach the end of the circus, I am drenched in sweat, my dress is falling off, I am exhausted and utterly lost, and we still had to do an entire pageant after the circus! I quickly scrambled backstage (a tent behind the circus bus) to find my yellow act puppet and costume as the band cued us to enter the stage. Suddenly, the “yellow act” is up, I hear voices call “Let’s go, let’s go!” and a mob of people rushes towards the stage, dancing and moving about in their yellow costumes. I could not see a thing around me and do not even know how I found my way to the stage without falling on my face. Someone grabs my arm and helps me find my mark. Although the music was loud, I could still hear folks calling towards one another, reminding them to get to their places or get ready for the next movement before the yellow sun appeared on stage. I am partly crying, partly laughing hysterically inside the darkness of my yellow lion mask, catching small glimpses through my two tiny eyeholes of folks in similar positions, wandering around the stage like drunk toddlers continually being redirected and rescued by other performers with more visibility. It was a complete train wreck and certainly felt like a circus moment. Suddenly, the music shifts, and the yellow sun appears on stage. A few folks tap me to move to my right and gently nudge me to walk towards the center of the stage. All I can see are my bare feet on the field grass stumbling to the beat of the music, so I follow their voices and finally reach my destination, making my final gesture towards the grandiose yellow sun. The music stops and then roaring applause from the audience. They love it! We all rush backstage, laughing and congratulating each other for finishing our first circus at the farm. I never figured out what the meaning was behind the yellow act (I do not think any of us ever did!), but that did not matter. All we knew was that this was the circus finale, and it had to be grand, epic, and yellow. I came to accept that there would be many more moments of complete chaos and absurdity like the Bread and Puppet’s circus Yellow Act, which no matter how much training I had, I could never navigate on my own. I would almost always rely on the generosity and guidance of my fellow apprentices or staff. Had it not been for everyone’s collective work on that stage, I would have never found the light of the yellow sun.

We were celebrating our first week’s culmination and what felt like a Bread and Puppet baptism when Peter made a shocking announcement about the Circus and *The Yellow Act* to the group: he thought it was a wonderful first performance! What? Did he say what I think he just said? What is more, an audience member argued the pageant (which followed the circus) was the “most put together pageant they had seen.” Did these people not see the show? How could they consider that a “wonderful” or “put together” performance?? Just a few minutes earlier, several apprentices shared their own stories of missing cues, being blinded by masks, or stumbling over costumes backstage over dinner.

It turned out that I was not the only apprentice who experienced their first Bread and Puppet circus performance in such a comedic and disastrous way. Of course, there were also several exceptions of apprentices who performed with effortless grace and beauty; I was not one of them. My performance alone was a complete embarrassment. It took some time for me to understand how performances, like *The Yellow Act* and others, were evidence of Bread and Puppet's communal work and how the spirit in which they were cultivated embodied the teachings of liberation theology.

The Yellow Act was one of many introductions to Bread and Puppet's take on communal work which shared a similar praxis to that of the *Cursillo* programs in Central America, centering formation of communities and communal work in the name of service for the greater good. The *Cursillo* programs adhered to liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor" and worked in solidarity with *campesino* and indigenous communities on agrarian reform and peasant liberation. Similarly, Bread and Puppet's work was founded in a philosophical doctrine of solidarity with the struggles of oppressed peoples worldwide, often showcasing characters based on peasants or proletarian people. Both the *Cursillo* programs and the Bread and Puppet apprenticeship were rooted in communal work and *service* in the name of social justice.

Unlike a dedicated church base community, the Bread and Puppet Theater praxis was not driven by Christian faith, at least not in a literal sense. However, it was fueled by the pursuit of social, racial, and economic justice in solidarity with poor and oppressed peoples, a definitive trait of liberation theology. All participating apprentices and staff members identified as members of the larger Bread and Puppet community, which spans transnational lines with company members and former apprentices from all over the

world, which I consider equivalent to the experience of belonging to a specific “church.” Comparable to a base community—but more in line with Bonpane’s description of the *Cursillo* program—the Bread and Puppet apprentice and staff’s efforts were motivated by the spirit of communal work (and not individual endeavors) which supported the collective needs of the company and addressed the current social and political state of the world, this time through theatre.

Similar to the *Cursillos*, the Bread and Puppet apprenticeship program followed a rigorous (almost boot-camp) schedule of communal mental and physical work on the farm. As apprentices, we performed several roles that would fluctuate on an hourly to daily basis: workers on the farm, performers in the shows, and members of one big communal family. Like the *Cursillo*, participants in the apprenticeship included young college-aged students, with a distinction that it also included homemakers and retired professionals from around the world. Most of us completed our apprenticeship as a five-week or nine-week program with other people arriving for shorter or longer stays.²⁰⁶ All apprentices lived on the property full-time, whether upstairs in the farmhouse dorm room, or in their tent on the theatre’s camping grounds in the forest. No “official” classes were taught, yet the Bread and Puppet staff (and apprentices) led workshops on stilt-walking, papier-mâché, clowning, flag dance, and movement, among other things. I was not the only apprentice to coordinate a group discussion or workshop. In fact, several apprentices coordinated group discussions and led teach-ins on social justice issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and gender-identity politics, similar to the group discussions and classes held in the *Cursillo* programs.

206 During my stay, three apprentices left the program earlier than planned for personal and health reasons. Rarely would an apprentice be asked to leave, but it has, and did, happen that summer. The reasons were unknown to me.

My interviews with the 2016 Bread and Puppet apprentice revealed the vast majority to be socially conscious, progressive, or liberal in their political ideologies. We believed in the work of the Bread and Puppet Theater as an effective vehicle for raising social consciousness and shared an overwhelming desire to be of service to the company. I spoke with Joe Therrien²⁰⁷, one of the lead puppeteers and co-founder of the People's Puppets of Occupy Wall Street in New York, inside the company museum about the Bread and Puppet legacy. I would often use the second floor of the Bread and Puppet Museum, in front of the Romero puppet, as a common space to conduct interviews. Therrien was one of the most involved of the younger staff members, with an extensive background in puppetry arts and activism, and a strong presence as a company leader. Therrien had been involved with the company staff for years as a performer and coordinator for various seasonal tours. It was apparent that he held a profound respect for Peter and the company and was wholly committed to its future. Therrien was also the only staff member mentored by Peter in the bread-baking process. This was quite the honor, as no one other than Peter himself was responsible for baking the bread. When I asked Therrien to share one of the greatest contributions of Bread and Puppet Theater, he responded with the following:

Subject, bodies, and work of radical politics. I will never be able to count all the shows...how much radical theatre has been made by one organization...The amount of work we produce is a huge contribution but also part of the experience of the Bread and Puppet community/engine/conglomeration of brains, hearts, and hands that have come in and out over the past 53 years. In a way, Bread and Puppet is its own school and it is very informal...So many artists have benefited and learned from the Bread and Puppet Theater and hopefully brought not only the techniques but also the politics out of it too...both a body of work and the amount of artists that have influenced and been influenced by Bread and Puppet.²⁰⁸

207 Joseph Therrien, interview with the author, June 7, 2016.

208 Joseph Therrien, interview with the author, June 7, 2016.

Communal-driven work, life, and play on the farm played a considerable role in the Bread and Puppet Theater's trajectory as a "community/engine/conglomeration" and is considered one of the company's oldest and most distinguishing qualities. Since the company first moved to Vermont in the late 60s, it has taken an entire community of puppeteers, activists, and volunteers living on the farm to run the Bread and Puppet machine. The same was the case for the apprenticeship of 2016 and was evident through the staff's actions whose performances served as model behaviors for the apprentices. The lead puppeteers would embody the spirit of communal work and productivity as Bread and Puppet policy only proving Therrien's point. In the span of five weeks, the Bread and Puppet collective, including apprentices, staff, volunteers, and lead puppeteers, produced a substantial amount of communal work on the farm. A regular workday would begin at 9 am (or 7 am if you worked in the garden) and end around 6 pm. All company members participated in weekly (and sometimes daily) farm chores, including, but not limited to, assisting the cooking staff and preparing and serving the daily meals for the company (sometimes in full costumes). We also cleaned and stocked the public outhouses for company members and audiences; reorganized the paint shop, music room, and other spaces; hand painted Bread and Puppet posters in the print shop; used papier-mâché and completed puppet repair; gardening and preparing food, etc. Some of my tasks included organizing the paint and music room, painting in the print shop, kitchen clean-up, and assisting Elka in the day-to-day tasks of the Bread and Puppet Museum.



Figure 67. A Papier-mâché puppet in production.



Figure 68. Staff dress as orange carrots to serve lunch to apprentices.



Figure 69. People in blue wait outside the Bread and Puppet bus to march in a parade.



Figure 70. A woman in angel wings stands in front of a large group all on their knees.



Figure 71. Canta storia people in front of a painted banner all pointing in various directions.



Figure 72. A yellow puppet head that looks like a sun is held up above a crowd.



Figure 73. Outdoor rehearsal with a large blue puppet.



Figure 74. Rehearsal in Bread and Puppet's backyard.



Figure 75. Several people walk on stilts.

In addition to our farm chores, we produced an impressive amount of communal work through theatre in a six-day workweek.²⁰⁹ A typical week would consist of daily show rehearsals for Bread and Puppet’s *Faust III* in the Papier-mâché Cathedral, the *TINA*²¹⁰ cantastoria, the *What Forward?* Circus acts and pageants in the field, as well as parade performances for local community events. *Faust III* and *TINA* were performed every Friday, the outdoor circus and pageants on Sundays, and street parades would occur mostly on weekdays. If we were not performing a Bread and Puppet show, we were rehearsing for it, modifying it, or completely revamping the entire act. Music and choral singing were also key factors of most performances and required rehearsals. Additional times would also be allocated to create new circus acts, making every circus performance

209 We had Mondays off unless a parade was scheduled; in that case, we would perform and take the rest of the day, or the following day, off.

210 An acronym for “There Is No Alternative,” a cantastoria against capitalist and consumerist societies.

slightly different from the one before. We never got too attached to anything, because at Bread and Puppet things could change at the drop of a hat, and in most cases they did.

Kitchen, the apprenticeship coordinator, sat with me inside the Bread and Puppet Papier-mâché Cathedral, a stunning indoor theatre with a dirt floor, raised wooden bench seating, and an impressive wall covered entirely in handcrafted papier-mâché puppets. Today was Monday, our weekly day off, and here she was, spending her limited free time with me as a willing participant in my research. Not surprisingly, Kitchen echoed Therrien's sentiment on communal work and argued for Bread and Puppet's "punishing work ethic" and its "unbelievable drive for production" as its major contribution.²¹¹ Like Therrien, Kitchen was one of the most involved Bread and Puppet staff, running the apprenticeship program while also performing other duties as staff, and occasional performer and musician, among other things. I honestly cannot recall a time when Kitchen was not working on the farm. She talked about the company's administrative ins and outs, a bit of Bread and Puppet history, and her desire to take a much-needed time off from the company. However, Kitchen confessed it was difficult for her to leave the farm (and theatre company) entirely. It was clear after my interview that she was as much a part of the Bread and Puppet theatre community as it was a part of her.

I think what is special or unique for me about this place is just that we are all living, in this communal thing. It's not like a job we come to every day and we go home and we have these outside lives...we make shows together, and then we hang out together, and then we go to sleep together. It forces this intimacy and working relationship.²¹²

Both Therrien and Kitchen, along with various other staff interviewed, acknowledged communal work as a distinguishable quality of the Bread and Puppet

211 Esteli Kitchen, Interview with the author, June 2016.

212 Kitchen, Interview with the author, June 2016.

company, manifesting in various forms throughout the apprenticeship. It was evident early on in the apprenticeship that Bread and Puppet upheld a high standard of work ethic—granted, a common trait in most theatre work—which we quickly embraced as apprentices in the company. By the end of the first week, we were all accustomed to a daily routine of farm work, theatre-making/rehearsing/performing, and participation in other social events, including shape-note singing with local community members and trips to the lake. But it was not just the amount of work produced at Bread and Puppet that most aligned with the lessons of liberation theology, but also the spirit in which we performed the work.

It was not until my interview with Tom Cunningham, a staff member, puppeteer, and one of the company's strongest comedic performers that I realized how embedded in the company the notion of service was. Although the theatre company produced an impressive and elaborate amount of performance work, it was not entirely about producing art, at least not in its traditional sense. Cunningham recalls his first experience with the Bread and Puppet Theater:

I was looking for something more that involved theatre, clownishness, humor, but that was also more than just about one individual person. And I heard about Bread and Puppet. Somebody described it to me and it was exactly what I wanted. So I applied for the apprenticeship without ever seeing a show...and then I saw a show and I was like, oh I don't know if this is exactly what I was going for...It was different than what I was expecting. It was different than anything than I had seen before...I was used to seeing perfection and I was expecting to see something that was massive but also like really tight that was going to blow my mind, and this was not tight at all. You can see there were a lot of people, there were a number of volunteers...a huge number of people in the show and you can see some of them looking to their neighbors to see what to do...Did they not rehearse the show? Why don't they know what to do?²¹³

213 Tom Cunningham, interview with the author, June 13, 2016.

Cunningham and I continue our interview outside his bus (one of a few non-operating school busses turned living quarters for the staff) over communal work followed by bouts of uncontrollable laughter. We unpack my disastrous first performance in *The Yellow Act*, and he tells me of similar performances throughout his time as an apprentice and staff member with the company. According to Cunningham, one of the greatest lessons he learned from his work with the Bread and Puppet company—and what he wanted to emphasize during the interview—stems from a comment made by Peter to him after a less than perfect performance: “We don’t strive for perfection; we also don’t achieve it.”

I really like this quote...I feel it is a nice way to be. Being okay with not being perfect. This place is extremely not perfect. There have been a lot of fuckups, really bad things that have happened along the way. But you know we do try to keep it going. Try to do better than what we have done in the past. It’s just like a garden...a garden of people.²¹⁴

I agree with Peter and Cunningham; the Bread and Puppet apprenticeship program was never perfect, nor were any of its performances; this does not negate the quality of the farm’s creative work. Every Bread and Puppet production that summer was rehearsed, prepared, and organized to a great extent. Indeed, we had established a blossoming and growing community on the farm, what Cunningham so beautifully described as a “garden of people.” I witnessed some of the most complex and riveting circus and street theatre work in my life while living and working on the farm. On one occasion, we even rehearsed the *Cantastoria* for the first time, a few hours before showtime; now, that was work ethic. And though not everyone was a theatre practitioner, nor needed to be, we were all committed to producing the best work we possibly could.

214 Cunningham, interview with the author, June 13, 2016.

The “punishing work ethic” of the company was alive and well in our Bread and Puppet apprenticeship community. Yet, like many other theatre-trained apprentices I interviewed, I struggled that summer with the idea of not striving for perfection. By the first week, I was questioning the Bread and Puppet rehearsal process. I was impatient and secretly frustrated for what I mistakenly considered a lack of theatre structure and organization; this is especially hard for me as a theatre director and dramaturg who thought I knew everything about theatre-making. Boy, was I ever wrong. In reality, the Bread and Puppet was carefully structured and well organized, only in a nontraditional way. I quickly realized that my preconceived notions of theatre work were getting in the way of a deeper, more meaningful purpose for my participation in the program. My communal work experience on the farm became less about producing aesthetically polished theatre for the company or being recognized for my creative contributions, and more about a collective effort to serve the needs of the theatre and its audiences. Is this why the company would often encourage, and prefer, non-theatre people to join the company? It was not until my apprenticeship with the Bread and Puppet Theater that I realized how liberating and humbling this praxis would be, both in my life as a theatre artist and as an activist. This change of perspective and practice transformed how I produced theatre work for social change and deepened my awareness of the teachings of liberation theology through communal work on the farm.

Long after my *Yellow Act* debacle, which I have to say had improved significantly since the first circus, I met with Jason Hicks, another longtime staff member and puppeteer, and talked about communal work on the farm. I conducted his interview on a rainy Monday outside the porch of his shack right next to the Papier-mâché Cathedral.

Hicks, like most other apprentices and staff members, was a multitalented puppeteer and activist. In addition to performance, Hicks was a member of the Bread and Puppet's band, which played during every performance, circus, pageant, and parade.²¹⁵ We talked about the unique qualities of communal work at the farm and his sense of belonging to the Bread and Puppet family, which he lovingly described as a "dysfunctional family." Hicks later talked to me about Bread and Puppet and the "do-it-yourself activist ethics" as part of that family dynamic:

When you run into anybody in New York, or anyone who has been here, it's like you can just meet them and they get what you are doing...you've learned a new vocabulary, you've learned a new language...after people come through here our process is so much faster...that thing over there needs to be figured out to make it work. I don't know how it's going to be figured out...and you will just trust that they will figure it out. People understand how delegation works. It is not about making space...we are giving up something for this bigger idea to happen...²¹⁶

What I found most compelling about Hicks' take on communal work is the argument towards building something greater than ourselves and working beyond our personal needs -- the "bigger idea." Bread and Puppet's performance of service and selflessness through communal work meant sacrificing our individual artists' desires in order to fulfill the greater good of the company, which ties directly to the ethical and moral obligations of liberation theology. The very essence of service throughout the Bread and Puppet apprenticeship program stemmed from performed acts of selflessness, evident in the admirable work ethic and duty of the staff and apprentices. And though communal work is common of most theatre work in general, the distinction with Bread

215 The Bread and Puppet band were also regular performers at our Friday or Sunday night dance parties. At Bread and Puppet, you did not have to be a trained musician to play in the band. Like Esteli, many company members first learned to play an instrument when playing for Bread and Puppet. Jason was also a member of Honk!, an activist group of musicians (though not everyone is a musician) that supports social movements by performing music during rallies and protests, both to deescalate and escalate the situation; they do whatever is needed in collaboration with the organizers.

216 Jason Hicks, interview with the author, June 23, 2016.

and Puppet is selflessness, void of artistic egos or ambitions, and service through labor and humility. I further argue the acts of service and selflessness are one of the reasons why Bread and Puppet could produce so much work in such a short period of time.

Not all apprentices welcomed the idea of forbearing their individual creative projects to fulfil the needs of the company. In fact, the most common complaint I received from apprentices during my group interviews was the lack of creative freedom throughout the program. It is no surprise that so many of them were eager to hone their craft, perform for Peter and Elka, or showcase their original work during the program. The number of talented apprentices that summer was impressive to say the least, and although not all participants identified as artists, there was a high number of established professionals including clowns, street performers, directors, actors, singers, musicians, etc. This topic was even brought up during a midsummer check-in where we all gathered in the Papier-mâché Cathedral to discuss our overall experience in the program and address any concerns. Several participants voiced their disappointment in not having artistic autonomy. Some even expressed dissatisfaction in the apprenticeship program not functioning more like a school where they would learn to build their own puppets. I have to admit that early on even I expected the program to run more like a school than a functioning theatre. Luckily, the Bread and Puppet Theater did “make space” to present participants original work including *A Cheap Artist Café*, a cabaret-style showcase of apprentice and staff’s original work for the community. The talent displayed by participants was outstanding and included original songs, marionette skits, puppet shows, crankie,²¹⁷ and movement pieces.²¹⁸ But as time progressed, it was evident that the Bread

217 A crankie is a device for smaller paper hand puppets performed in front of moving scroll.

and Puppet apprenticeship was not an official school of puppetry and that our role as apprentices would be far from traditional. The apprenticeship program would require a level of altruism and humility we had not anticipated, and firsthand experience of liberation theology's spiritual, moral, and ethical teachings.

Bread and Puppet praxis as a performance of communal work sustains liberation theology's spiritual and moral teachings as service towards social change; it reimagines communal work in base communities through a non-secular lens. The ultimate collective goal of base communities like the *Cursillo* programs, and in this case, the Bread and Puppet Theater, was not limited to religious indoctrination and instead focused on a revolution that is based on humanistic values.²¹⁹

Collaborate

While at the farm, we were so disconnected from our regular daily stresses that seldom were there somber moments... until early July, when we received the devastating news of the fatal shootings of two Black men, Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, at the hands of police. It did not matter how isolated we were from civilization or how wrapped up we were in our little bubble; the news of the two shootings, only two days apart from each other, significantly impacted everyone on the farm. Soon there was a collective sense of deep frustration, anger, helplessness, and heartbreak, which was expected among compassionate, selfless, and socially driven individuals. I would soon learn that several staff and apprentices had worked with Black leaders and the Black Lives Matter movement within their communities. The sentiment of anger and grief was even more prevalent among the small number of Black and brown people on the farm, especially for those of us who were all too familiar with systemic racism or police brutality. We spent most of the day reading the local newspaper, gathering as much information as possible, getting updates from the staff (the only ones with internet access on the farm) while the rest of the world reacted with expected uproar and protest.

The next few days remained overwhelmingly emotional for most people as more details of Castile's and Sterling's murders began to unfold. We talked about creating a theatre piece on police brutality or white supremacy on several occasions, but no one

218 There were a few other apprentices or staff-led events that showcased the amount of creativity on the farm, but for the most part we were performing Bread and Puppet's theatre.

219 Bonpane, *Guerrillas of Peace*, 35.

knew precisely what to do. Our conversations never went beyond throwing out ideas. During a run of the circus, Jason suggested that we include an activity in the circus that honors the lives of the Black and brown people killed by police; everyone was finally on board. His initial idea was that the act be a moment of silence, during which we state our solidarity with those impacted and our state of helplessness, what he referred to as a “void” and symbol of our inability to fill it. The Bread and Puppet staff quickly modified that day’s agenda and created time for open discussion and group brainstorming. Those of us who chose to participate gathered around the wooden picnic table we used for our morning meetings. The group conversation was heated, emotional, and draining; everyone had an idea, but not everyone understood what it meant to be Black or brown in America. We all knew it was a delicate subject matter that needed to be handled with care and respect; there were also not enough culturally diverse perspectives on the farm to draw from. Nonetheless, after a long but fruitful conversation, we came up with an initial idea and some language for a BLM circus act. Later that day, we held our first rehearsal, pulled puppets for the show, and began testing our ideas before presenting to Peter and the company... an important start to the healing and creative process.

The Bread and Puppet’s praxis of collaboration was one of its informal teachings and preferred methods of working on the farm, with a few exceptions depending on the work at hand.²²⁰ To “collaborate” at Bread and Puppet meant joining forces and banding together to achieve efforts on the farm. Specifically, the Bread and Puppet praxis of collaboration embodies the principles of dialogue as defined by Freire and exemplified through Bonpane’s observations in Central America. Collaboration, as performed through Bread and Puppet’s Black Lives Matter (BLM) circus act, upheld the values of liberation theology, in this case, as dialogical pedagogy. I examine Bread and Puppet’s performance of collaboration during the creation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) act for the *What Forward?* Circus act of 2016. I propose that Bread and Puppet’s performance of “collaboration” through theatre-making as dialogical praxis, which speaks truth to power through *theatre*, embodied the same principles of dialogical pedagogy: *love, humility, and faith.*

220 There were also exceptions, with some projects lead entirely by staff members or fully realized before our arrival on the farm.

The Black Lives Matter Circus Act



Figure 76. A cluster of fists used in the Black Lives Matter Circus Act. (Photography by Jasmine Erdener)



Figure 77. Cluster of fists seen from a distance. (Still image from video footage by Mark Dannenhauer)



Figure 78. Cluster of fists with person reading from script. (Still image from video footage by Mark Dannenhauer)



Figure 79. A black boot raised to hit fists. (Still image from video footage by Mark Dannenhauer)



Figure 80. Person reads from script while the fists are frozen in place. The boot waits off to the side.

(Still image from video footage by Mark Dannenhauer)



Figure 81. The fists fight back, reacting to the boot. (Still image from video footage by Mark Dannenhauer)



Figure 82. People behind the puppets, both the fists and the boot, speak.

(Still image from video footage by Mark Dannenhauer)



Figure 83. Close up of those involved in the Black Lives Matter circus act.

(Photography by Jasmine Erdener)

For my analysis, I draw from my personal experience as a committee member, performer, and one of three narrators in the final BLM circus act. Though circus acts at Bread and Puppet were known to evolve with each performance continuously, the following version is the one I bore witness to during my apprenticeship in 2016:

We hear the sound of cymbals lightly crashing as nine performers dressed in their traditional white attire slowly enter the circus stage right from around the Circus bus. You can only see the performers' legs as their bodies and faces are covered by the large cardboard hand puppets they carry. (See Figure 77)

Each hand, which slowly bobs up and down, represents a diverse body of people, but mostly deep gray, blue, and brown tones, and are shaped as solidarity fists or open palms. The performers stand in a group cluster with their hand puppets as the light drumroll on the cymbals comes to an end. They raise their puppets high in the air and shout (See Figure 78):

“No!”

The hand puppets stand still in position as an apprentice performing as the narrator enters the circus stage and begins a speech (See Figure 79):

“Eric Garner’s death was two years ago. In 2016, so far, there have been 1733 reported killings by the police in the United States.”

Drumroll and cymbals begin again as two more performers with two large, dark brown cardboard boot puppets stomp their way on stage from the left of the circus bus—each time stomping on the ground to the sound of the bass drum. The two boot puppets face the cluster of human hands and fists until another drumroll is heard, and the boot farthest stage left is swung up in the air by the performer. (See Figure 80) The boot returns with such force that it kicks the cluster of human fists. A cymbal crash is heard as the boot makes contact with the cluster of human fists. The human fists then react to the impact, and the puppet hands swing up into the air to stay frozen. (See Figure 81) We hear a cymbal crash, and the narrator returns on stage. The hand puppet cluster slowly returns to regular positions as the narrator says:

“Almost two weeks ago, Alton Sterling was killed. Since his death, twelve Black and Hispanic/Latinx people have been reported killed. These deaths have

included Philando Castile, Delrawn Small, Raul Savitra Bargau, Pedro Villanueva, Anthony Nunez, and Micah Johnson.”

We hear a drumroll again as the other boot begins to run back, is lifted in the air, and gains momentum to hit the human cluster. The human fist cluster prepares for the impact, slowly moving the puppet hands away from the oncoming boot as we hear a cymbal crash. Suddenly the human cluster of fists returns and decides to face the boot. The hand puppets are lifted in the air and shout (See Figure 82):

“Enough!”

We hear another cymbal crash.

The performers slowly bring their hand puppets in front of them until we can see everyone’s faces. A performer behind one of the boots begins the following speech (See Figure 83):

“In the face of the ongoing crisis of institutional white supremacy...

Another performer, this time one of the hand fist puppets (played by me) continues the speech and says:

...resulting in state-sanctioned killings of Black and brown people...

Together, all of the performers on stage say (See Figure 84):

We stand with the Black Lives Matter Movement!”

The puppeteers stand in place for a few seconds until we hear a drumroll and a series of cymbal crashes from the band as they take their puppets and exit stage left behind the circus bus. End of scene.

In addition to the BLM act, the Bread and Puppet circus of 2016 included a number of acts addressing issues of equality and social justice for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). For example, we performed a circus act addressing the impact

of foreign investments on Puerto Rico, the recent murder of Indigenous environmental activist from Honduras, Berta Casares, as well as an homage to Muhammad Ali's social justice work, and the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, it is the company's ongoing struggle to diversify its membership for the apprenticeship program, which has primarily consisted of "18-25-year-old, white, college-educated women."²²¹ The BLM circus act committee, predominantly white participants, also reflected that year's apprenticeship demographic.²²²

Nevertheless, Bread and Puppet's apprenticeship program, though not racially diverse, was rich in other forms of diversity including social, economic class, artistic practice, or political and spiritual ideologies. The company diversity efforts also included addressing issues impacting myriad communities through theatre, hiring people from various ethnic backgrounds as staff, and fostering lasting relationships with collaborators of color. Since its early years in New York, the company continues to work in solidarity with BIPOC, as when they first partnered with the local Puerto Rican community in their fight for tenant rights.²²³

And yet, as a direct result of the apprenticeship's lack of diversity, we encountered significant challenges while working on the BLM act that gave way for 'collaborate' as dialogical praxis. First, despite the apprenticeship including people of cultural backgrounds from around the world, the BLM committee consisted of mostly white apprentices and a handful of people of color. As a result, there was a lack of representation in the committee from people of color that were familiar with racism and

221 Kitchen, interview with author, July 3, 2016.

222 Apprenticeship participants included people from the U.S., Central America, South America, Canada, Puerto Rico, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

223 Peter and Elka Schumann, interview with the author, July 2016.

police brutality within the context of the United States. Second, Jason (a staff member who identifies as white and male) initiated the BLM development with majority participation from apprentices and a few other staff members contributing from time to time. In this case, there were complicated power dynamics present amongst the BLM circus act committee, including white privilege and power positions.

Bread and Puppet's performance of collaboration as dialogical praxis on the farm helped address the challenges we faced during the BLM act creation process, beginning with establishing initial meetings to express our feelings, experiences, and thoughts on police violence in the country. The subsequent gatherings were not only useful for brainstorming creative ideas for a circus act but, more importantly, were relationship-building opportunities that allowed for group discussion, self-reflection, community-building, and direct action. Through Bread and Puppet's collaboration as dialogical praxis, we began the healing process, and transformed one of the most critical program challenges into an expression of *love*, *humility*, and *faith* on the farm.

Although most participants in the Bread and Puppet apprenticeship and BLM act were white-identifying—except for a few BIPOC—the act was produced in the spirit of collaboration because of a shared “profound love” for the world and people. This *love* in the name of brotherhood with the oppressed is a significant value of Bread and Puppet Theater and its members. In the summer of 2016, I witnessed the company staff and apprentices' emotional response as news of the murder of Castile and Sterling at the hands of police became known on the farm. Specifically, many participants (especially those who participated in the brainstorming meetings) were visibly distraught, infuriated, and determined to honor the lives of Black and brown victims of police brutality through

our work on the farm that summer. Regardless of people's direct experience with police violence, institutional violence, or racism in America, they were committed to expressing through theatre their stance of solidarity with those who had. Several committee members were active supporters of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and had experience working as allies with Black leadership in their communities. The BLM act, which served as a testament to Bread and Puppet's "collaboration" as praxis, resulted in a symbolic performance of its stance in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. As a committee, we were more invested in taking a collective public stance on the issue than in creating artistic work, but theatre, an inherently collaborative process fueled by reflection and action, proved to be an appropriate platform not only to engage in dialogical praxis but also to produce socially driven performances.

Despite the mostly white membership of the BLM circus act committee (and overall apprenticeship program), participants acknowledged white privilege when expressing their ideas by centering BIPOC folks' perspectives and contributions on the farm, an example of *humility* as dialogical pedagogy. Freire argues that dialogical pedagogy is necessary when working in partnership with others in naming the world.²²⁴ For example, Jason (and other company staff members who first proposed that we create a BLM act) took a step back in the process to allow for apprentices to lead the development of the act, a different approach than what we were accustomed to in the farm. By the time we started the apprenticeship program, most circus acts had been developed in one form or another. Although changes were made for every performance, Peter and the Bread and Puppet staff were the ultimate decision-makers for each performance. Seldom did the apprentices make changes or adjustments to a circus act

224 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 61.

without consulting the staff or getting Peter's approval. The BLM circus act, however, was one of few circus performances which was driven almost entirely by the leadership of apprentices and community volunteers. Specifically, the apprentices developed the narrative dialogue for the skit based on conversations and suggestions from the group. The text was then revised, shared, and edited through a collective process by all. Also, the apprentices, in collaboration with Bread and Puppet staff and anyone familiar with puppetry performance, choreographed the stage movements in the BLM circus act. Like other acts in the circus, everyone in the committee pulled puppets out of storage for the performance and based on group consensus they made the final selection of puppets for the show.

The BLM act process shifted the power dynamics in the group that adhered to dialogical pedagogy, which challenges the group leader's role as the "expert." Instead, the BLM process made room for mutual learning and collective sharing of knowledge by everyone in the group, including those personally impacted by racial violence in America and those who stand in solidarity as allies. Participants of the BLM circus act committee shared research responsibilities. They collected news reports and data for the production while members of the group who played in the circus band worked on the show's musical cues. During rehearsals, everyone was encouraged to make contributions and suggestions for the circus act and would often meet during lunch or personal time to work on the act as needed.

The committee's approach to developing the BLM act is an example of group participation through dialogical praxis fueled by horizontal leadership and a shared sense of *faith* in all group members. The BLM circus act was brainstormed, rehearsed, and

performed as part of the circus in seven days; this was on top of rehearsals and meetings for all the other circus acts and pageant, Friday *Faust III* performances, and tasks on the farm. This was a short amount of time, but almost the preferred method of producing theatre on the farm. Because of the act's relevance to current events, there was also more pressure to include it in the circus as soon as possible. Despite the challenges we faced and the quick turnaround, the BLM circus act committee believed in each member's ability to think critically, collaborate, and create theatre. This sense of collective *faith* is a critical component of Bread and Puppet's collaboration as dialogical praxis on the farm, what Freire referred to as a belief in the dialoguer's ability to transform and "to create and recreate" their realities. For Freire, *faith* in people was necessary to fully engage in dialogue and prevent "paternalistic manipulation."²²⁵ Like liberation theology teachings, dialogical praxis argued that all human beings had a right to participate in group reflection and dialogue actively to shape their lives and transform their destinies.

Bread and Puppet's performance of collaboration through dialogical pedagogy fully embodied the principles of *love*, *humility*, and *faith*. Collaboration as dialogical pedagogy served to address several obstacles faced in creating the BLM circus act, including group demographics, power dynamics, and time constraints. Though the BLM act was one of the simplest circus acts that year, its purpose and message left a lasting impact in all who participated. It was evident, based on the people's response after each performance of cheering and applauding, that audiences stood with Bread and Puppet in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.

225 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 64

Conclusion

The energy on the final day of the apprenticeship is somber, quiet, and still, as one by one apprentices say their goodbyes and are driven to the nearest airport. In the apprentices' lounge, stockings made from white cotton socks are hung for the folks leaving that day with small gifts and thank-you notes inside them. And in the morning meeting, folks take pictures, exchange contact information, and sing together, something we did at every morning meeting, but this time with much more commitment and comradery.

I roam the theatre grounds on the final day of the apprenticeship. I take all the final pictures and video I need to document the wonders of the farm, desperately trying to capture every bit of its magic through my camera. I make sure to pay a last visit to the Romero puppet before my departure and walk through the museum floors; there are no visitors or apprentices roaming the space or in the print store below; no groups of people being guided through one of Elka's famous tours. It is just me...and the Romero puppet. This was not the first time I find myself intensely staring at the puppet, secretly hoping it will respond with a smile. Throughout the apprenticeship, I would often come here to spend "alone time" with the Romero puppet as I had done so since my first day at the farm. I facilitated all my group interviews, hosted my talk on liberation theology, and worked on my presentation notes in front of the Romero puppet. Visiting the Romero puppet was the first thing I did—next to pitching my tent in the forest—when I arrived at the beginning of summer; it would also be the last thing I did before I left.

The first moment I saw the puppet at the beginning of the apprenticeship was surreal and, in a weird way, spiritual. I never imagined the presence of a puppet would have such an emotional impact on me. Here it was, right in front of me, the very puppet I first saw on the cover of the Guma and Green's book: the very reason why I chose to apprentice with the company.

For this final moment, I wanted to give thanks to Romero, who I felt was present throughout my entire apprenticeship, guiding me and inspiring me along the way. Romero's spirit was with me indeed... embodied within the large-scale puppet in front of me; manifested by the farm's green fields and pine forest, inside the dirt floor and puppet-covered walls of the Papier-mâché Cathedral; and epitomized in the work of the Bread and Puppet company. Turns out I would find myself in front of the Romero puppet once again in a few years, still taken aback by its grand presence and still waiting for it to smile.

The Bread and Puppet's praxis of *Cheapicity*, communal work, and 'collaborate' all embody the teachings of liberation theology, which in turn resurrect Romero's spirit and maintain his legacy well beyond the confines of the second floor of the museum. First, Bread and Puppet's *Cheapicity* as a critique of capitalist societies echoed Romero's stance against systemic structures that resulted in economic inequality, war, and the

suffering of the poor in El Salvador. In this chapter, I demonstrate Bread and Puppet's performance of *Cheapicity* as a practice of democracy through an analysis of the Bread and Puppet's "Cheap Art Manifesto" as an alternative "business" model for the museum and theatre that maintained an anti-capitalist stance towards sustainability. One of the reasons why Romero was considered such a threat to the right-wing government was because he spoke truth to power. In his sermons, Romero addressed the country's years of wealth disparities, denouncing the immoral and unethical consequences of a greedy capitalist society, and refusing to be purchased by the wealthy elite through monetary and material gifts. Like Bread and Puppet, Archbishop Romero chose to live a sustainable, simple, and humble life in solidarity with the poor, a stark contrast to other religious figures in his position who lived lavish lifestyles while "serving" the needs of the poor. What is more, the "option for the poor" is one of the defining characteristics of liberation theology, which not only interprets God through the eyes of the poor, but advocates for lifestyles rooted in a simple earthly existence, like that of Jesus Christ. Bread and Puppet's *Cheapicity* functioned not only as a sustainable approach to making theatre, but was a moral, ethical (even religious) framework for the company's existence.

Second, Bread and Puppet's praxis of communal work upheld Romero's spiritual and moral responsibility to the marginalized poor, which was rooted in service and selflessness. In this chapter, I interpret Bread and Puppet's communal work as a performance of liberation theology because of its formation of community similar to that practiced by the *Cursillo* programs in Central America. I do so by examining the company's praxis of collective labor on the farm and demonstrate how communal work values evoked by the apprenticeship program were grounded in service and selflessness.

Additionally, I examine how these community-building principles are parallel to the work of liberation theologians throughout Central America, including Romero's work in El Salvador. Specifically, Bread and Puppet's communal work as service and selflessness upheld Romero's definitive traits, as a servant to social justice work, by living out these ideals in their efforts on the farm. For Romero, in order for the Church to truly serve the needs of the people, the Church had to be poor and humble and a "Church from below."²²⁶ Bread and Puppet's "garden of people" nurtured through communal work embodied the Salvadoran martyr's spirit of service through humility. What is more, Romero, nicknamed the "voice of the voiceless," became one with the oppressed, fought for social justice on their behalf, and in doing so, *served* God and the Church. His moral and spiritual obligation to the Salvadoran community took precedent over his ambitions as Archbishop within the Catholic Church. Similarly, Bread and Puppet apprenticeship upheld responsibility to the greater good of the company, the "larger picture," with humility and above individual ambitions and creative ego. Service, selflessness, and humility were so deeply embedded in Romero's praxis that he sacrificed his life for the poor. For Bread and Puppet, its performance of communal work as service through selfless actions and humility linked its moral praxis to Romero's.

And last, Bread and Puppet's performance of collaboration evokes Romero's dialogical approach to working alongside people by embodying the teachings of God's love for all. In this chapter, I evaluate Bread and Puppet's performance of collaboration as dialogical pedagogy by exploring the Black Lives Matter (BLM) act. In my evaluation, I demonstrate how Bread and Puppet's collaboration embodied notions of *love*, *humility*, and *faith* to address challenges while working on the BLM act, similar

226 Maier, "Archbishop Oscar Romero and Liberation Theology," 3.

to the dialogical approach of liberation theologians when working with atheist or indigenous communities. When Romero was first appointed as Archbishop, he was a known conservative and political centrist, yet he continued to foster his friendship with Father Rutillio Grande, a liberation theologian who was actively mobilizing the campesino movement during Romero's appointment. Romero was quickly rejected by liberation theologians who assumed he would be no different than his predecessors. Grande, however, continued to engage with Romero in meaningful debate and dialogue throughout their friendship. Despite having opposed political views regarding the role of the Church in politics, Romero's approach to collaborating with Grande was rooted in compassion and mutual respect. Romero and Grande's partnership, as well as Grande's ultimate death, not only influenced Romero's transformation, but also demonstrate his willingness to engage with all of God's children through love and respect. The Bread and Puppet praxis of collaboration through dialogical pedagogy and theatre embodies similar values, particularly when integrating dialogical praxis to engage in diverse cultural experiences, political views, and conflicting leadership styles. Likewise, Romero advocated for all human beings in full faith that they could be capable participants of fulfilling their destinies regardless of socioeconomic status. For Romero, it was critical to engage the poor in dialogue and social action towards self-liberation.

My witness to, and participation of, Bread and Puppet's performance of *Cheapicity*, communal work, and collaboration during the apprenticeship instilled in me a deeper understanding of liberation theology and Romero's work than I had ever imagined. After five weeks at the apprenticeship, I knew that I would return. Similarly, I came in contact with people who had lived and worked with Bread and Puppet with ties

to the company that also returned to the farm each year. It was evident that their experiences at Bread and Puppet played a significant role in their lives: they held a special place in their hearts for the theatre, and visiting the farm was akin to visiting family and friends. I wondered what it was exactly that made people return to the Bread and Puppet each year. During my interview with Elbow, she described the extended Bread and Puppet family—which included generations of people from across all parts of the world—as part of a “gigantic onion that is a layer, after layer, after layer of people who work with us (Bread and Puppet Theater). Some people have stayed more or less consistently...and sometimes other people just hop back out of the blue, people you have not seen in thirty or forty years.”²²⁷ According to Elbow, the reason why people returned to Bread and Puppet was “probably out of curiosity. And probably out of *love*.”²²⁸

My curiosity about Bread and Puppet, its Romero puppet and its relationship to Central American politics motivated me to apply for the apprenticeship program and inspired me to conduct interviews for this study. However, it was my subsequent love and admiration for Peter, Elka, the company staff, apprentices, and former company members who best embodied the spirit and legacy of Romero’s work that drove me to return. When I did return three years after the apprenticeship, I could still feel Romero’s presence and the teachings of liberation theology amongst the work and people I encountered.

It has been forty years since the birth of the Romero puppet, and Romero’s spirit of brotherly love continues to be “resurrected” throughout the Bread and Puppet Theater praxis. His teachings of social justice, economic equality, selfless humility, and commitment to service continue to influence the company’s praxis today. Romero’s spirit

227 Linda Elbow, interview with the author, June 5, 2016.

228 Elbow, interview with the author, June 5, 2016.

is a critical part of the fabric of Bread and Puppet Theater history like one of the many layers of the Bread and Puppet onion and living manifestation of the Bread and Puppet family.



Figure 84. People in puppet masks with signs reading “Si Se Puede,” “Black Lives Matter,” “Refugees Welcome,” “Make Do or Do Without”, “Courage,” and “Organize and Survive.”

CHAPTER V.

Performing Transnational Solidarity: Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE

...it was extremely optimistic, and sort of joyous time and they had become almost self-sufficient, and food production...the literacy campaign had been so incredibly successful, and people felt so empowered, you know? It was contagious and we were there soaking it up, and feeling, and getting the benefit of a successful revolution with big ideas...it was thrilling and so inspiring to be there. --Michael Romanyshyn

1985, the year of *The Nativity* tour, marked six years after the Sandinista National Liberation Front and the Nicaraguan revolution defeated the oppressive regime of Anastasio Somoza (1936-1979). As a result of the Nicaraguan revolution —the only successful Central American revolution to date — national efforts were made to restore and rebuild a new Nicaragua. In order to create an ideal society, a number of educational, agricultural, economic, health, cultural, and art programs were established in the country.²²⁹ As part of the cultural efforts that year, the Bread and Puppet Theater was invited to tour a performance in Nicaragua of *The Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador* with Romero as the central puppet figure. Though Romero was murdered five years earlier, his spirit of solidarity with oppressed peoples was alive throughout Central America, including Nicaragua, and would manifest through the reconstruction efforts of activists across transnational lines.

229 Gary E. McCuen, *The Nicaraguan Revolution*, Ideas in Conflict Series (s.l.: Gary E. McCuen Pub., Inc., 1986), 8-179.

That same year, the Nicaraguan *Movimiento de Expresión Campesina Artística y Teatral* (MECATE)²³⁰, a political theatre movement that embodied Romero's moral attitude towards spirituality and social justice — and consisting of over 80 campesino theatre groups with ties to the Sandinista guerrilla group — had already formed. MECATE contributed to the social and cultural efforts of national reconstruction by mobilizing campesinos²³¹ towards self-liberation through theatre. MECATE's first interaction with Bread and Puppet Theater was during the *Nativity* tour of 1985. Through performances of comradeship amidst the Nicaraguan revolution and the *Nativity* tour, Bread and Puppet and MECATE would embody, and “resurrect” the teachings of Romero, which in turn would foster negotiations of solidarity between the groups, a performance of transnational solidarity in the spirit of Romero.

The Bread and Puppet Theater's performance of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala included, but was not limited to, the dramatic presentation of *The Nativity*. Though the company performed *The Nativity* as part of an extended series of productions -- a theatrical expression of solidarity with the plight of Central Americans in the 1980s -- they also performed a series of behaviors as allies with the Central American people, during and after the tour. I argue that solidarity with MECATE and its Nicaraguan audiences was performed, and negotiated, through subsequent actions driven by both social and artistic design. I interpret these social behaviors through a performance lens which offers a unique analysis of collective behaviors as manifestations of brotherhood and solidarity.

230 My English translation: Farmworkers Movement of Artistic and Theatrical Expression

231 My English translation: farmworkers

Within the canon of protest theatre history in the Americas, there is limited documentation regarding hemispheric perspectives of theatre as solidarity activism specifically through political puppetry in Central America. What is more, there is an inadequate insight into political collaborations of radical theatre practices between organizations like Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE during times of civil conflicts. The performances of transnational solidarity activism between both Bread and Puppet and MECATE “resurrect” —manifest, embody, bring back to life — Romero’s teachings of solidarity and uphold his legacy. Even though tensions and differences between the groups’ logistical structures, including geographic distance, language barriers, and disparities in targeted audiences existed, the spirit of solidarity between the members of MECATE and Bread and Puppet was formed and sustained for over 35 years.

In this chapter, I employ analytical tools from social movement theory, specifically symbolic interactionism, collective identity, and master frames, to investigate the performance of transnational solidarity activism between the Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE. Performances of transnational solidarity activism can be interpreted as political negotiations and interchange, inspired by shared leftist principles, between U.S.-based Bread and Puppet Theater and Nicaragua’s MECATE. Through the framework of collective identity, we can better understand how *The Nativity* influenced the performance of transnational solidarity activism between the groups, as well as the significance of these performances during an era of U.S. history dominated by forced military intervention in Central American politics.

We can appreciate the distinctive features of radical theatre like those of Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE and their role in the performance of solidarity through the integration of master frame concepts, specifically tactical innovation. This framework offers a unique perspective on understanding the value of political theatre strategies embedded in the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity in comparison to traditional direct action. Similar to master frames, symbolic interactions that took place throughout the tour between participants and the Romero puppet in post-revolution Nicaragua help us recognize the benefits of political puppetry as a performance vehicle for meaning-making and consequent solidarity building.

Since 2016, I have conducted ethnographic research including in-person and phone interviews, focus groups, and facilitated community talks on Bread and Puppet's *Nativity* tour and its subsequent relationship with Central America. My first visit to Bread and Puppet occurred in the summer of 2016, where I participated in a five-week apprenticeship program. I made a second visit to the theater's farm and home base in Vermont for Geezer Week 2019, a weeklong reunion of former company puppeteers from as far back as the 1960s-1980s. During Geezer Week, I facilitated a community dialogue with participants in front of the Romero puppet at the Bread and Puppet Museum. Members who participated during the tour included in this chapter are Schumann, Bell, Romanyshyn, Cohen, and Elbow. Shortly after Geezer Week, I conducted a phone interview with Marquez. Lastly, I interviewed Nidia Bustos, Nicaraguan community organizer, activist, and founder of MECATE in person during a research trip to Costa Rica in 2019.

In order to explore the influence of *The Nativity* on the performed behaviors between Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE, I draw from these firsthand accounts and oral histories, as well as the Bread and Puppet archives, including a rare documentary, photographs, and out-of-print postcards to answer the following questions: How does a theatrical performance about Archbishop Romero's life, like *The Nativity*, uphold his spirit, and influence the performance of brotherhood and solidarity across transnational lines during times of civil unrest? How did the Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE address tensions or negotiations that occurred throughout the performance tour? In what ways have they continued to perform transnational solidarity since the tour? How do these performances continue to "resurrect" Romero's legacy?

The Nativity as a Heightened Theatrical Expression of Collective Identity

Hay que tomar en cuenta es que ellos (Bread and Puppet) nunca han vivido ajeno a Nicaragua, a El Salvador, a las luchas Centro Americanas, a las luchas de nuestros pueblos. Que ellos siempre han estado con el Corazon abierto y con los ojos muy abiertos par aver y sentir las luchas de nuestro pueblo. Eso es hermoso.-- Nidia Bustos²³²

Sociologists Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier define collective identity as "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity."²³³ Taylor and Whittier present a theoretical framework for analyzing the construction of collective identity inside the lesbian feminist movement. I refer to Taylor and Whittier's work as a model to examine MECATE and Bread and Puppet as a politicized identity community during post-revolution 1985. In this article, both authors

232 Nidia Bustos, interview with the author, January 2019. My translation: "You have to take into account how they (Bread and Puppet) have never been strangers to Nicaragua, El Salvador, or the struggles of Central Americans, the struggles of our people. That they have always been with their heart wide open and their eyes open to see and feel the struggles of our people. That is a beautiful thing."

233 Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization" in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties, People, Passions, and Power*, ed. Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 170.

provide a comprehensive review of major social movement scholarship and methods of analysis while proposing three additional factors as analytical tools: Boundaries, Consciousness, and Negotiations. According to the authors, “Boundaries mark the social territories of group relations by highlighting differences between activists and the web of others in the contested social world” and are significant because “they promote a heightened awareness of a group’s commonalities and frame interaction between members of the in-group and the out-group.”²³⁴

In the case of Bread and Puppet and MECATE, Boundaries, Consciousness, and Negotiation identify how these two politicized groups, existing across transnational lines, could identify as allies and members of a shared struggle. Boundaries are markers that include social, psychological, and physical structures that help us understand how a group’s politicized identity was formed, the ways in which they separate themselves from an oppressive or dominant society by creating alternative institutions. Consciousness is the group’s understanding of where they stand as a socially and politically marginalized group, the interpretive framework to realize their interest. Negotiation entails ways a challenging group confronts the existing structures of oppression by implementing subversive actions and strategies. I integrate Taylor and Whittier’s notion of Boundaries, Consciousness, and Negotiation in my study to examine the impact of different geographic locations on the construction of collective identity between MECATE and Bread and Puppet and identify ways that Boundaries, Consciousness, and Negotiation impact the performance of solidarity between both groups.

At the time of the tour, both MECATE and Bread and Puppet had established their positionality against U.S. intervention in Central American politics within their own

²³⁴ Taylor and Whittier, “Collective Identity,” 176.

networks and geographic locations. As active members of the Sandinista guerrilla movement, members of MECATE opposed the civil wars and all forms of U.S. imperialism and intervention in Central American policies; this was especially significant considering recent U.S. intervention during the Nicaraguan revolution in favor of the oppressive capitalist regime.²³⁵ Although the country had won the revolution and successfully ousted the Somoza dictatorship, President Reagan—in efforts to prevent Communism from spreading to the Western hemisphere—declared a counter-revolutionary war against the Sandinistas by creating the Contras, a U.S.-trained and funded right-wing rebel group, similar to the death squads in El Salvador.²³⁶ Meanwhile, Bread and Puppet had developed a reputation as key players during the 1960s anti-war movement in America, which included the company's public opposition to U.S. capitalism and imperialism in foreign countries via large puppet performances, protests, marches and rallies, including the first street performance of *The Nativity* in New York as published in the *New York Times* "Theatre: Archbishop Remembered."²³⁷ Once touring *The Nativity*, Bread and Puppet continued to perform its status as members of the "in-group" which both reaffirmed, though sometimes challenged by others, its "gringo" solidarity with the Nicaraguan people.

Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity*, an explicitly anti-U.S.-imperialism piece, was a "heightened" theatrical expression of their positionality regarding imperialist U.S. policies when first conceived for a North American audience in 1982 as part of the *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*. As Taylor and Whittier suggest, a "heightened awareness

235 Steven, "The Contra War in Nicaragua - Noam Chomsky," libcom.org (blog), September 8, 2006, <http://libcom.org/history/1970-1987-the-contra-war-in-nicaragua>.

236 McCuen, *The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 56-57.

237 Mel Gussow, "Theater: Archbishop Remembered," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/20/theater/theater-archbishop-remembered.html>.

of a group’s commonality” establishes the framework of social interactions between the members of the group and those they are fighting against.²³⁸ For Bread and Puppet this framework established by a “heightened awareness” through performance translated across international borders and geographic locations, including Nicaragua, both strengthening and challenging the group’s status as allies and members of an “in-group.” Specifically, *The Nativity* was a means to express Bread and Puppet’s solidarity with the Central American people and to publicly condemn the actions of the U.S., through artistic performance. Once the show was performed in a different geographic location — Nicaragua vs. the U.S. — the significance of the performance was elevated. Bell describes his thoughts on taking the performance to Central America:

...the show that we created was first performed for an American audience so that it was to a certain extent explaining the situation of campesinos and repression. And when we were in Nicaragua everybody already knows it...like to say and this is what is happening to campesinos in Nicaragua. But I think the presence and importance of it was this big show that was about the situation of campesinos, and Romero being done by gringos—that in itself was the Meta element of it—was very important and people appreciated the solidarity.²³⁹

The initial performance of *The Nativity* was to inform *U.S.-based* audiences about the situation in Central America and performing it in a new geographic space transforms not only the purpose but also the audiences’ reception of the piece. The Nicaraguan tour of *The Nativity* was not intended to inform its audiences of the plight of Central America, nor to introduce them to Romero as a historical figure. To perform *The Nativity* in Nicaragua after first premiering it for North American audiences was risky — especially considering MECATE’s goal of reclaiming culture from Western influence — as it could create tension between the two groups. Though there were certain complications along

238 Taylor and Whittier, "Collective Identity," 176

239 John Bell, Geezer week interview with the author, August 15, 2019, Bread and Puppet Museum, Glover, Vermont.

the way, Bread and Puppet adjusted several existing features of the 1985 performance to meet the needs of the Nicaraguan tour which supported the company's heightened expression of collective identity and strengthened their status as part of the "in-group." Thus, Bread and Puppet performances, including both performances of *The Nativity*, were developed as cultural exchanges between the company and its creative contributors:

The great thing about the Romero show was that it was also a workshop piece, so it wasn't that we just arrived and taught everything... we had a lot of rehearsals and we worked with the people we were collaborating with, which half of them were Nicaraguan too. You know, it was first developed there in Nicaragua and the people playing the roles, the people leading the flags, the revolutionary flags, weren't led by me, they were led by one of the Nicaraguans... it is true for Bread and Puppet in a lot of situations, especially in foreign countries... it is an exchange.²⁴⁰

Although the story of Romero featured in *The Nativity* is specific to people of El Salvador, its essence featured the *testimonios* and voices of Nicaraguans, making it a story they could claim as their own. Susan E. Chase, author of "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices," defines *testimonios* as a politically driven oral narrative associated with Latin American activism in revolutionary movements. As Romanyshyn states, the first performance was developed in collaboration with Nicaraguan volunteers across international borders both in Vermont and in Nicaragua. He further argues that previous collaborations had existed between Bread and Puppet and Nicaragua long before *The Nativity* tour, including a performance with circus families in the National Circus Festival of Nicaragua, and an invitation from the Nicaraguan cultural department to offer theatre workshops in the country.²⁴¹ Moreover, according to Susan Green and Greg Guma's *Bread and Puppet: Stories of Struggle and Faith from Central*

240 Romanyshyn, interview with the author, August 17, 2019.

241 Romanyshyn, interview with the author, August 17, 2019.

America, the scenes for American performance of *The Nativity* were indeed developed through firsthand *testimonios* from Central American activists visiting the farm in 1982.²⁴² Green and Guma further claim that the concepts for *The Nativity* were constructed from this series of *testimonios*, conversations, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, and books about the situation in Central America.²⁴³ This sharing of *testimonios* was part of the cultural exchange between North American and Central American artists. Instead of appropriating the *testimonios*, the Bread and Puppet theatre worked in unison to co-create a performance that communicated the Central American experiences, in collaboration with Central American people, to a U.S.-based audience. Furthermore, in the 1970s, the majority of North Americans were unaware of the humanitarian crisis that was taking place beyond the southern border, let alone direct U.S. involvement in the matter. *The Nativity* thus served as a performance vehicle in communicating the dire situation down south, and the role of the United States.

The Bread and Puppet's integration of *testimonios* in developing the narrative limited, though not entirely eliminated, the "penetration" of Western culture in Central American history. Specifically, development of *The Nativity* centered the Nicaraguan people as experts in their stories. Bread and Puppet's integrations of *testimonios* served as a political exchange between U.S. and Central American contributors, which reaffirmed transnational solidarity, while simultaneously supporting Nicaraguan efforts to reclaiming history after the revolution. The integration of *testimonios* framed how the U.S.-based theatre company interacted with its Central American counterparts through

242 Green and Guma, *Bread and Puppet*, 70.

243 Green and Guma, *Bread and Puppet*, 70.

the creation of the show, generating forms of oral history through cultural exchanges via performance work.

Bread and Puppet's cultural exchange can be analyzed as a critical performance of transnational solidarity activism in which agents of social change include previously excluded subjects in political action, and distribute power among all participants.²⁴⁴ In the case of *The Nativity*, the performance was created in collaboration with Central American theatre artists and activists who not only spearheaded the construction of the performance but who also drove the narrative structure by incorporating their own *testimonios*. *The Nativity* thus became a creative channel for inclusivity with people of Central America, and because of theatre's inherently collaborative form, established opportunities to work alongside, and not simply on behalf of, oppressed people. American theatre that dramatizes the experiences of marginalized groups rarely demonstrates true inclusivity or collaboration with oppressed people, as was the case with Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity*.

In developing the content for *The Nativity*, the Bread and Puppet Theater honored the *testimonios* of the Central American activists, and furthermore performed a public condemnation of the U.S. and its role in the assassination of Romero. During the community talk at the Bread and Puppet Museum, Peter Schumann passionately argued that the Romero story is not just a Salvadoran or Central American story; it is "an American story."

What we did was not attempt to historicize this thing. I mean for us the affect was this is America. America is where the murderers were trained. These were CIA agents who killed these people. They were trained in Texas in the School of the Americas so this whole thing isn't innocently a Salvadoran event at all, it is out of what the empire does. This is a fascist empire that does these actions and did them

244 Mor, *Human Rights*, 5.

historically again and again, not just in South and Central America but in its own country as well.²⁴⁵

Schumann implies a shared commonality between North Americans and Central Americans because of the United States' direct accountability to the war; therefore, his stance in transnational solidarity activism with the plight of the Central American people is performed through *The Nativity* and framed by Taylor and Whittier's *boundaries*. Romanyshyn further adds, "Because it wasn't just their story...it was also our involvement in their story. Our country supporting his assassination." All other participants of the tour agreed that Bread and Puppet chose the story of Romero because it was also about America's role in his murder. Although typical Bread and Puppet preparation included conducting extensive dramaturgical research around performance themes, for many like Cohen, it was not until the Nicaragua tour that the performance was contextualized:

I think of how naïve I was as a young 30-year-old-ish...the context wasn't real to me but to bring it to Nicaragua and feel like the story belonged there, it was very powerful for me to feel what the story was really about. That was a very strong experience for me, like Michael said, kind of changed our lives. It was so new in our eyes.²⁴⁶

The Romero performance, as described by Green and Guma, clearly recognizes and highlights America's role in the murder of Romero through protest theatre. *The Nativity* as a "heightened theatrical expression" positions the Bread and Puppet (and its stance as Americans against U.S. involvement in Central American policies) as allies and members of the "in-group" with the Nicaraguan people. The Bread and Puppet's performance against U.S. imperialism through *The Nativity* demonstrated the company's

245 Peter Schumann, interview with the author, Geezer Week, Bread and Puppet Theatre, July 2019.

246 Cohen, interview with the author, June 08, 2019.

ongoing solidarity with Central American liberation, like the newly won Nicaraguan revolution. So much so that, according to Bell, Bread and Puppet was cordially invited as “De facto U.S. representatives” to the inauguration of the newly elected Sandinista leader and president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega.²⁴⁷ The inauguration and celebration that followed included in attendance other international and Latin American allies, most notably Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro. Marquez recalls the event as a fond memory:

*...entonces eso coincidio que Daniel Ortega (entonces era otra persona) se le habia negado el triunfo en las elecciones y Estados Unidos obligo que se hicieran una segunda ronda de elecciones y el volvio a ganar. Y entonces se hizo una celebracion en el palacio whatever de estado y nosotros fuimos todos a esa celebracion. Habiamos terminado de hacer una funcion no se en que pueblo y fuimos a la fiesta y alli estaba Daniel Ortega y alli estaba Fidel Castro, y alli nos presentaron. Y claro Peter estaba todo sucio, todos estavamos sucios porque habiamos hecho funciones durante el dia y oliamos mal y todo eso y haci fuimos a la actividad.*²⁴⁸

Sociologists Francesca Polleta and James M. Jasper quote Fireman and Gamson (1979) and argue that the “pre-established” individual bonds of people are even more likely to establish a collective identity between groups: “A person whose life is intertwined with the group [through friendship, kinship, organizational membership, informal support networks, or shared relations with outsiders]...has a big stake in the group’s fate.”²⁴⁹ This same principle can be applied to MECATE and Bread and Puppet’s collective identity throughout the years, for despite geographic distance, the lives of

247 The U.S. forced Nicaragua to hold new elections as they refused to acknowledge the leftist president’s victory. Ortega won both elections.

248 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, January 8, 2020. My English translation: “So then what happened, Daniel Ortega (who was a different person then) they had just denied him the election victory, and the United States forced them to have a second round of elections and then he won again and then they had a celebration in the palace “whatever” of the state and so we went to the celebration. We had just finished a performance in I don’t know what town ,and so we go to this celebration and Daniel Ortega was there and so was Fidel Castro and that’s where they presented us. And of course Peter was all dirty, we were all dirty, we had just performed in the day time and we smelled really bad and all that and that’s how we went to the activity.”

249 Polleta and Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” 289.

MECATE and Bread and Puppet remained actively engaged with one another through friendship, kinship, and informal support networks.

Bread and Puppet's relationship with MECATE was first initiated through The Nativity tour. The U.S.-based theatre group was first introduced to Bustos, MECATE's lead organizer and founder, through Lucas Amador and Porfirio Munoz — two MECATE *promotores*²⁵⁰ and Nicaraguan activist and theatre artists. Both Amador and Munoz paid visits together to the Bread and the Puppet Theater the summer before the tour at the Vermont farm and established a bond with the company that easily transferred over to Nicaragua. Both men were also performers in The Nativity tour. Amador's and Munoz' "pre-established" individual bond with Bread and Puppet reassured other leaders in Nicaragua, like Bustos, of the theatre's reputable comradery with the Nicaraguan movement.

Bread and Puppet's creation of *boundaries* through *The Nativity* highlighted differences between the company and other more silent and complacent North American groups on U.S. intervention in Central American policies. For example, Bread and Puppet actively performed its shared opposition to U.S. intervention in Central American politics long before they arrived in Nicaragua at a time when media outlets rarely covered U.S. interference in Latin America. What is more, the performance of *The Nativity* framed the interaction between MECATE and Bread and Puppet while also heightening and challenging Bread and Puppet to reaffirm their status as members of the "in-group." For MECATE, and other Nicaraguans, the performance of *The Nativity* — and the company's previously performed actions — framed their interaction with the theatre as members of the "in-group." These performances of solidarity, during a time of severe U.S.

250 My English translation: MECATE organizers.

interference in Nicaraguan policies, proved substantial enough for MECATE to declare Bread and Puppet part of a collective identity across international lines.

Symbolic Interaction through the Romero Pageant Puppet

I think to see a giant puppet, it changes the context about how one imagines or thinks about a subject- John Bell

The Romero puppet was a central object and player in Bread and Puppet's performance of transnational solidarity, specifically during its encounter with Nicaraguan audiences during the tour. Herbert Blumer, an American sociologist, and scholar, unpacks the nature of objects and meaning in his work, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Blumer states that one can classify objects into three convenient categories: "a) physical objects, such as trees, chairs, or bicycles; b) social objects such as students, priest, presidents... and c) abstract objects, such as moral principles, philosophical doctrines and abstract ideas such as justice..."²⁵¹ The Romero puppet of *The Nativity* performance represents an object under each category: first, it is a puppet (physical object), second it is a puppet representing a priest (social object), and lastly, Romero (whom the puppet was made to represent) is directly associated with the philosophical doctrine of liberation theology (abstract object). In some cases, the Romero puppet served as an object under two or three of Blumer's categories simultaneously, which reiterates the weight of the Romero puppet as a multilayered medium for meaning making. Blumer's definition of Symbolic Interactionism, specifically his concepts on the meaning-making of objects, is not limited to the significance of an object based only on its "intrinsic makeup," but also as "arising in the process of interaction between people"

251 Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 3.

in relationship to said object.²⁵² He further argues, "...the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act towards the person with regard to the thing."²⁵³ The interactions that took place between Nicaraguan audiences and Bread and Puppet's Romero puppet not only established meaning between participants, but also made a significant impact in solidifying Bread and Puppet's position as allies during the Nicaraguan revolution.

Blumer points to meaning-making under Symbolic Interactionism as an "interpretive process" in two steps.²⁵⁴ The first step includes the actor's "internalized social process" where the individual recognizes that the object holds meaning, and the second step consists of the actor negotiating ways to act upon these meanings via "the guidance and formation of action."²⁵⁵ I propose that Blumer's theory of symbolic interaction, specifically the nature of objects and meaning-making as social creations, when applied to MECATE's interaction with the Romero puppet in *The Nativity*, helps us analyze social interactions through performance, specifically political puppetry, as a contributor of solidarity-building between Bread and Puppet and Nicaraguan audiences.

Physical Object

The Nicaraguan people's impression of the Romero puppet, as a physical object, and its structural design made a considerate impact. Bustos, like most of the local community, responded to the Romero puppet with complete personal admiration particularly because of the puppet's resemblance to Romero, the man. She recalls seeing Romero the puppet and admiring the puppet's overall design and detail for the first time:

252 Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 4.

253 Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 4.

254 Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 5.

255 Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 5.

Era imponente. Eso si recuerdo. Impresionante cuando lo miras y aparece el titera de Monsenor Romero. Ademas lo caracterisaron en una manera impresionante. Vos ves toda esa bondad que derama...esa cara que le hicieron. Sus manos que abarcan al mundo a toda humanidad. Todo eso te para los pelos. Te da escalofrio pero del bueno no del malo. Porque en realidad era impresionante la obra para que mucha gente participara por que el ya era de muchos. San Romero de Americas es de muchos verdad? A todos nos representa entonces tenia que ser lo mas abarcante y volvente posible. Se puede decir que el es como un abrazo permanente en America Latina. Es un abrazo, este calido sentido, un abrazo de consuelo y de esperanza.²⁵⁶

According to Bustos, MECATE members, along with most Nicaraguan audiences, were deeply moved by the presence of the Romero puppet specifically during Nicaragua's post-revolution *and* soon after Romero's murder. She further argues that the timing of *The Nativity* performance, and its central character, shortly after the Nicaraguan revolution was critical to the audience's reception:

Estavamos en un momento historico en un momento cuando llegaron ellos. A un momento historico muy especial. Ya via triunfado la revolucion estavamos en los primeros anos. Ademas la euphoria, el contento de la jente, tambien la lucha estaba ya plantada...cuando uno dice Romero estavamos hablando de alguien que nos representa. De alguien que nos enaltese. Alguien que nos pone sobre la mesa...que nos rescata, todo lo que significaba las luchas de nuestro pueblo...que un hombre como el haya tomado las luchas de nuestro pueblo como propia te imaginas, lo que es significaba y lo que representa?²⁵⁷

256 Nidia Bustos, interview with the author, January 19, 2019. My English translation: "It was imposing. That is how I remember. Impressive, when you see it and suddenly the Monsignor Romero puppet appears. What is more, they characterized him in such an impressive way. You see all the humility that he projects...that face they made him. His hands cupping the entire human race. All of this makes your hair stand on end. It gives you shivers, but the good ones not the bad ones. Because in reality it was an impressive performance for so many people to participate because he belonged to so many. San Romero of the America belongs to many, right? He represented all of us; he had to be as encompassing as possible. You can say that he was a permanent hug for Latin America. He was a hug, that feeling, a hug of solace and hope."

257 My English translation: "We were in a historic moment when they came. In a historic and special moment. We had just won the revolution, we (were) just in the first years since victory. Besides the euphoria, the joy of the people, also the struggle was grounded...when one says Romero we are talking about someone that represents us. Of someone who uplifts us and puts us on the table...that rescues us, everything that is meaningful, the struggles of our people...that a man like him would take our struggles and make them his own. Can you imagine what that meant, what it represented?"

The Romero puppet's resemblance to Romero the man left a visceral mark on its audience. In Bustos's recollection she refers to Romero, the man, as a comrade of the Nicaraguan revolution and a martyr of all Central American struggles. She considered Romero to be "*un verdadero revolucionario, un verdadero transformador social, un verdadero activista.*"²⁵⁸ Bustos was so enthused in our discussion of her first encounter with the Romero puppet that at some point during my interview with her in Costa Rica, she was moved to tears. It is understandable then that the presence of the Romero puppet left a significant mark in the Nicaraguan, or any Latin American audience, particularly as *The Nativity* was presented just five years after Romero's murder. During my interview with Bustos, she referred regularly to the puppet as both a symbolic representation of Romero as puppet, and the true embodiment of Romero the man. For Bustos, and likely for others, *The Nativity* was not just a well-timed performance, but the first, true "resurrection" of a beloved Central American martyr through political puppetry.

Social Object

Bread and Puppet's figure of the Catholic priest as social object carried a significant weight not only to the members of MECATE, but to the Nicaraguan audiences as well. Blumer states that the meanings of objects are enhanced by the way other people act towards objects. In the case of *The Nativity*, Nicaraguan audiences reacted towards the Romero puppet with the same reverence they held for the murdered priest and other religious figures (like Father Cardenal) who were active during the revolution. The manifested representation of a religious figure as giant pageant puppet only elevated Romero's stature as a cultural and spiritual leader.

258 My English translation: "a real revolutionary, a real change-maker, a real activist."

Bustos, a community organizer and theatre activist, was far more impressed by the meaning of the performance, not just as a mere artistic accomplishment in portraying the Catholic priest, but also by the puppet's ability to bring people together. For MECATE, theatre as community building was an integral part of its work with farm workers and what they valued most about the art form. She recalls what the people's reaction to the Romero puppet said about Bread and Puppet Theater and its ability to build community through political puppetry:

*Y claro cuando miravamos a ese hombre, en forma de titera verdad? Haci de esa forma y participando tanta jente de diferentes grupos de Teatro, y movimientos ya sean culturales, estoy hablando de lo que se dio en Nicaragua. Eran muchas bastantes personas participaron en el montaje. Eso fue un momento de confluencia de conbulcion de energia fuerza de coraje. Fue como montar muchas cosas que no se juntan y voluntades que por veces no se juntan. Ese typo de trabajo que hace Bread and Puppet consigo eso juntar y reconciliar, y unir, y convocar. Bread and Puppet tiene una capacidad impresionante de hacer esa majia...*²⁵⁹

Abstract Object

MECATE, and socially conscious Nicaraguan audiences, also recognized the puppet as an abstract object, a direct symbol of the social justice teachings of liberation theology.²⁶⁰ Bustos described the working philosophy of their clandestine theatre groups as people who “worked with a Christian conscience, committed to the people’s struggle.”²⁶¹ It is no surprise that Nicaraguan audiences welcomed the Romero puppet (an

259 Nidia Bustos, interview with the author, January 19, 2019. My English translation: “And when we see that man as puppet, right? Like that in that form and so many people participating from different groups of theatre, and movements, whether they are cultural. I am talking of what happened in Nicaragua. There were so many people in that scene. That was a moment of convulsion of energy, strength and passion. It was like presenting so many things that are never together and people who never gather. The type of work that Bread and Puppet do is reconciliating, uniting, and convening. Bread and Puppet have the impressive capacity of creating this kind of magic.”

260 Bustos, interview with the author, January 19, 2019.

261 Ross Kidd, “A Testimony from Nicaragua: An Interview with Nidia Bustos,” *Theatrework Magazine*, September, 1982, 33.

abstract symbol of liberation theology) as they associated familiarity and acceptance to the object. The Romero puppet created a shared language between MECATE and Bread and Puppet based on liberation, Marxist, and moral ideals. What is more, Romero, the priest, embodied the values that fueled the Nicaraguan revolution. Bustos further states that the liberation of the Nicaraguan people from social, economic, and political oppression through theatre and cultural expression was similar to Romero's efforts and the teachings of liberation theology in El Salvador.²⁶² Therefore, it is no surprise then that when MECATE first witnessed the performance of a recently murdered Romero, reincarnated as a large-scale puppet, it made a profound impact on its members and the people of Nicaragua, specifically those who supported the revolution. The performance through puppetry, theatre, and music communicated a shared message of faith and spirituality in social justice efforts, which resonated with the Spanish speakers of Nicaragua. Though liberation theology originated from Catholicism, it was a considered a doctrine "more democratic, more worldly in its concerns, and more sensitive to the plight of the poor majority," and therefore much more appealing (and inclusive) to those outside of its base.²⁶³

Although Bustos and most of the MECATE members could not communicate directly with Schumann (an English speaker with a heavy German accent), it was through the symbolic interaction with the puppet and performance that they could first interpret the theatre's stance on liberation theology and U.S. intervention in Central America, which paved the way for relationship-building and comradeship between both groups. Subsequently, they read the Romero puppet and the performance of *The Nativity* as a

262 Kidd, "A Testimony," 33.

263 "Religion in Nicaragua 1970-1980s," last modified August 25, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Nicaragua#1970s-1980s.

direct indictment of U.S. war crimes against Central America and its involvement in the murder of Romero.²⁶⁴ Bread and Puppet's acknowledgement through performance of U.S. involvement in the murder of Romero through performance was a symbolic gesture of transnational solidarity activism with the Nicaraguan people who considered the murder of Romero a failed attempt by the government to abolish leftist ideologies of social justice among Central American people. Additionally, Marquez asked Schumann if he was concerned with Central American issues during an interview in 1985. His response further enforces Bread and Puppet's recognition of U.S. intervention and its impact in Central America:

Yes, it is the one issue that could prove to U.S. citizens that kind of life that they are proud of and that they enjoy is for a very, very heavy price, and this shows itself in Central America more than anywhere else.²⁶⁵

I argue that the significance of the Romero puppet for MECATE, which was further enhanced by the response from the larger community, subsequently framed and thus guided their interaction with Bread and Puppet as members with common moral values, which Blumer refers to as the second step of the interpretive process, "the guidance and formation of action." According to Blumer's interpretative process of Symbolic Interactionism, the "internalized social process" that most strengthened transnational solidarity activism between Bread and Puppet and MECATE occurred when MECATE recognized the puppet's significance and the Nicaraguan audiences' response to the performance object. MECATE thus elected to engage with the North American

264 Gibb, "The Killing of Archbishop Oscar Romero," <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/mar/23/features11.g21>.

265 Peter Schumann, interview with Rosa Luisa Marquez, in "Peter Schumann: The Bread and Puppet Theater in Nicaragua 1985," 3.

theatre company as potential allies, establishing comradeship between the two groups, and investing in a working relationship beyond the tour.

Regardless of their separate languages, transnational solidarity activism between MECATE, Bread and Puppet, and the Nicaraguan audiences was first solidified primarily through symbolic interaction with the Romero puppet. In the case of *The Nativity*, political puppetry proved to be an asset in performing solidarity between Bread and Puppet and the Nicaraguan audience, especially groups like MECATE. Thirty-something years after *The Nativity* tour, MECATE and Bread and Puppet still follow the core moral values of liberation theology, personified through the Romero puppet, in their work. For Bread and Puppet and MECATE, the Romero puppet is considered a central figure and key “participant” in *The Nativity* tour of 1985. Furthermore, two versions of the Romero puppet were constructed, and while one puppet remains in exhibition, the touring puppet of 1985 remains in the Bread and Puppet Museum; it is one of the first giant puppets you encounter when entering.

Tensions in Performance of Solidarity through Symbolic Interaction

The performance of Bread and Puppet’s solidarity with marginalized people like MECATE or the Nicaraguan people, specifically as members of a dominant group, is a delicate and complicated matter, and can therefore result in damaging solidarity-building. Associate professor of Drama Bree Hadley discusses the practice of political performance and protest online in “solidarity” with marginalized people by members of the dominant group.²⁶⁶ She addresses the complexities of allyship through online performance as liable

266 Bree Hadley, “Advocacy, Allies, and ‘Allies of Convenience’ in Performance and Performative Protest,” in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, Routledge Theatre and Performance Companions, (London: Routledge, 2019), 85.

to “performative” and “convenient” actions based on the popularity trend of the social issue online.²⁶⁷ Hadley’s article is useful in recognizing issues with expressing solidarity through social media platforms, which can result in unreliable, inconsistent, and temporary acts of allyship. Although there is an initial act of solidarity, the actions do not necessarily sustain or engage in further accomplishments. Instead, performances of solidarity that are not based in genuine allyship are aligned with social and cultural trends, which can disappear as quickly as they were created, and are not always intended to live beyond the cultural moment. These types of alliances with marginalized groups are not rooted in dialogical engagement with others, nor do these allies understand the lived experiences of oppressed peoples.

In “U.S. Central Americans in Art and Visual Culture,” Decolonial Art Historian Kency Cornejo discusses the creation of artistic work as voicing solidarity with disenfranchised people, and further adds that during the civil conflict in Central America, the U.S. produced a number of visual art works — "photography, political posters, and Hollywood feature films"— in solidarity with Central American people that resulted in what she coins as “solidarity aesthetics.”²⁶⁸ Cornejo describes “solidarity aesthetics” as mutual support offered by the U.S. through visual communication that perpetuated stereotypical, colonial, and destructive discourse on the lives of Central Americans.²⁶⁹ She further adds that U.S.-driven “solidarity aesthetics,” originally intended to promote "empathy" and advocate for an end to U.S. intervention in Central America, instead disseminated “optical codes,” or visual narratives that devalued and romanticized the

267 Hadley, “Advocacy, Allies, and ‘Allies of Convenience,’” 87.

268 Kency Cornejo, “U.S. Central Americans in Art and Visual Culture,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, ed. Paula Rabinowitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.434>, 1.

269 K. Cornejo, “U.S. Central Americans,” 3.

lives of Central Americans to that of only poverty and violence.²⁷⁰ She further argues that U.S. "solidarity aesthetics" through the visual arts in the 1970s-1990 was problematic because it also undermined the existing and flourishing creative art practice of Central American artists.²⁷¹ Both Hadley and Cornejo investigate complications in performing solidarity within the context of meaning-making through either performance space — the internet and social media — or the production of solidarity art — primarily visual art, as potentially disingenuous and damaging in establishing positions of allyship. In the following section, I draw from Cornejo's article to unpack the complexities of performing solidarity through visual communication, which unique to the case of *The Nativity*, is manifest through both visual communication and performance mediums.

The Romero Puppet as Vehicle for Meaning-Making

Although the Romero puppet presented a vehicle for meaning-making that reaffirmed the theatre's position as allies, unexpected moments of tension through symbolic interaction caused audiences to question the U.S.-based theatre's collective identity as members of the "in-group." These moments of pressure occurred, ironically, through symbolic interaction primarily between Bread and Puppet and the Nicaraguan audiences with the Romero puppet when performed in one specific region, as well as with a performance of Hallelujah, a *Cantastoria* that was part of many supplementary circus acts and scenes in *The Nativity*. In addition, for many Nicaraguans, solidarity with the revolution meant actively fighting for the cause, which naturally places your life at stake, and though Bread and Puppet did not travel to Nicaragua with intent to "risk their lives" in the name of the Nicaraguan revolution, they had however identified themselves

270 K. Cornejo, "U.S. Central Americans," 9.

271 K. Cornejo, "U.S. Central Americans," 2.

as allies with the movement. Risking one's life for the movement was a common reality for many Nicaraguans who joined the Sandinista guerrilla group and wholeheartedly believed in a revolutionary ideology, called *Sandinismo*.²⁷² David Nolan, author of *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, states that in following *Sandinismo*, and truly becoming a "Sandinista revolutionary," one must take a leap of faith and "believe that an ultimate truth exists, and that the *Frente* is the means by which that truth will be realized in Nicaragua. If he truly believes, he will dedicate his life to the cause."²⁷³ The Bread and Puppet Theater inadvertently encountered situations where their safety and fidelity to the Nicaraguan revolution was put to the test, beginning with performance locations.

The Nativity tour was taken to various areas throughout Nicaragua from densely populated towns to more rural countryside where military warfare between the leftist guerrillas and the Contras was a common occurrence. Bell recalls performing for rural audiences: "It was very different when we played in the countryside with like one light bulb. You know, it was getting dark and the dirt and all around the hills and people coming in from working all day." The Bread and Puppet traveled with giant puppets by bus and "on the backs of trucks" (sometimes for several hours) to perform for the isolated rural communities of Nicaragua.²⁷⁴ Schumann recalls, "...it was precarious the way they traveled us with great precaution." Though touring company members understood precautions were necessary while traveling abroad, they had no idea the extent of the situation in Nicaragua. It became more apparent to Marquez that performing in specific

272 David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinista and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, (Miami: Institute of Interamerican Studies, 1988), 122.

273 Nolan, "The Ideology of the Sandinista," 123.

274 Romanyshyn, interview with the author during Geezer Week, August 14, 2019.

rural communities had its risks when Alan Bolt, Nicaraguan playwright and appointed National Director of Theatre, questioned the company for performing in certain areas of the country:

...entonces ese director...le cuestiono a Peter 'Como tu espones a un grupo de Teatro y la jente con esos puppets de 20 pies altos que se pueden ver y el enemigo los puede encontrar y dispararles?' ...y eso me parecio interesante que el objeto escenico que se estaba poniendo para ensalsar, para enoblecer, para hacer una historia hermosa, tambien era un objeto peligroso. ²⁷⁵

The outdoor performance using the 20-foot puppet of Romero was visible from considerable distances because of its distinct physical makeup and stature. The Romero puppet thus inadvertently became a target, which could notify the “enemy” of the exact location of the theatre and its Nicaraguan audiences. As Marquez recalls, Bolt refers to the counter-revolutionary armed forces of the Contras as the “enemy.” At the time of the tour, Bread and Puppet was not fully aware of the Contras nor the danger they might face if encountering them. Who exactly were the Contras? What could the Contras possibly have against the 20-foot papier-mâché Romero puppet? How could the Bread and Puppet’s Romero puppet pose a threat?

The Contras consisted of some of the most dangerous members of Somoza’s original National Guard. They were notorious for disappearances, torture, violence, and extrajudicial killings against the Nicaraguan people, as well as any sympathizers of the Sandinistas revolution. In 1985, during the Nicaraguan tour of *The Nativity*, the Contras were still occupying land in Nicaragua, and with full U.S. backing continued to do so until the 1990s. This means the Contras were likely to occupy several of the locations

275 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, August 4, 2019. My English translation: “And so that director...he questioned Peter ‘How can you expose your theatre group and the people with these 20 foot puppets that can be seen by the enemy and they can find you and shoot you?’ ...and I thought that was interesting that the scenic object that was being presented, to honor, to celebrate, to make a beautiful history, was also a dangerous object.”

traveled by *The Nativity* touring company in 1985. In McCuen's "Contra Terror, Torture and Murder" he presents excerpts from the International Human Rights Law Group report, "Attacks by the Nicaraguan Contras on the Civilian Population of Nicaragua."²⁷⁶ The report includes painfully detailed affidavits from victims and eyewitnesses that revealed the extent of brutality imposed on the Nicaraguan people by the U.S.-trained Contras. According to the report, many distinct patterns among the Contra activities included:

- attacks on purely civilian targets resulting in the killing of unarmed men, women, children, and the elderly.
- premeditated acts of brutality including rape, beatings, mutilations and torture...
- individual and mass kidnappings of civilians...
- assaults on economic and social targets such as farms, cooperatives, food storage facilities and even health centers...
- intimidation of civilians who participate or cooperate in government or community programs...
- kidnapping intimidation, and even murder of religious leaders who support the government, including priests and clergy-trained pastors.²⁷⁷

Marquez further argues, "*No intencional, pero a la misma ves importante, en el sentido que Romero era un hombre peligroso para el systema y el puppet de Romero tambien* (laughs)."²⁷⁸ Despite it being long after Romero's death, for the Contras the Romero puppet still manifested an opposing political idea and figure. She also claims that it was not Schumann's intention to expose his company, nor the audience, to such dangers. In fact, he had been known to perform in basements all over countries in Eastern Europe during times of civil conflict as bombs were being dropped.²⁷⁹ What was "dangerous" and "threatening" about the Romero puppet was entirely accidental. Of course, the Bread

276 International Human Rights Law Group, "Attacks by the Nicaraguan Contras on the Civilian Population of Nicaragua," March 1985, 56-64.

277 International Human Rights Law Group, "Attacks by the Nicaraguan Contras," 58.

278 My translation: "It was not intentional, but at the same time, in regards to Romero being a man who threatened the system, and now so did Romero the puppet."

279 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with author, October 2019.

and Puppet's Romero puppet never imposed any dangers for participants when first created for the *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* in Vermont, and yet the performance of solidarity through political puppetry on a different geopolitical space, amidst the U.S.-backed Contras, proved otherwise.

The presumed meaning-making of the puppet by the Nicaraguan audience and the Contras can also be analyzed through Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism. First, the puppet was a 20-foot physical object. Because of the puppet's physical makeup which could be seen from faraway distances, audience members like Bolt read it as a potential target that risked the safety of the theatre and its audiences by giving away their exact location. Second, the puppet was a social object representing Romero, the recently slain Catholic priest and martyr. It is important to note that Romero was murdered by the *Esquadron de la Muerte*, El Salvador's version of the Contras.²⁸⁰ If Bolt believed that the puppet as a physical object could be a threat to the Contras, it was even more dangerous that it was a 20-foot representation of Romero, an established "enemy" of the right-wing military forces. The Contras could have easily murdered Romero had he been in Nicaragua the day of his assassination. Third, the puppet was an abstract object, a symbol of liberation theology closely aligned with *Sandinismo* revolutionary faith, and the Nicaraguan revolution was a threat to Contras because Romero, the man, went against their anti-radical agenda, to the point where he risked his life in the name of social justice. For the Contras, anyone demonstrating allegiance with the Sandinistas was considered the real enemy. As the report stated, the Contras "targeted civilians who participate or cooperate in government or community programs." It is probable that if members of the Contra saw the Bread and Puppet's homage to liberation theology

280 My English translation: Death Squad or Squadron of Death.

through the Romero puppet, they would not hesitate to retaliate against the Bread and Puppet Theater as their enemy and cause them physical harm, torture, or even brutal death.

The Cantastoria

Another moment of tension through Bread and Puppet's performance of solidarity occurred during the symbolic interaction of audiences with Bread and Puppet during a performance of *Hallelujah*, a popular Bread and Puppet *Cantastoria* about protecting Mother Earth. The performance, which was part of *The Nativity* and occurred on Sundays, included a narrator who told the story from images displayed through a large canvas storybook. As the story unfolds, the narrator leads a chorus of volunteers (dressed in all white) into a series of physical and verbal responses.²⁸¹ The responses were made in as many languages as possible, which is solely determined by the volunteers involved. The word "Hallelujah" is the most oft spoken word throughout this particular piece.

According to Marquez, the incident occurred as follows:

Pues esa pieza (Hallelujah) se hizo un domingo en Nicaragua y esa pieza tenia todos los puppeteers de blanco gritando 'hallelujah.' Y entonces habia unos integrantes de la contra revolucion que eran fundamentalistas protestantes. El publico cuando vio esa pieza no entendia de donde venia porque los signos se asociaban con la contra. Y eso fue muy interesante y eso yo se lo dije a Peter 'Las senales que manda esta obra se an perdido a causa de que aqui ay una tradicion- a porque los fundamentalistas religiosos se vestian de blanco para ir a las casas y oponerse a la revolucion... aqui ay un problema o se visten de otro color o no dicen halleluyah...' eran, yo creo, testigos de Jeova, y entonces alli ubo una reaccion fuerte al montaje y un questionamiento...²⁸²

281 Since the company's inception in the 1960s, costumes for all Bread and Puppet performers for every performance consisted of white colored shirts and pants.

282 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, August 8, 2019. My English translation: "Well, that piece (Hallelujah) was done on Sundays in Nicaragua, and it had puppeteers dressed in white screaming 'Hallelujah.' And then there were members of the counter-revolution that were fundamentalist Protestants. The public when they saw that piece did not understand where it came from because the signs were associated with the Contra. And that was really interesting, and so I told Peter 'The signs that come from

Several audience members who engaged in symbolic interaction questioned Bread and Puppet's performance of *Hallelujah* as genuine solidarity with the Nicaraguan people because of the performance's association with members of the Contra revolution. As Marquez states, the members of the Contra right-wing rebel group/Jehovah's Witnesses would visit the towns and preach against the Sandinista revolution, while shouting "Hallelujah" and wearing white. Similar to the Romero puppet, the construction of meaning from the *Cantastoria* as a physical and abstract object heavily influenced the internalized social process and guidance formation of action by the Nicaraguan audiences. Audience members were left questioning the intention of the Bread and Puppet in presenting this performance and its message to their communities. Unlike the Romero puppet, the incident with *Hallelujah* weakened Bread and Puppet's reputation as allies with the revolution. Marquez further states that the audiences struggled to create the same meaning of the signs and symbols initially presented by the Bread and Puppet in Vermont to U.S. audiences. The Nicaraguan audience's new interpretation of Bread and Puppet's *Hallelujah* conflicted with the theatre's reputation as allies. She also recalls the company realizing that "*esa cosa de los signos, los significados, no son universales.*"²⁸³ In Nicaragua, unlike back in the States, the "universal" message of *Hallelujah* was lost in translation. After receiving such a puzzled response from the Nicaraguan audience, Schumann decided to stop performing *Hallelujah* on Sundays.

Political Performance as Tactical Innovations

this scene are getting lost cause here. There is a tradition - because the religious fundamentalists also dress in white to go to the houses and oppose the revolution...there is a problem here, or we dress in a different color, or we don't say 'Hallelujah.' I think they were Jehovah's Witnesses', and from there was a strong reaction to the scene and a questioning..."

283 My English translation: "The thing with signs, and its meanings, are not universal."

*Yo creo que habia un gran agradecimiento por un lado teatralmente ingenua porque ese tipo de obra no era comun. Y se sentia que habia apoyo en el respaldo. Participaron miembros de la comunidad, jovenes, tambien ubo gente de paises cercanos-yo recuerdo haciendo amistad con Costa Ricenses. Yo creo que la recepcion fue buena.*²⁸⁴

MECATE and Bread and Puppet were heavily influenced by the tactical strategies of two pioneers of theatre as nonviolent activism, Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal.²⁸⁵ Brecht's Epic Theatre heavily influenced Peter, the cofounder and director of Bread and Puppet. In Bell's "Uprising of the Beast: An Interview with Peter Schumann," he refers to Schumann as "a descendant" of Brecht's political theatre along with other influential theatre groups and figures of the 1960s including The Living Theatre, San Francisco Mime Troupe, and Augusto Boal.²⁸⁶ Brecht's influential Epic Theatre is a form of political performance that advocates for theatre as a means for direct social action and not just entertainment. Similarly, Bustos, head organizer of MECATE, was inspired by Boal's Forum Theatre which stems from his Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), a collection of interactive nonviolent theatrical forms that encourage participation by audience members (referred to as spect-actors) in the self-exploration and self-liberation of their struggles through theatre. Forum Theatre invites audience members onto the stage as actors to resolve the problems portrayed in the drama. Bustos claims that performers and audience members resolved their day-to-day struggles collectively through these theatre

284 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, 2019. My English translation: "I think from a novelist theatrical stance there was a great sense of appreciation because that type of theatre was not common. And you can feel the support. Members of the community, youth, even people from neighboring countries participated—I remember making friends with a Costa Rican. I think the reception to the tour was a good one."

285 Bertolt Brecht was a German poet, playwright, and theatre director who developed the Epic Theatre. Augusto Boal was a political activist, drama theorist, and theatre director who developed Theatre of the Oppressed.

286 John Bell, "Uprising of the Beast: An Interview with Peter Schumann," *Theater* 25, no. 1, (1994), 32.

tactics.²⁸⁷ What is more, Bustos discusses MECATE's theatre work as a standard strategy for the mobilization of people through Campesino drama:

The cultural work of the farmworkers develops out of the reality in which they live. What they do in theatre is what they do in their daily lives in the community. They try to express what people do and feel and they give it a political and social content. They try to share with their fellow campesinos the kind of clarity and understanding they have about certain kinds of problems. That's why there is such a strong connection between the campesinos and this kind of theatre.²⁸⁸

Social Movement theorists David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford argue that selected tactics and strategies of a social movement are affected through the movement's "master frame." In "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," Snow and Benford defined the concept of frame as "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment."²⁸⁹ They further argue that in the case of activists, frames help us draw attention to social conditions as "unjust or immoral" as opposed to simply regrettable yet tolerable circumstances.²⁹⁰ Both MECATE and Bread and Puppet utilize political theatre as a framework for raising social consciousness on antiwar, anti-imperialism, and anti-capitalism issues, among others, through nonviolent action. Frames also help people recognize ways to address these issues through direct social action and reveal the importance of taking action in resolving the problem. Snow and Benford argue that "master frames" are similar to collective action frames, except that they function on a

287 Ross Kidd, "A Testimony from Nicaragua: An Interview with Nidia Bustos, the Coordinator of MECATE, the Nicaraguan Farm Workers' Theatre Movement.," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 2 (1983), 40.

288 Kidd, "A Testimony from Nicaragua," 39.

289 David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford "Master Frames and Protest Cycles" in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1992).

290 Snow and Benford, "Master Frames," 137.

much larger scale and are easily tailored to fit the functions of many social movements. Snow and Benford also refer to the nonviolent protest philosophy espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders as an example of a master frame in social movement theory.²⁹¹ They continue that “master frames” present “new ways of interpreting a situation as well as novel means of dealing with or confronting it” and further suggest that “tactical innovations” are the offspring of new master frames.²⁹² In the case of MECATE and Bread and Puppet, nonviolent tactics of political theatre were alternative means to promoting social consciousness and mobilizing people to direct action. Following Snow and Benford’s argument on master frames and tactics, I put forward that the common master frame of peaceful protest, an approach through direct social action, through performance influenced the shared tactics of MECATE and Bread and Puppet, which contributed to enhancing transnational solidarity activism and collective identity even while working with different target groups.

Bread and Puppet and MECATE adapted the successful master frame of nonviolent philosophy, but unlike most antiwar and civil rights movement groups, they both approached “tactical innovation” by way of theatre as a primary method of nonviolent protest, civil disobedience, and direct action. Romanyshyn discusses why Bread and Puppet engages in non-violent forms of resistance:

The philosophy of Bread and Puppet is Peter’s version of Gesamtkunstwerk, which goes beyond (Richard) Wagner’s idea of total integration of music and drama to encompass politics, economics and their effects on the human condition and the natural world.²⁹³ The very nature of this artwork is nonviolent and how could it be otherwise? That doesn’t mean that Bread and Puppet hasn’t supported violent struggles, such as the Nicaraguan Revolution or the NATO bombing of

291 Snow and Benford, “Master Frames,” 146.

292 Snow and Benford, “Master Frames,” 146.

293 Gesamtkunstwerk, a concept developed by German composer and conductor Richard Wagner, is a “total work of art” that makes use of all art forms.

the Serbs in Bosnia. But, even if the message of a show is sympathetic to a violent struggle or action, the performance, parade or participation itself is nonviolent. I think Bread and Puppet is a living example of how to be an activist nonviolent artist in a violent world. Its theme of “possibilitarians” and use of cardboard and papier-mâché as a basic platform to espouse a much larger philosophy is based in a philosophy of nonviolent anarchism.²⁹⁴

Bread and Puppet’s “possibilitarian” theme is inspired by the lead characters of its theatrical performances, the proletarian, a working-class person. In short, the “possibilitarians” in all Bread and Puppet productions are presented as common people who have the power to create social change. In a similar vein, Bustos recognized the campesino (a different version of the “possibilitarian”) as an active leader and participant of MECATE’s work.²⁹⁵ She further argues that the campesino played a critical role in the movement: It is a movement of the farmworkers---they set it up, they organize it, and they are the members.²⁹⁶ Bustos, like Schumann, believed that working with farmworkers through theatre, specifically in developing a “total art” that encompassed all forms of cultural expression, was an effective strategy to raising social consciousness and inspiring political action from the ground up:

MECATE attempts to bring together all the campesinos cultural groups, in order to exchange experiences, support one another, work out common strategies, and promote the development of popular culture. It is more than a theatre movement--it covers all forms of campesino cultural expression---drama, music, poetry, dancing, etc.²⁹⁷

MECATE and Bread and Puppet’s use of political performance is a form of nonviolent symbolic protest that falls under the philosophy of peaceful protest tactics.

What is more, their Brechtian and TO (Theatre of the Oppressed)-inspired protest

294 Michael Romanyshyn, email correspondence with the author, February 21, 2021.

295 Spanish word for peasant or farmer.

296 Kidd, “A Testimony from Nicaragua, 31.

297 Kidd, “A Testimony from Nicaragua, 31.

strategy through theatre lends itself to engage in direct social action in nontraditional forms, with various ways of engaging an audience in significant roles, featuring practical elements of spectacle (stripped elements of costumes, lighting, set design, etc.), and in nontraditional theatre spaces such as in the streets, the fields or farmlands. Through the integration of political performance as “tactical innovation,” MECATE would mobilize and promote social awareness among the campesino community throughout various regions of the country. According to Kidd, the use of “campesino expression” through political theatre was a critical part of the efforts of national reconstruction for groups like MECATE. Bustos further adds, “It is not only with arms that a revolution is made. Revolution is made in every moment of one’s life, and our experience confirms that.”²⁹⁸ She further claims that people’s culture specifically “the forms of expression which are rooted in the lives of the people”- this includes theatre, poetry, singing, dancing, etc. - could be turned into weapons in the hands of the farmworkers.²⁹⁹ Arts activism, like political theatre, was often used as a vehicle to promote and encourage participation in the new Nicaragua social programs, including literacy and health campaigns.³⁰⁰

Participants in both MECATE and Bread and Puppet were, for the most part, untrained performers. MECATE specifically chose to hire non-actors as coordinators for the theatre groups. The majority of individuals involved with MECATE were themselves farmworkers and not actors; therefore, they could personally identify with the plight of the farmworkers. Bread and Puppet, on the other hand, did not officially target a specific group but had been known to create political theatre and puppetry with all types of people, not limited to the trained theatre practitioner or activist. The company relied

298 Kidd, “A Testimony from Nicaragua,” 33.

299 Kidd, “A Testimony from Nicaragua,” 33.

300 Kidd, “A Testimony from Nicaragua,” 34.

heavily on volunteers who were trained to participate in every parade, puppet, and street performance, sometimes only hours or minutes before the performance took place.

Regardless of its scale and magnitude, Bread and Puppet's political theatre tactics were driven primarily by audience participation and collective efforts. They even held workshops on political puppetry and circus before each performance for anyone in the audience willing to participate at the last moment. This remained an effective recruitment strategy for the company.

Tensions through Political Performance as Tactical Innovation

Bread and Puppet's use of political puppetry as "tactical innovation"- specifically its use of visual aesthetics as nonviolent symbolic display - engaged diverse groups of people, however it also inadvertently threatened solidarity between the company and Nicaraguan director Bolt. Marquez recalls an incident where Bolt questioned Schumann on the aesthetic of the brown puppets in one of the acts:

*...tambien le cuestiono a Peter porque los personajes de piel oscura eran tristes...en el sentido que los personajes de piel oscura no...donde estaba la alegria y la fuerza de las comunidades Latinas representadas en escena?*³⁰¹

The "personajes de piel oscura" or dark-skinned (brown) puppets were to represent the Central American people of the villages in the performance. Although puppeteers like Bell, Cohen, Elbow, and Romanyshyn also designed, sculpted, and built puppets for the tour, Schumann designed the majority of the puppets. His aesthetic for the "village people" included brown tones and sad expressions, a similar approach to his puppet designs from former shows representing large masses of people. One could say it was a

301 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, August 8, 2019. My English translation: "He also questioned Peter why the characters of brown skin were sad...in the sense that the characters with darker skin tones didn't... "Where was the joy and the resilience of the Latin communities represented in the scenes?"

trademark Bread and Puppet “look,” and one that distinguishes the company from other protest theatre groups in the 60s. Also, the brown tones of the puppets could also be a direct result of the papier-mâché process used by the company, where puppets are shaped by gluing strips of paper together, specifically strips of brown cardboard, on top of a sculpted piece of clay separated by a piece of plastic. The dried strips of cardboard dry to create a hard shell in the shape of the original sculpture. The plastic is then removed to preserve the clay for reuse. In some cases, the original cardboard is left alone in its original brown hue and other times it is painted.

According to Marquez - who was the official translator of the tour and often spent 17 hours a day translating – Schumann’s response to Bolt’s concern was the following:

*Entonces Peter contesto con la alegria...y el decia que la alegria estaba en los banderines, en la energia y los movimientos de los que movian los banderines. Y que los puppets brown, que es como el nos persive a nosotros, se movian como una masa y luchaban juntos. Y que la alegria no siempre se demuestra cantando y riendo.*³⁰²

For Bolt, the mere representation of Central American people as sad and joyless bodies, regardless of Schumann’s artistic intentions, was problematic. Perhaps Bolt’s critical eye on *The Nativity* was also due to his stake in Nicaraguan theatre at the time of the tour. In 1985 Bolt had worked as the National Director for six years and was the “main coordinator of a nationwide movement of theatrical activity.”³⁰³ According to Elizabeth Ruf’s “Theatre of the People, By the People, and For the People,” an interview conducted during her one-month stay in Nicaragua 1986, Bolt (like the members of MECATE) was

302 Rosa Luisa Marquez, interview with the author, August 8, 2019. My English translation: “So then Peter responded that the joy...and he said that the joy was in the banners, and in the energy of the movements by the flag runners. And that the brown puppet, which is how he perceived us, moved like clay and fought together. And that joy is not always present through singing or laughing.”

303 Elizabeth Ruf, “Teatro del Pueblo, por el Pueblo, y para el Pueblo: An Interview with Alan Bolt,” *The Drama Review* 31, no 4. (1987), interview endnotes, 90.

heavily involved during the Nicaraguan insurrection. It was in 1971 that Bolt formed the first revolutionary theatre group where he took on the role of writer, performer, and director (after no one volunteered to do so) in hopes to produce and create their plays. Ruf claims the work of Brecht briefly inspired the work of Bolt's theatre group. In the interview, Bolt claims that it took them an entire year to form the group, but that they had the support of the Sandinista Liberation Front. It is understandable even, as Marquez states, that Bolt could have felt the presence of Bread and Puppet as somewhat invasive as here was Bread and Puppet theatre, albeit a U.S. ally, showing Nicaraguan people who were already doing theatre in Nicaragua how to do theatre in Nicaragua. Bolt's comment to Schumann's questionable choice of design is prevalent throughout his *Movimiento de Teatro Comunitario*³⁰⁴ manifesto where he discusses the significance of image vs. text in political theatre:

We have an historical memory that we have fought on behalf of our oppressors. We have lost more than enough. We also have an obscure memory, subconscious, in which the meaning of a multitude of symbols are located that even today form a part of our world...From there arises the need to create a theatre of images that reveals both what is obvious and what is hidden - that which for both reasons, cannot be clearly seen. The images make up a legible text more profound than the spoken word. The oral language only completes or support. The essential thing is the image. In theatre, the essential is visible to the eye.³⁰⁵

Bolt's argument on the political significance of visual communication through images in political theatre, specifically during the new Nicaragua era, is substantial and is considered across the spectrum of political theatre, including Boal's Image theatre.³⁰⁶

More importantly, the image of the puppets as Nicaraguans was not designed by

304 My English translation: Community Theatre Movement.

305 Ruf, "Theatre for the People, By the People, and For the People," 80.

306 Image theatre is a form of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed communicated through creating images using one's body.

Nicaraguan audiences but instead, was a representation of their people through the lens of a Western aesthetic designed by a German-born sculptor. Thus, it is not surprising that Nicaraguan audiences, like Bolt, would find issue with the visual image and its communication about Nicaraguan people, if they felt it did not truly represent their reality.

Marquez recalls translating Schumann's response, which did not directly address his aesthetic choice to making the village puppets brown-skinned with sad facial features but instead countered with a suggestion that the representation of emotions like happiness and joy in political theatre does not need to be so literal. In many ways, Schumann's approach to political theatre, like most performance work, is open to individual interpretation and is not necessarily right, wrong, or confined by any set formula. Schumann is also known for using other performance and tactical elements in addition to puppets, including masked characters, people on stilts and flag runners to express the characters, ideas or concepts within a show. Likewise, Bread and Puppet prints its own hand-painted work and produces its own flags and banners inspired by the characters and themes of each show.

Nonetheless, Bolt's concern regarding representation of Central American people in the performance is also valid. It is especially critical considering that the reconstruction efforts in Nicaragua resulted in programs with intentions to promote civic pride, national strength, and personal healing among the people. The vision of a new Nicaragua was one towards a happier, brighter future for its people, and not one representing the violence and suffering of the past. In the case of the village people puppets incident, audience members could have easily interpreted the aesthetic in many ways, not because they were

wrong to do so, but because the symbolic interaction through the aesthetic of the material without context left plenty of room for interpretation.

On the other hand, Elbow and Romanyshyn argued that *The Nativity* included other legitimate forms of visual representation by the Nicaraguan people. They both believed self-representation was critical and discussed how Bread and Puppet included the playing of specific speaking central roles by Nicaraguans throughout the piece:

I think the Romero puppet saying his words, that it didn't come off as "Hey, we are telling you what he said..." we were all together hearing his words and they were spoken by the people that were hosting us...³⁰⁷

The "bad guy" roles (like Roberto D'Aubuisson, the death squad leader who placed the order to assassinate Romero) were always played by a member of Bread and Puppet. Other "good" puppet characters, including the Romero puppet, were saved for Nicaraguan volunteers. Elbow further argues that based on the relationships they developed before and after the tour, the Nicaraguan volunteers were not just typical volunteers, but in most cases, they became full contributors to the spoken dialogue and musical score of the show:

We went there so many times later. And then we would make a show so many just almost all the people seemed like (inaudible) great musicians. We would say we need a song here and a song there, and a song here and sometimes they had one! And sometimes they would sit down and make one. They were all writing scripts and stuff. It was great.³⁰⁸

Conclusion

We have to talk about Nidia (Bustos) in order to talk about the tour, right?³⁰⁹
-Peter Schumann

307 Romanyshyn, interview with the author, November 4, 2020.

308 Linda Elbow, interview with the author, July 17, 2019.

309 Peter Schumann, During Geezer week interviews with the author August 7, 2019. This was Schumann's first response to my first question about the tour.

Bread and Puppet's 1985 tour of *The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Archbishop Oscar A. Romero* had a longstanding impact on the company's history. Not only was it the first of many times that the full company would travel to Central America, but it leads to a significant political collaboration with MECATE, specifically with its founder and lead organizer Nidia Bustos. Surprisingly, not much previous attention is given to the Bread and Puppet's Nicaraguan tour of *The Nativity*, in comparison to its U.S. premiere in 1982, nor to its other performances around the globe. Nevertheless, a great amount of information about transnational solidarity activism through performance can be gathered from the Nicaraguan tour that influenced the personal and political work of both MECATE and Bread and Puppet, while simultaneously "resurrecting" the spirit of brotherhood embodied by Romero.

In this Chapter, I analyzed the social processes and transnational solidarity activism of MECATE and Bread and Puppet during *The Nativity* tour through the lens of performance, collective identity, collective action frames, and symbolic interaction that embodied, upheld, and "resurrected" the teachings of solidarity by Romero. Despite the geographic distance, language barriers, and disparities in targeted audiences, these aspects have demonstrated ways that transnational solidarity activism can be enhanced and challenged through performances, specifically political theatre. First, I have reflected my position by establishing arguments of Boundaries, Consciousness and Negotiations through performance that heightened commonalities, experiences, and solidarity between Bread and Puppet and MECATE, which ultimately shaped and strengthened collective identity. Bread and Puppet's long-term commitment and performance of opposition

towards U.S. intervention in Central America years before its visit to Nicaragua proved to be profitable, as it led MECATE members to recognize the theatre as transnational allies. In addition, it was Bread and Puppet's direct indictment of the U.S. and its role in the murder of Romero through the performance of *The Nativity* that strengthened their position as members of the "in-group."

Second, I have revealed that implementing political theatre and performance strategies, as a shared tactic through a master frame of nonviolent protest philosophy, has been highly significant when working amongst diverse audiences. For MECATE and Bread and Puppet, having a shared approach to activism through theatre performance solidified their unified stance on the ideologies of nonviolent direct action from the bottom up, which further enhanced their collective identity as transnational allies. Also, it was through the shared master frame of performance strategies that they both demonstrated a shared investment in empowering participants through direct action, a key component of transnational solidarity activism. However, Bread and Puppet recognized how the aesthetic representation of the "other" through political puppetry, without direct participation from the "other" in its design, can lead to misinterpretation and alienation between the theatre group and its audiences.

Lastly, I argue that through a symbolic interactionist lens, we can analyze the formation of solidarity through performance, specifically meaning-making with the Romero puppet, as successful in creating solidarity despite language barriers. The negotiation of meaning between Bread and Puppet's Romero puppet, and MECATE and the Nicaraguan audiences proved to be an accessible and perceptible component of performance of transnational solidarity that established their position as U.S. partners.

Bread and Puppet's performed position as allies through meaning-making with the Romero puppet was apparent, so much so that it even put them in danger of retaliation by the Contras. In contrast, with *Hallelujah*, Bread and Puppet realized that it could not rely on universal messages or signs and that the geopolitical context of a performance space can quickly transform the message of any production.

In 2018, 34 years after the Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity* tour and 39 years after the Sandinista Revolution, Bustos was forced to flee her native home in Nicaragua. In a bizarre turn of events, Daniel Ortega, Sandinista leader and the last Latin American revolutionary still in office, was responsible for violating human rights, suppressing public protests, and perpetuating government corruption, among other offenses.³¹⁰ The charismatic leftist leader that once led the Nicaraguan revolution to victory in 1979 had held office for three terms. While in office, Ortega's political ideologies had drastically shifted from leftist Marxist principles to the more right-wing, conservative, and capitalist ideals. After Ortega attempted to cut pension plans for the poor and working-class, the people of Nicaragua took to the streets to demand his resignation. Under Ortega's leadership, protests became violent and deadly. His armed military forces confronted the protestors, while threats were made to social activists throughout the country. Ortega's new government echoed that of the oppressive Somoza regime, the same government it successfully overthrew during the revolution of 1979.

For Bustos, a Sandinista and long-term community activist, Ortega's violent repression against the Nicaraguan people was a profound betrayal to all those who had

310 Joshua Partlow, "From Rebel to Strongman: How Daniel Ortega Became the Thing He Fought Against," *Washington Post*, August 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/from-rebel-to-strongman-how-daniel-ortega-became-the-thing-he-fought-against/2018/08/24/117d000a-97fe-11e8-818b-e9b7348cd87d_story.html.

fought alongside him during the revolution. Bustos temporarily relocated to Costa Rica in the fall of 2018. Concerned for Bustos' safety, Bread and Puppet invited her to join them at the farm for an extended visit in 2019. The members of Bread and Puppet felt it would be good for Bustos to spend time on the farm, surrounded by nature, theatre, and old friends, and away from the dangers of political unrest in Nicaragua.

Bustos is currently planning a trip to the Bread and Puppet sometime soon, where I hope to join her; this was not the first time that MECATE members were invited to Bread and Puppet. After the performance, Bread and Puppet extended an invitation to members of the farmworkers' movement, to join them at the Bread and Puppet Farm during many summers. When the invitation to Bustos was made in 2019 there was no joint protest action, planned puppetry workshop, or anticipated performance; instead, this symbolic performance of solidarity by Bread and Puppet is one of the ways that it continues to strengthen and invest its relationship with MECATE. It is also a genuine performance of love and friendship between old comrades who look out for one another's safety and well-being. Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE's performance of transnational solidarity activism beyond *The Nativity* tour of 1985 has proven to transcend borders, languages, and time, and has successfully "resurrected" Romero's teachings of love, brotherhood, and solidarity through theatre.

CHAPTER VI.

Voice of the Voiceless: Dramatizing Romero's Resurrection

A small number of theatrical productions about Romero were produced worldwide, mainly in Central America and in the United Kingdom. For this study, I gained access to a few video recordings, including *Heartbeat of El Salvador*³¹¹ by RISE Theatre in Association with the Archbishop Romero Trust of the United Kingdom and *Romero: the Musical* written by George Daly and Liam Bauress.³¹² I uncovered one of the few published Romero plays during my interviews with Costa Rican participants of *The Nativity* tour, *El Martirio del Pastor* by Samuel Rovinski, a famous theatre piece written by Costa Rican playwright and dramaturge often performed in the country.³¹³ The Loyola Press, a Catholic publishing ministry, has a series of public domain ten-minute plays about Catholic saints including *A Play: Oscar Romero*.³¹⁴ Lastly, there is a social justice community theatre troupe based in Denver, Colorado, called The Romero Theatre Troupe that still performs today.³¹⁵ These theatrical plays focus on Romero's life as Archbishop, his social justice work during the Salvadoran civil war, and his murder at the hands of the right-wing military.

311 "Romero: Heartbeat of El Salvador—Love is Trailer," Rise Theatre, 2018, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.risetheatre.co.uk/media>.

312 George Daly and Liam Bauress, "Romero: The Musical," The Archbishop Romero Trust, June 4, 2015, <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/resources/romero-musical>.

313 Samuel Rovinski, *El Martirio del Pastor*, 1st edition (Ciudad Universitaria Rodrigo Facio, Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1983).

314 "A Play: Óscar Romero," Loyola Press, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/saints/saints-activities/plays/a-play-oscar-romero/>.

315 "Romero Theatre Troupe website," accessed April 12, 2021, <http://romerotroupe.org/>.

In this chapter, I explore Romero's claim to "resurrection" and canonization through the performative act of dramatic writing. Specifically, I apply dramatic writing as a creative vehicle to diving inside Romero's mind as a historical figure and to interpret *his* experience of canonization and his claim to "resurrection" in the Salvadoran people through his character and the play. The following original full-length play was developed through rigorous dramaturgical research -- using primary and secondary sources like documentaries, interviews, scholarly articles, *testimonios*, books, and films -- into the life, death, and legacy of Romero; the Salvadoran civil war; Central American student activism and anti-war protests; *campesino* union efforts of the late 1970s; the Catholic canonization process; the current Central American migration crisis; Salvadoran and Honduran gang activity subsequent to civil unrest of the 1980s; and the most recent investigations on Romero's murder and U.S. involvement.

My play, *Voice of the Voiceless: the Romero Play*, inspired by Bread and Puppet's *The Nativity* -- the only other dramatic play to dramatize Romero's resurrection through political theatre -- is an original dramatic work and the first play on Romero written by a woman of Salvadoran descent that explores Romero's life and death. In *Voice of the Voiceless*, I unpack his canonization process to sainthood and provide an in-depth analysis into his legacy and resurrection, long after his murder, through a contemporary lens. *Voice of the Voiceless* allows us to imagine the possibilities of Romero's resurrection through live theatre, puppetry, projection, and music, weaving together these elements through Romero's original dialogue from his homilies and speeches. How would Romero react to his nomination for sainthood? How would Romero's legacy "resurrect" in the people worldwide, during his lifetime, after his

murder, and today? If Romero's claim to "resurrection" is valid, how would it play out on the dramatic stage?

Voice of the Voiceless: The Romero Play

(The English version)

*Dedicated to Saint Oscar A. Romero,
the first saint of Central America and the Caribbean,
and all the people of El Salvador,
past and present.*

CHARACTERS:

- MONSIGNOR ROMERO: the revolutionary Catholic priest, martyr and saint.
- 1ST ARCHANGEL: an old man/angel in heaven, friend of Monsignor Romero, as Manuel who was murdered alongside Father Rutilio Grande by the right-wing military in El Salvador.
- 2ND ARCHANGEL: a fifteen-year-old boy/angel in heaven, dear friend of Monsignor Romero, who was murdered alongside Father Rutilio Grande by the right-wing military in El Salvador.
- FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE: murdered revolutionary priest, proclaimed liberation theologian and activist, dear friend of Monsignor Romero, who was murdered by the right-wing military for organizing peasant workers in El Salvador. Many consider his murder to be the tipping point and reason for Monsignor Romero's radical conversion.
- EDUARDO: early 30s, father, husband, peasant worker and union co-organizer. A humble and giving individual, a caregiver, insightful and poetic. An important future leader of the leftist guerrilla movement.
- GINA: early 20s, university student and a photojournalism major. Creative artist, courageous, bold, a young student activist. Lives her life with a social and moral purpose. Wants to live forever.
- MUSA: late 30s, death squad member, and hit man who shoots Monsignor Romero. Ambitious, violent, full of resentment, hungry for power, desperate to be seen. A ticking bomb.
- CARMEN: late 20s, street vendor of *pupusas* (popular Salvadoran dish), a migrant crossing the U.S. border on *La Bestia*. Kind, generous, with a positive and infectious personality.
- SANTIAGO: a fifteen-year-old *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS) gang member in jail for car theft. Intelligent, patient, boyish, trying to grow up too fast. Loyal to his gang.

WILLIAM: a veteran MS gang member serving life in jail. A voice of reason and conversion.

CHORUS:
TOWNSPEOPLE 1, PEASANT WORKERS #1-4 , STREET VENDORS #1-3,
MIGRANTS #1-5, *LAS PATRONAS #1-4, PRISON MATES #1-7, NATIONAL
GUARD/DEATH SQUAD, PRISON GUARDS.

SETTING:

various locations throughout El Salvador and in heaven.

TIME:

various times between 1980 and the present

PRODUCTION NOTES:

*ALL puppets and/or puppet head masks have to be made from *cardboard papier-mâché*. We should get a sense of poor people's theatre but still provide aesthetically beautiful and captivating works of puppet theatricality.

**La Bestia* (The Beast) is the cargo train that Central American migrants ride to cross through Mexico to get to the U.S. border; should be a large-scale puppet, puppeteered by the chorus.

*LAS PATRONAS will need to walk on medium-large stilts.

*PRISON GUARDS have no speaking lines.

*Trigger Warning must be included for audiences as images of violence will be presented throughout the play.

Voice of the Voiceless: The Romero Play

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Projection reads:

**Stage I:
MARTYR
1980**

(Spotlight on an a 1980s-style radio made of cardboard papier-mâché somewhere on the stage. We hear static and then the following broadcast coming from the radio)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

“I would like to make a special appeal to the men of the army, and specifically to the ranks of the National Guard, the police and the military.

Brothers, you come from our own people. You are killing your own brother peasants when any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God which says, "Thou shalt not kill." No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you recovered your consciences and obeyed your consciences rather than a sinful order. The Church, the defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, of the person, cannot remain silent before such an abomination.

We want the government to face the fact that reforms are valueless if they are to be carried out at the cost of so much blood. In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!”

(End of spotlight on radio.)

Scene 2

(Lights up on the stage as we see the inside of a Catholic church. There is a small desk US that holds all the necessary items for Communion. In front of the small desk floats a giant wooden cross. To the left and right of the cross stand 1ST and 2ND ARCHANGELS, their wings wide open, moving gracefully and slowly throughout the scene. No one is aware of the ARCHANGELS' presence in the

church. Standing with their backs to the audience are ALL the characters, except for MUSA, with their regular costumes now as townspeople in the benches. They are waiting for Mass to begin.

The townspeople stand in silence for a second after the radio speech until one of the townspeople turns around and faces the audience. They wait for MONSIGNOR ROMERO to enter the church as priests do. They begin to sing (a cappella) the first verse of a song that sounds like Libera, the all-boys choir, and their *Sacris Solemnis* to the tune of Beethoven's *Symphony No.7 in A Major*. Throughout this verse more townspeople begin to turn their heads to face the back of the church, waiting for their priest to arrive, each time contributing to the singing as the music begins to fill the church room.

As we reach the second verse, the music builds, and we hear the first sound of the musical instruments (the drums). This is MONSIGNOR ROMERO's cue to enter the "church." He enters from the center aisle of the theatre wearing traditional white Archbishop robe and headdress. As he walks through the church aisle he greets and blesses everyone in the room. There is love in the room the minute he enters the space.

The people continue to sing as MONSIGNOR ROMERO heads to the front of the church and preps for Communion. As he gathers the items, MUSA enters the scene the same way MONSIGNOR ROMERO did. No one is aware of his presence. MUSA walks in wearing aviator glasses and a red trucker hat. He carries a special .223-caliber Roberts rifle. The people continue to sing as MONSIGNOR ROMERO grabs a piece of Communion bread and uses both hands to place it above his head for blessing. He maintains his eyes looking up. The ANGELS see MUSA and take a step forward standing to the left and right of MONSIGNOR ROMERO. They begin to flap their wings wildly as they close their eyes. MUSA positions the gun and aims at MONSIGNOR ROMERO's neck. The townspeople are still singing when we hear a very loud gunshot. End of singing as gunshot echoes throughout the following: MONSIGNOR ROMERO drops the Communion bread and falls back. 1st and 2ND ANGEL catch him as he falls. We see MONSIGNOR ROMERO, held by the ANGELS, stretched out like Jesus on the Cross. He has died. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Spotlight on cardboard papier-mâché radio and TOWNSPEOPLE #1 stands beside it.)

TOWNSPEOPLE #1

(We hear the sound of bullets, screaming, people rioting from the actual sound footage of MONSIGNOR ROMERO's funeral coming through the radio. TOWNSPEOPLE #1 turns the knob, lowering the volume, and looks at audience.)

It's impossible to tell where the first shot came from on the day of Romero's funeral. People think they saw armed guards at the top of buildings. Snipers? Were they coming from inside the Cathedral? The Plaza? The trees? The crowds? Shots from rifles.... rounds of semi-automatics...and even bombs! That's when the chaos occurred. Over 250,000 people attended his funeral. Men and women, children, seniors, all falling on top of each other, trampling and hurting one another. Running over dead bodies as they fell to the floor. 40 dead. Over 200 injured. Everyone headed towards the gates of the Cathedral for safety. "Throw yourselves to the ground, don't run, stay calm!" you could hear the priests screaming through the megaphones, trying to control the crowd. The ceremony hadn't even finished. The priests all ran towards Romero's casket. Throwing their bodies over it. Protecting it. Rushing him inside the cathedral. We were afraid they would try to steal his body. They had already killed him, and now, they were killing those that mourned him.

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

Projection reads:

Playa La Costa del Mar El Salvador present time

SETTING: Somewhere in the heavens, otherwise known as *Playa La Costa del Mar, El Salvador* (the Coast of El Salvador Beach).

(The violent sounds of the funeral from the radio of the previous scene will trickle over to this scene as the sounds of the ocean slowly begin to take over.)

Lights slowly come up on stage as MONSIGNOR ROMERO is seen in "heaven." He is sitting, calmly on the "sand" floor, taking in the sun and facing the audience as if they were the ocean waves. He is not wearing a priest's robe but instead wears faded black slacks, a light color, long sleeve, buttoned-up dress shirt, his old dress shoes, black socks, his signature black frame glasses, and a small wooden cross around his neck that comes down to his lower chest.

Frustrated by the sounds of violence MONSIGNOR ROMERO stands up. He begins to unbutton his shirt and then takes it off. We can see his wooden cross and a faint mark on his neck where he was shot. He takes off his shoes and socks, rolls up his pant legs above his calves and places his clothes neatly on the "sand." He begins to walk towards the "ocean waves" (aka audience) as the radio announcements begin to faintly disappear as if muted underwater. Projection of underwater waves hit by the sunlight is projected onto MONSIGNOR ROMERO and completely take over the stage. HE has now entered the depths of the ocean and is floating underwater.

HE sees a bright light in front of him, crosses himself and walks towards it. The light vibrates from time to time as if it has a life of its own.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO (smiling at the light)

I have been thinking about you...praying that you would return. (The light shines brightly as if responding to MONSIGNOR ROMERO and then comes to a more bearable intensity. It creates a glow around MONSIGNOR ROMERO's head.) I knew if I was patient and had faith that you would come back to me...if I prayed for you. I would see you again. (projection the glimmering waves). But you...you are *everywhere*, in everyone, and in everything, are you not? (smiling) You bring me such peace and calm; I am overpowered by your love. (the light responds) And yet...violence is *still* winning. I can still *hear* it... the moral fibers of society breaking into pieces; the screams of "the disappeared" searching for a place to rest, women and mothers crying for their children to return, to reappear, if only to be buried...

(muffled soft sounds of 1ST ARCHANGEL calling out MONSIGNOR ROMERO's name)

1ST ARCHANGEL

Monsignor! Monsignor!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

...it's the never-ending resonance of repression—the noise. I can feel it...

(muffled soft sounds of 2ND ARCHANGEL calling out MONSIGNOR ROMERO's name)

2ND ARCHANGEL

Monsignor! Monsignor!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

...then and *now*—the vibration of bloodshed and torture that still haunts me. *I* started a war and now it is the poor who pay the price for my insubordination...for my words. I made a promise to Rutilio, to the people and *I failed* them both. And yet I am the one who is here, safe, and bathing in the warmth of your love and light—

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO looks up as we hear the muffled sound of 1ST ARCHANGEL calling out his name louder than before)

1ST ARCHANGEL

Monsignor! Monseñooor!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Manuel?? Nelson?? (END of projection. Blackout.)

(Lights up on stage as MONSIGNOR ROMERO stands outside of the water back on the sandy beach. We hear the sound of the ocean. HE puts his clothes and shoes back on. Next to him are 1ST ARCHANGEL and 2ND ARCHANGEL. Each

ANGEL wears the same clothes they had on the day of their murder, typical campesino clothing, but each also wears a pair of extravagant and breathtakingly beautiful cardboard papier-mâché wings that move alongside them. Bright light emanates from the ANGELS from time to time.)

1ST ARCHANGEL

I knew we would find you here! I knew it. Didn't I tell you? (Flapping his wings with childish pride)

2ND ARCHANGEL

You might have said something about that, but I wouldn't—(laughs).

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Manuel! Nelson! How can I be of service to you today, my friends? How I have missed your company!

2ND ARCHANGEL

You will *not* believe it, Monsignor!

1ST ARCHANGEL

We come bearing wonderful news, dear friend!

2ND ARCHANGEL

We were given special permission to deliver the news personally to you and begin the—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

What news?

1ST ARCHANGEL

They all knew how much it would mean for us to do so. And so we—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Well, what is it?

(the ANGELS look at each other as their wings begin to move with excitement)

Tell me what it is, already! (laughing)

ARCHANGELS

You have been summoned!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Summoned??

1ST ARCHANGEL

Yes! Summoned by the heavenly courts of justice!

2ND ARCHANGEL

You have been called upon for sainthood! Monsignor...they could make you a saint!

1ST ARCHANGEL

A saint!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

What do you mean, a *saint*?

2ND ARCHANGEL

Yes, a saint! Can you believe it?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

No, no, that...it doesn't make any sense.

1ST ARCHANGEL

Of course, it does!

2ND ARCHANGEL

It's been long over 5 years since—

1ST ARCHANGEL

Your arrival...here in the heavens of *La Costa del Mar*.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I am not the right person—

2ND ARCHANGEL

If *anyone* is worthy of such high honor it surely would be you, Monsignor!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

They made a mistake.

1ST ARCHANGEL

What are you talking about? You were *nominated* by the holiest of powers...now the process states that we—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

No, this is *not* happening! How could this happen?

2ND ARCHANGEL

Why are so upset? We thought this would be good news for you.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

We have to put a stop to this. They have chosen the wrong person!

2ND ARCHANGEL

The wrong person?! Monse—

1ST ARCHANGEL

Monsignor, you are a *martyr*, that already makes you—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

No! I am *not* a martyr!!

1ST ARCHANGEL

Monsignor.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I am *not* the one who is still suffering persecution. I am *here*... surrounded by God's loving grace and your blessed company. But, my friends... it is the people of El Salvador, the poor, the oppressed, *they* are the ones who are still being kidnapped, tortured, raped, and *killed* for their faith...in the Church, in the possibility of peace as they fight for a more just and dignified world. *They* are sacrificing their lives for the sake of equality. *They* are God's true martyrs.

2ND ARCHANGEL

Yes, but *you* were their priest—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Exactly. I was their shepherd and they were my flock. I lived my life in servitude to them all and then *abandoned* them when they needed me the most.

1ST ARCHANGEL

You did not *abandon* them—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I *should* have been there protecting the people from harm's way, serving as a mediator—a bridge--preventing violence from escalating for so long...*I* should have been there advocating and fighting on their behalf. When they killed me...when they killed an Archbishop, it gave them full immunity to kill anybody else. *Anybody!* Don't you see? It was *my* death, this so-called martyrdom that gave new life to the armed insurrection. A war on the poor.

2ND ARCHANGEL

There was nothing you could do—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

It was all my fault.

1ST ARCHANGEL

Your fate was already written, and even if—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

You are both wrong! I could have done something...God gave me the opportunity to create my own destiny and I *missed* it! That driver, that lost soul, I could have saved him. Things could have been different for him. I *could* have saved—

1ST ARCHANGEL

He could not be saved!!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Everyone can be saved!!...Every. One.

(Silence. THEY stare at each other for a moment not knowing what to say)

I need to be alone, to think...to...I just need time to pray.

2ND ARCHANGEL

Monsignor—

(ROMERO exits)

I don't understand. What, what just happened? What is he *doing*?

1ST ARCHANGEL

I don't know...but it's too late now...the process has already started.

(The ANGELS flap their wings violently as a burning light emanates from them shining brightly until the entire stage is immersed in light. Blackout.)

Scene 5

Projection reads:

***Stage II:
WITNESS
1982***

SETTING: Late night, outdoors, somewhere near one of El Salvador's volcanoes in Morazán, El Salvador, 1982.

(Lights rise on a group of 4 PEASANT WORKERS sleeping on the floor of the forest somewhere near one of El Salvador's volcanoes. The PEASANT WORKERS, except for EDUARDO, are wearing papier-mâché head masks. They are hiding from the death squad. They are ALL lit by the moonlight. EDUARDO sits up somewhere in the middle of the group and watches over them as they sleep. They all have sticks and other farm tools for protection. Tonight, he is the group's lookout. Some of the PEASANT WORKERS toss and turn in their sleep)

throughout the scene, some sit up and listen to EDUARDO, while others are in deep slumber. Nothing too distracting but we should know they are there all the time. Throughout the scene EDUARDO can keep an eye out for any noise or possible invasion from the DEATH SQUAD. A pitch-black starry night is projected on stage with stars twinkling and even shooting stars flying through the sky from time to time. We hear the sounds of sleeping forests as EDUARDO watches the night sky before he looks directly to the audience and shares his testimony.)

EDUARDO

The first time that I met Monsignor Romero... I didn't really like him—that was before of course. (laughs) Back then he was more reserved, closed off, quiet, really shy...I sometimes wondered if he ever smiled or even laughed. (laughs) I mean that's the only reason why they appointed him as Archbishop. They were *certain* he wouldn't cause any trouble. (laughs) He was always listening and observing others in the room. Never taking up more space than he needed, even when he became Archbishop. I guess it's easy to mistake that for arrogance, but Monsignor Romero was anything *but* arrogant, that man had a humbling presence that is so hard to describe. When you were around him, you witnessed something really special. There was something so calm. Peaceful. Soothing about him. His energy was like...a warm light. Beyond doubt, through Monsignor Romero—

PEASANT WORKERS

God himself had walked through El Salvador.

EDUARDO

He was the first priest that I felt I could really talk to, that really cared about my feelings or wanted to know what *I* was thinking. He called me by my first name, always shook my hand, and even knew the names of all my children. When I was around him, I felt like a human being, like I mattered. A poor peasant like me...

PEASANT WORKERS (to each other)

A poor peasant like me...

EDUARDO

...that's empowering, you know? When others make you feel like you exist eventually you *see* yourself too for the first time in all your flawed greatness just like God intended you to be. He once told us the poor were the *embodiment* of the presence of God!

PEASANT WORKERS (to each other)

Can you believe that? The poor helped *him* feel closer to God.

EDUARDO

I will always remember when I spent the whole evening walking and talking with him. We talked about so many things...about me, about him, about his love for the beach...his connection to prayer and meditation...he liked driving that beat up car...he told really

bad jokes...did you know he is a really good swimmer? He is! He *was*. In the seminary, he volunteered himself as the “unofficial” swimming instructor...God knows how many priests know how to swim because of him. (laughs)

PEASANT WORKERS

That was the kind of man he was.

EDUARDO

Always looking for ways to serve others. He referred to himself as a servant of God. It made you think. You know? How can someone like me serve somebody else when I have nothing to give...how do you share what you do not have? But with Monsignor Romero, we weren't just poor peasants, or victims of an unjust society, accepting our poverty as if it was God's will. Monsignor Romero helped me see that a loving and *merciful* God would never want his children to suffer...

PEASANT WORKERS

Poverty is not a *punishment* of God.

EDUARDO

That great sin was created by man, but man could also change that. And that includes the poor. He helped me believe that I had so much to offer and that together—

PEASANT WORKERS (to each other)

We could transform our nation!

EDUARDO

We can transform the nation. It says so in the Scripture, the readings of Christ, what Monsignor Romero called the “preferential option for the poor,” and if Christ himself believed in the value of the poor, why shouldn't I? (beat)
When the boss brought the National Guard to “supervise” the farm workers I knew we were in trouble. There they were, the whole time, with full military gear, intimidating us with their weapons, pointing them at us and shoving us with their rifles while we worked, beating us, belittling us, calling us...

ALL

Communist! Sons of bitches!

EDUARDO

...and spitting in our faces like we were nobody...Some of them, recently recruited young boys, the same age as my own son! We were forced to work extra hours in the heat with no additional pay... I guess it was punishment for forming the union... and those who complained were taken out into the fields and were beaten. They didn't have to say it... you could hear their screams from across the fields (EDUARDO looks up to the sky for a moment). And it didn't even matter if you were involved in the union, if you were a peasant you were already guilty. It took a great part of me not to explode with anger, but I was so afraid. Back then. I couldn't even move.

PEASANT WORKERS

Basic human rights...we asked.

EDUARDO

...like food during lunch; beans...tortillas, that's all.

PEASANT WORKERS

We asked...

EDUARDO

...for fair pay for work we were never paid for...sometimes you worked so late you had to sleep outdoors in the freezing cold just to make it to work on time the next day.

PEASANT WORKERS

We asked...

EDUARDO

...for shelter to sleep--the floor even--something to protect us from the harsh weather. It's hard to work long hours throughout the day when you haven't had any sleep. We all signed the letter with our formal demands, practically begging the boss to throw us a bone.

PEASANT WORKER #1

I signed for the first time EVER on that letter! (smiles) Do you know how powerful that felt? To sign your *own* name?

(beat)

EDUARDO

But the letter was a complete failure.

PEASANT WORKER #2

Now we are being disappeared...

PEASANT WORKER #3

tortured...

PEASANT WORKER #4

and even *killed*...for organizing . . .

EDUARDO

for *asking*.

(EDUARDO hears a noise and stands up to check. It's nothing).

PEASANT WORKERS (to each other)

Had you ever heard him speak?

EDUARDO

(stands up and walks around as he talks)

I was always so moved by the way Monsignor Romero spoke to us...during Mass...on his radio show--you can still listen to it around here, if you get a signal but you gotta be really careful that they don't hear--he had a way of sharing the word of God in a way that made sense to someone like me...He held everyone's attention, you would often hear applause from the people after almost every other sentence. You didn't have to know how to read the Bible or speak Latin like they did before anyone could understand what they were saying...it's like suddenly I understood the teachings of God *through* Monsignor Romero and I could apply them to my own life. What I thought could never change and the *possibilities* that a more dignified life existed if I took charge of my own destiny.

(sits back down)

When Monsignor Romero spoke, he was speaking directly to you, *about* you, *for* you and *with* you. The message was the same; peace, equality, human dignity for all, justice, and the right of the people to mobilize. The same liberating message of Jesus Christ.

PEASANT WORKER #1

One time we all stood in the church for three hours listening to his every word—

PEASANT WORKER #2

and not one person complained.

EDUARDO

And those who couldn't come to Mass, would listen to his radio show...you didn't even need to own a radio to hear him. You could walk down the street and every house was playing his sermon. The whole country was listening to Monsignor Romero as he held us close with his words, waking us, transforming anyone who was ready for change...*that* was part of the problem...(beat) the National Guard, the president, even the death squad...I am sure they were listening too—maybe not by choice—but they were listening...when Father Rutilio Grande died...(crosses himself)

PEASANT WORKER #3

when he was *killed*... (crossing themselves)

EDUARDO

When he was killed alongside Nelson, a poor boy, like 13 or 15 years old, and Manuel, an older peasant man like us...Monsignor Romero became a new person. He was still everything that we had grown to love about him...

PEASANT WORKER #4

Patient.

PEASANT WORKER #1

Selfless.

PEASANT WORKER #2

Humble.

EDUARDO

...the *voice of the voiceless*, like we used to say, always walking alongside the poor, without protection and without fear...but that voice...it wasn't the same after Father Rutilio's death...kindly asking for justice, writing letters, making phone calls, begging our government and military leaders for mercy. It was after Father Rutilio's murder that Monsignor Romero found *his* own voice.

PEASANT WORKERS

The voice of gentility turned into the voice of justice. No one can *kill* the voice of justice.

EDUARDO

That's when they started to pay attention, the government, the military—

PEASANT WORKERS

The right wing.

EDUARDO

Everything he did, in the *name* of God, for the liberation of his people. And the people, well *we*—

PEASANT WORKER #3

we had been paying attention to Monsignor for some time...

PEASANT WORKER #4

Because he had paid attention to *us*.

(Hears a noise. Gets up and walks around the PEASANT WORKERS looking around to make sure they are safe)

EDUARDO

Monsignor Romero used to tell me, that—the National Guard—were more afraid of me than I was of them...and I thought...how could these men armed with rifles and military weapons, with complete immunity to the law, be afraid of a poor man like me? Of people like us? It wasn't until his death...until they killed his body...that I finally understood what he was trying to tell me. They weren't afraid of us because we are armed like them, or because we have power and money on our side. What they fear the most is our faith and our courage to fight for a just cause. To speak truth to power.

(Loud sounds of war helicopters flying over in the distance.)

(whispering) Get up! Get up! They're here. We have to keep moving! Let's go...let's go!
Vayamonos!

(EDUARDO and the PEASANT WORKERS gather their belongings and quickly exit. Helicopter sounds continue and get closer and closer as the lights from the starry night continue to sparkle. Blackout.)

Scene 6

Projection:

San Vicente, El Salvador
Earlier that day

SETTING: Early morning, the interior of a peasant's home. The door has been forced open. There is a small twin bed with a bed sheet in the corner, a plastic chair, and a wooden table. There is a blank concrete wall US.

(Lights up on the interior of the home. We see the DEATH SQUAD and the TOWNSPEOPLE on stage. The DEATH SQUAD members on SR significantly outnumber the TOWNSPEOPLE on SL as they face each other. The DEATH SQUAD members wear grotesque puppet masks, while the TOWNSPEOPLE wear head masks similar to the peasants. The characters on stage are lit from below with foot lights so that their shadows reflect on the wall US during the following "dance." The DEATH SQUAD members are armed with powerful military weapons, also made of cardboard papier-mâché, while the TOWNSPEOPLE are unarmed. There is significant distance between them like two opposing groups ready to embark on a battle. We hear the loud sound of everyone breathing heavily before beautiful instrumental music fills the space.

The DEATH SQUAD members begin to slowly walk toward the TOWNSPEOPLE. With each step they take, the TOWNSPEOPLE also take one step forward. This continues until they are facing each other with little space between them. Each step from DEATH SQUAD or TOWNSPEOPLE is in unison and is loud—like a large drum beating—somewhat tribal, and should fit with the rhythm of the song, building with each step.

Once the DEATH SQUAD members and the TOWNSPEOPLE are facing each other, the TOWNSPEOPLE make the first move and try to defend themselves with their bare hands but they are no match for the DEATH SQUADS who grab their hands in mid-air and quickly turn the TOWNSPEOPLE (like the way a dance partner would turn you for a tango or salsa) until the TOWNSPEOPLE are facing the audience and the DEATH SQUAD members are standing tall behind or next to the TOWNSPEOPLE.

We see all of the DEATH SQUAD members violently handling their guns or standing viciously behind the TOWNSPEOPLE who stand still and do not move. One by one the DEATH SQUAD members place their guns in front of the TOWNSPEOPLE'S necks as one places a knife to someone's throat, quickly running the cardboard gun across their necks. Each of the TOWNSPEOPLE falls to the ground as endless images of real victims of DEATH SQUAD members are projected on stage, including but not limited to people being cut open, shot in the face, decapitated, raped, beaten violently, mutilated, or drenched in acid.

Once all the TOWNSPEOPLE have fallen to the floor, the DEATH SQUAD members cross to US and face the concrete wall. The images begin to slowly fade and we return to the empty concrete wall that we saw at the beginning of the show. The DEATH SQUAD members simultaneously raise their hands and press them on the wall as high as they can reach. They slowly slide their hands down leaving their handprints in white coming down from the wall.

The DEATH SQUAD members exit SR in typical military line-up.)

(We hear whistles from offstage, like a secret call of sorts, but there is no response. Enter EDUARDO and PEASANT WORKERS from last scene. They are armed with sticks, *corbos* — Salvadoran word for a type of machete — and other farming tools. They enter cautiously and stop in their tracks shocked at the sight of people lying on the floor)

PEASANT WORKERS 1-4

It's too late.

EDUARDO

This was a warning.

(PEASANT WORKERS 1-4 slowly walk to the people still lying on the floor. One of the PEASANT WORKERS kneels down to one of the townspeople and quickly puts their hand over their own mouth. There is no sound, but we can *feel* them screaming. The other PEASANT WORKERS kneel down close to the other TOWNSPEOPLE lying on the floor and put their hands over their mouths. We know the PEASANT WORKERS recognize the victims. Lights fade to black.)

(Lights up on cardboard papier-mâché radio as loud static and MONSIGNOR ROMERO's voice is heard. The following speech plays as a spotlight shines on each PEASANT WORKER. They stand up and echo MONSIGNOR ROMERO's words at specific parts of the speech:)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

PEASANT WORKER #1
(standing up)

We will be firm in defending our rights—

But with great love in our hearts
Because when we defend ourselves
with love
We are also seeking sinners' conversion
That is the Christian's vengeance

Because when we defend ourselves
with love
That is the Christian's vengeance

(sound of loud static. PEASANT WORKERS #2-3 stand up)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

PEASANT WORKERS #2 & #3
(standing up)

To each one of us Christ is saying
If you want your life and mission to be
fruitful like mine, do as I.
Be converted into a seed that lets itself be
buried.
Let yourself be killed.
Do not be afraid.
Those who shun suffering will remain alone.
No one is more alone than the selfish.
But if you give your life
Out of love for others
As I give mine for all,
You will reap a great harvest
You will have the deepest satisfactions.
Do not fear death or threats;
The Lord goes with you.

Do not be afraid.
No one is more alone than the selfish.
Out of love for others.
Do not fear death or threats;
The Lord goes with you.

(sound of loud static. PEASANT WORKERS #1, #4 stand up)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

PEASANT WORKERS #1, #4
(standing up)

...And so I invite you,
Let us place all that energy
that God has given our Salvadoran people,
like a torrent,
not at the service of bloodshed or violence.
We have nothing to fear
When Salvadorans put all that
aggressiveness
That God has given them
At the service of building true justice,
Of building the order of things
That truly ought to be defended.

Let us place all that energy
like a torrent,
We have nothing to fear
At the service of building true justice
Of building the order of things

That truly ought to be defended.

(Sound of loud static. EDUARDO walks to the wall with the projected handprints of the DEATH SQUAD. He stares at the white handprints, a sign that the DEATH SQUAD was there. He turns around.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO cont. (through radio)

And to those who have received the awesome charge of governing...
We have vital problems of livelihood, of land, of wages. The good of all, the common good, has to be an impetus for you, as charity is for a Christian!

Be mindful of the right to participate that all aspire to—

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO's voice fades out into the distance as EDUARDO completes the speech.)

EDUARDO (to everyone)

“--that all aspire to...for everyone can contribute something to the nation's common good...Give the people opportunity to organize!”

(Lights up on PEASANT WORKERS and EDUARDO)

EDUARDO cont.

“Even when they call us mad, when they call us subversives and communists
And all the epithets they put on us,
We know that we only preach the subversive witness of the Beatitudes, which have
turned everything-upside down.
To proclaim blessed are the poor...”

PEASANT WORKERS

BLESSED are THE POOR!

EDUARDO

Blessed are the thirsting for justice!

PEASANT WORKERS

BLESSED are THE POOR!

EDUARDO

Blessed are the suffering!

ALL

BLESSED are THE POOR!

EDUARDO

(looks around at the victims on the floor)
We have to leave...

PEASANT WORKER #2

What now?

EDUARDO

We will join the union of *Chilatenango*. They left a few days ago and should have arrived by now.

PEASANT WORKER #3

We can cross through *El Rio de Morazan*.

PEASANT WORKER #1

We can hide in the forest for a few nights if we stay near the edge of the volcano.

PEASANT WORKER #4

We can meet the group on their path, but we have to stay together. They will be looking for us.

PEASANT WORKER #2

We can help them build base communities like the ones from the church.

PEASANT WORKER #3

Organizing the people from the towns, reclaiming their land, helping them grow their own food—

PEASANT WORKER #1

building new schools, teaching the children—

EDUARDO

Creating sustainable communities. Free communities... True Liberation.

ALL

We have to *wake up*. Walk alongside the poor...without protection...without fear.

(They ALL exit. Blackout as the white handprints of the DEATH SQUAD slowly fade out.)

Scene 7

Projection:
San Salvador, El Salvador
1984

SETTING: A deserted classroom at the Central American University (UCA), San Salvador, 1984.

(Lights up on the deserted classroom in a university. You can tell that the school has been shut down for weeks, the black board is broken, dust has collected, books and desks are thrown on the ground, the National Guard has been here. GINA is on stage wearing typical student attire, jeans, nice fitted top, and sneakers. She has a small manual camera hanging from her neck. GINA sits on one of the empty chairs facing the audience swinging her legs as she talks.)

GINA

I was 16 when I heard Romero read his letter to President Ronald Carter...

(Spotlight on MONSIGNOR ROMERO as he enters the stage. We can only see his silhouette.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Dear Mr. President,

In the last few days, news has appeared in the national press that worries me greatly. According to the reports, your government is studying the possibility of economic and military support and assistance to the present government junta.

Because you are a Christian and because you have shown that you want to defend human rights, I venture to set forth for you my pastoral point of view in regard to this news and to make a specific request of you.

I am very concerned by the news that the government of the United States is planning to further El Salvador's arms race by sending military equipment and advisors to "train three Salvadoran battalions in logistics, communications, and intelligence." If this information from the papers is correct, instead of favoring greater justice and peace in El Salvador, your government's contribution will undoubtedly sharpen the injustice and the repression inflicted on the organized people, whose struggle has often been for respect for their most basic human rights.

The present government junta and especially the armed forces and security forces have unfortunately not demonstrated their capacity to resolve in practice the nation's serious political and structural problems. For the most part, they have resorted to repressive violence, producing a total of deaths and injuries much greater than under the previous military regime, whose systematic violation of human rights was reported by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The brutal form in which the security forces recently evicted and murdered the occupiers...that political power is in the hands of unscrupulous military officers who know only how to repress the people and favor the interests of the Salvadoran oligarchy.

If it is true that last November a "group of six Americans was in El Salvador...providing \$200,000 in gas masks and flak jackets and teaching how to use them against demonstrators," you ought to be informed that it is evident that since then the security forces, with increased personal protection and efficiency, have even more violently repressed the people, using deadly weapons.

For this reason, given that as a Salvadoran and archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, I have an obligation to see that faith and justice reign in my country, I ask you, if you truly want to defend human rights:

- to forbid that military aid be given to the Salvadoran government;
- to guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly, with military, economic, diplomatic, or other pressures, in determining the destiny of the Salvadoran people.

In these moments, we are living through a grave economic and political crisis in our country, but it is certain that increasingly the people are awakening and organizing and have begun to prepare themselves to manage and be responsible for the future of El Salvador, as the only ones capable of overcoming the crisis.

It would be unjust and deplorable for foreign powers to intervene and frustrate the Salvadoran people, to repress them and keep them from deciding autonomously the economic and political course that our nation should follow. It would be to violate a right that the Latin American bishops, meeting at Puebla, recognized publicly when we spoke of “the legitimate self-determination of our peoples, which allows them to organize according to their own spirit and the course of their history and to cooperate in a new international order” (Puebla, 505).

I hope that your religious sentiments and your feelings for the defense of human rights will move you to accept my petition, thus avoiding greater bloodshed in this suffering country.

Sincerely,
Oscar A. Romero
Archbishop

(End of spotlight on MONSIGNOR ROMERO.)

GINA

As a kid, I always found Mass to be...boring. Sometimes I would just stay home and watch cartoons on TV while my parents headed downtown to Mass. Well, that day, I decided to go to Mass. There was no particular reason, it wasn't a holiday, and there wasn't a carnival, they weren't even selling food or anything fun like that. I just decided to go...I am so glad that I did, or I would have missed it.

He read the letter during Mass at *The Basilica of the Sacred Heart* in San Salvador. He wanted *us* to hear it and for us to give him *our* approval before he sent it out to the President of the United States. Everyone kept applauding, after every single sentence (laughs). They must have stopped him at least eight times. There was no doubt that he had full approval from every person in that church. Everywhere I turned people were standing, clapping, completely enamored by his every word. And the letter was so beautifully written. Every bit of *Monsignor Romero's* signature style: it was clear, direct without any unnecessary noise, and full of his love and compassion. I didn't realize the context behind what he was saying at the time—I was a kid, I wouldn't fully realize the extent of our country's suffering until I started the University last year—but what I did

understand was the way it made me *feel*. The way it made all of us feel that day...*hopeful*, that if this letter worked things could change for us.

This was not the first time I had heard him speak, but it was the first time I witnessed firsthand the power of reporting the *truth*. How important it was for us to be able to do so on our own behalf. Not waiting for others that could never understand what it was like to live in El Salvador during times of peace, of war, and still appreciate the beauty of our landscapes or the resilience of our people. The Americans, most of them didn't even know where El Salvador was on the map, let alone know what was happening here, and what direct role they were playing in the repression of an entire nation. Monsignor Romero was right. It can only be the people of El Salvador—who were already mobilizing and organizing—that could truly transform the future of this country. Not foreign intervention and *especially* not military aid...the president never responded. (snaps a picture of the classroom. We hear a click.)

When they killed Monsignor Romero, all I could think about was that moment. And how much it had changed me. After that experience, I started to *really* listen to his homilies. The ones they would broadcast through the radio? My parents were so surprised that I could stay still for so long. Sometimes, they--the homilies--would last up to three hours! My favorite parts were at the end when he made these weekly reports on what was happening nationally and locally, like social commentary on the lives of the Salvadoran people. That was how many of us got our news. He became our source of *trusted* information. They didn't call him the *Voice of the Voiceless* for nothing. And you couldn't really trust the information they were feeding us. But with Monsignor Romero, you always knew he was giving you nothing but the truth. He reported names, dates, locations, all the information verified and gathered by his legal aid fund. That included the victims *and* the perpetrators of every crime. It didn't matter who you were or what powerful position you had, if you were involved in a violation of human rights against the people—I'm talking unimaginable atrocities committed by government leaders, the National Guard or the death squads including disappearances, mutilations, rapes, bombings —then he called you out. It had nothing to do with the left or the right, he always tried to remain in a neutral position. It wasn't about politics. It was about moral ethics. It was about protecting human rights. Church was never boring to me again. Even after his death, I knew that the truth would always prevail. And I *had* to do something. It was my responsibility to report the truth. No one else would do it for us.

Once I got to the University, I realized I wasn't the only one inspired by Monsignor Romero. It was like the entire campus was moved by his critical spirit...from students to professors. We were all in this together. *Solidarity!* We had to be in order to survive this war. So, I became a journalism major. *Photojournalism*. And that's when I got this pretty girl (grabs her camera around her neck). What a beauty! (gently kisses the camera). Words can be a pretty powerful way to spread the truth but an image...an *image* is a direct snapshot of reality, a moment captured in history that cannot be altered or questioned. It is exactly what the image is telling you. Neutral, for the viewer to interpret for themselves without manipulation or lies. That is what makes this (looks at camera) so

powerful. It's the truth. You can say this is my weapon of choice. (snaps a picture of the classroom. We hear a click.)

I document all of our student group's events, our rallies, group meetings, protests, our workshops, etc. Some of my pictures have even made it onto our campus papers! But I also take pictures for the group's protection. We often get unexpected or surprise visits by the National Guard in full military gear and sometimes with tanks. All U.S.-trained. Since they started closing down the universities, things have gotten pretty dangerous...we've even had some of our members threatened and even abducted. This way there is evidence. (snaps a picture of the classroom. We hear a click.)

(gets up and wanders throughout the classroom, taking pictures and documenting the space.)

Nowadays, being a university student or a professor is like a death certificate. And if you are a student reporter? It's even worse. We have become the enemy of the state. Can you believe that? *Students* armed with what? backpacks and books?! Which is why you never carry your student id, *especially* if you get stopped at a checkpoint and they ask for documentation. You have to convince them you are not a guerrilla or a communist. You know, many of our top students, the most *brilliant* kids in the class, have already joined the leftist guerrillas! Can you even blame them?

(click)

We're organizing a huge collective march with the students from the Occidental University across town. We are demanding the reopening of our classes, rehiring of our professors, and condemning those involved in the torture, disappearances and killings of our peers...and faculty. There's gonna be a march towards the *Plaza de La Libertad*, this theatre skit with masks, music, chanting, banners— *it's gonna be beautiful!* We are all coming together, as university students, as scholars, as activists. There are even some students from the U.S., Nicaragua, Guatemala who will join us. It is our social duty as students to put pressure on the government and to reclaim the autonomy of our universities. And *I* am reporting the entire event!

(Lights change in the room and now there is a spotlight on GINA as she stands still.)

We are on the bus, halfway to the university, where we agreed to meet before the event; the bus had a handful of civilians, children, but mostly it was university students sitting at the back of the bus. When we got to a stop point...The National Guard wearing bulletproof vests and carrying sophisticated military weapons blocked our way. Told the bus driver to pull over and asked for everyone's documentation. None of us had any. But I did have my camera hidden in a bag underneath some dirty laundry and 20 pieces of sweet bread I purchased for our meeting. I was praying and praying that they wouldn't check my bag. If they found my camera, they would have taken it, *or* they would have taken me. They spent about 30 minutes probing us with their guns, intimidating us and taking a few people outside to "ask further questions." Some of those people never returned. I was staring out the window looking for ways to escape, where to run, or

somewhere to hide down the road if I had to, when I heard the sound of machine guns. I could see the National Guards walking alongside the sides of the bus... shooting each window by window. Then it hit me...the smell of fire! The bus was burning! They lit the bus on fire with all of us *inside it!* I grabbed my camera and started taking pictures, clicking and clicking and clicking and clicking...my hands were shaking...all I could see was smoke and bullets...people were screaming rushing for the closed door. I stood there, clicking and clicking and clicking...documenting the truth...of the victims and the perpetrators...I knew it was the last time I would...

(Spotlight on GINA fades as projections appear on the walls of the classroom, on the chalkboard, floors, ceilings, etc. Photo images of university students protesting, marching, rallying. These are GINA'S pictures. A celebration of student solidarity and courage. This is how GINA lives forever.)

(Spotlight on cardboard papier-mâché radio as projected images continue to fill the stage. We hear the following:)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO (through the radio)

If some day they take the radio station away from us
If they close down our newspapers,
If they don't let us speak,
If they kill all the priests and the bishops too,
And you are left a people without a priest,
Each one of you must be God's microphone (faint sounds of people applauding) ...
Each one of you must be a messenger (faint sounds of people applauding) ...
A prophet...of *truth*... (faint sounds of people applauding)

(End of projected images. Loud sounds of people cheering and applauding.
Blackout.)

Scene 8

Projection:

***Somewhere on the road
El Salvador, 1980.***

SETTING: Inside Musa's old 1970's red, four-door Volkswagen, February 1980. A month before he shoots Monsignor Romero. It is early afternoon around 3 pm on a beautiful summer's day.

(Lights rise on an empty stage where we see chairs set up as a makeshift car facing the audience. Two chairs in the front as driver and passenger seats, and three chairs in the back as the back seat. There are no doors to the car or even

tires, simply the chairs positioned in a way that we can recognize it is a car. Behind the car is a medium-sized projection screen wider than the width of the car that will display various real-life images of El Salvador in 1980 as they drive from the more rural communities to San Salvador, where Romero is to celebrate Mass that evening. MUSA is sitting in the driver's seat while MONSIGNOR ROMERO is in the middle seat in the back. A rearview mirror floats above MUSA. He can still turn back from time to time but most of his conversation with MONSIGNOR ROMERO will be delivered out to the audience. MONSIGNOR ROMERO is wearing his traditional black priestly robe, a long wooden cross hanging around his neck, worn black shoes, and a small suitcase. MUSA is wearing a burgundy fake leather jacket, red trucker hat and a white collar fitted polo shirt with brown slacks and aviator glasses. He is smoking a cigarette and blowing the smoke inside the car and outside the window as he drives throughout the town. We hear the sound of an engine as the scene begins)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I appreciate you stopping by and giving me a ride, son. God will bless you.

MUSA

(blows smoke outside of his window, maintaining his eyes on the road)
Someone like *you* really shouldn't be driving their own car. All alone on these dirt roads. Especially not on a piece of shit like the one you were driving. No offense but...

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(laughs quietly)
...it's a very *old* car, but it has been reliable for so many years...at least, until today. (looks out the window) It was fine this morning then suddenly I'm pulling over on the edge of the mountain road. If you hadn't appeared out of nowhere—

(MUSA laughs and puffs on his cigarette)

MUSA

That clicking sound you heard. Means it's your starter. And based on what I saw, your starter motor is done— I suggest replacing it with a new one. This year's model, American made—or better yet, get yourself a *new* car *or* a private driver. Some security. You never know during these violent times. Wouldn't you say so, Father? (smirks and looks at rearview window at MONSIGNOR ROMERO)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(still looking outside of window. Projected images of the people they pass on the streets of El Salvador are projected on the screen behind the car. Poor working-class people walking through the streets, selling food and water.)
For me? No son, I am not the one in need of protection...there are so many others who need it more than I ever will...The good Lord... HE walks beside me every day.

MUSA

The good Lord, huh? Can the good Lord *fix* your car? Or this shit hole of a country? (looks out the window) It's like a fuckin' *cancer* out there. (opens his mouth and exhales a large cloud of smoke from his cigarette.)

(There are a few moments of silence as images of El Salvador's lush green forest and beautiful grand volcanoes are juxtaposed with images of a country at the beginning stages of war continue to be projected on the screen. MUSA continues to smoke while MONSIGNOR ROMERO continues to look out the windows. We get the sense that the car is moving, and these are the scenic images they pass by on the road behind them. *Beat.*)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I have never really seen this side of the mountain before. Where are we exactly?

MUSA

I am taking you through a secret route. A little privacy for such a well-known Father like yourself. You are practically a celebrity! (laughs)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(smiling) No. I am a simply a—

MUSA

Everybody knows who you are. And they listen to your every word. Getting people riled up like that. You sure do cause a lot of commotion with your...what is you call it? Your talk shows? (laughs)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(looks at MUSA)

Sermons. We broadcast our sermons for those who don't have access to Mass.

MUSA

Yeah, like a talk show, right?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Not necessarily (laughs softly) simply interpreting the words of God...making sense of this chaotic world.

MUSA

Sure...but this is *different*. And you are making some pretty loaded accusations on the air. About violence and murder...*torture* even...you claim that the National Guard...You are a priest, not a reporter, *that* is your job.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Unfortunately, it has become my *job* to tend to all the wounds produced by the persecution of the Church—to record the abuses and pick up the bodies...I simply report the truth.

MUSA

The truth? (laughs)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

The persecution of our people every—

MUSA

I have to admit it is quite entertaining to hear. (laughs) I mean, where do you even *get* that information—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Everything is verified. Investigated by—

MUSA

Takes a lot of balls to call people by name don't you think? Spreading rumors like that can get you in a lot of trouble. You are practically *preaching* violence.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I have *never* preached violence, son! Not like the violence of the sword...or hate. But of brotherhood. Think about Christ and what left him nailed to the cross. The violence of love.

MUSA

No need to preach a whole sermon. (laughs) I just said it was entertaining, that's all. Didn't know you had it in you to get so fired up. (smokes his cigarette.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Forgive my passion... it has been quite a day and with the car breaking down...

(they continue to drive as more images are projected on the screen. *beat*)

You seem to know a lot about me, but I have never seen you before? Are you a member of the Chapel of San Miguel?

MUSA

(laughs) Me? No. I don't believe in it.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

You don't believe in...?

MUSA

Church...I don't go to church. So, I don't believe in God.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

The church is something different than believing in God. The church...it seeks adorers of God in Spirit and in truth. But that can be done under a tree, on a mountain, by the sea...on the *road* even—

MUSA

I'm not from around here. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time...and there you were...the one and only in the flesh (looks at rear view mirror)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

It was a blessing that you drove by... I had been waiting for hours.

(MUSA smokes his cigarette. *Beat*)

You don't go to church, but you listen to my sermons?

MUSA

A few times, yes. Not by choice...and it wouldn't matter if I had or not. Your face is pretty recognizable. I knew who you were the moment I saw you. If I were a priest, I would be *really* careful. Your face is plastered all over...Let me show you. I think I have one here (looks underneath seat for a paper ad) somewhere... (continues to dig for the paper) What did it say? *Get the priest...*No. that's not it. *Kill a Priest...*that's what it was! "*Be a patriot. Kill a Priest.*" Catchy huh? and I bet a priest of your stature. Someone like you, well you are probably the *top* prize... (continues to dig underneath the chair). Where the fuck is that thing?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I don't need to see it. I am aware that it exists.

MUSA

Of course, you are aware...well lucky for you, Father, you're no longer waiting alone on the side of the road... (turns around to MONSIGNOR ROMERO) What do you think a man like you would go for? Huh?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I never got your name. What is your name, son?

(we hear the sound of a car coming to an abrupt stop. They arrive at a small checkpoint on the mountain. The NATIONAL GUARD enters wearing oversized cardboard and papier-mâché puppet masks and oversized papier-mâché guns, similar to the death squad. They stand in position DS of the car. STREET

VENDORS quickly enter from SR and SL of the car selling gum, water, and fruit at the side of the road. They carry small plastic bags of water tied at the top with straws, small boxes of Chiclets gum, and plastic bags of cut-up fruit like mangos, coconuts, and pineapples. THEY approach MUSA's driver-side first.)

MUSA

(yelling outside of his window. STREET VENDORS approach him)
Come on! Another check point? (to the vendors) No, no, no, I don't want anything.

STREET VENDORS

(simultaneously and slightly overlapping each other)
What can we get for you, sir? We have mango, pineapple, water. Do you want gum?? We have gum! Only a *colon*, sir! We have what you need right here. Please, please, buy something from us. By the grace of God. We beg you.

(MUSA refuses to buy fruit. He is clearly bothered. The vendors walk around to MONSIGNOR ROMERO's side and smile recognizing MONSIGNOR ROMERO right away. MONSIGNOR ROMERO smiles at them and extends his hand outside of the window to touch, bless, and embrace them. THEY turn to look at MUSA and back to MONSIGNOR ROMERO. They do not trust him)

STREET VENDORS

What can we get for you? We have mango, pineapple, water. Do you want gum?? We have gum! We have what you need right here. *At no cost*. Please, please, take it as a gift from us. By the grace of God, we thank you.

(the STREET VENDORS hand MONSIGNOR ROMERO bags of fruit, water, and Chiclets. MONSIGNOR ROMERO insists on paying the street vendors and takes out all of his money from his wallet handing it over to the vendors. He only takes a bag of pineapple and two waters with straws. NATIONAL GUARD MAN #1 walks towards MONSIGNOR ROMERO's window when he is suddenly surrounded by the STREET VENDORS preventing the NATIONAL GUARD MAN #1 from getting near MONSIGNOR ROMERO. They are protecting him from the military guard.)

STREET VENDORS

(Simultaneously and slightly overlapping each other but much louder, faster, and more aggressive than before)
What can we get for you, sir? We have mango, pineapple, water. Do you want gum?? We have gum! Only a *colon*, sir! We have what you need right here. Please, please, buy something from us. By the grace of God. We beg you.

(NATIONAL GUARD's MAN #1 grumbles as he pushes the STREET VENDORS away with the end of his papier-mâché gun as they continue to circle around him repeating the same lines. MONSIGNOR ROMERO puts his head in

his hands and begins to softly pray. MUSA looks to the right of his passenger window as NATIONAL GUARD MAN #2 walks towards his window.)

STREET VENDORS

What can we get for you, sir? We have mango, pineapple, water. Do you want gum?? We have gum! Only a *colon*, sir! We have what you need right here. Please, please, buy something from us. By the grace of God. We beg you.

(NATIONAL GUARD MAN #1 is forced further and further away from the car as he continues to shove people out of the way until he and the STREET VENDORS are off stage. NATIONAL GUARD MAN#2 begins to walk over towards MUSA.)

MUSA

(takes off his glasses and places two fingers to his hat in a soldier salute to the NATIONAL GUARD MAN #2 who looks at MUSA, back at MONSIGNOR ROMERO, and salutes him. The NATIONAL GUARD MAN #2 points to the road allowing him to continue on his way. MUSA puts his glasses back on and we hear the sound of the car moving again as more images of the road are projected on the screen. NATIONAL GUARD MAN #2 exits off stage.)

Nos vemos!

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO looks up from prayer quietly mouthing a “Thank you” to God. *Beat*)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(handing MUSA a bag of water and pineapple)

Take it, fresh water and pineapple on a hot day.

MUSA

I don’t eat street food in plastic bags—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

It’s only water.

MUSA

You don’t even know where that’s been. Those people were barefoot and filthy—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Jesus Christ was barefoot and filthy...would you reject him?

MUSA

I’m just saying... if they are gonna make a big show about how depressing they are...rubbing it in our faces like that. I don’t want to see it. Why not pull yourself up by the bootstraps—like they say in the States—and get out of your miserable skin?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

And what if you are barefoot? How do you pull yourself up from the *bootstraps*?

MUSA

Steal them if you have to! I don't care. (laughs) You won't get anywhere selling fruit for a few cents a day. It's degrading if you ask me. If you are trying to survive, you have to think bigger than selling fruit or working in the fields like animals...it all boils down to ambition.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(eating his fruit)

Ambition?

MUSA

Ambition...I have bigger plans than driving others around all day, you know? I'm building something great. Investing in myself to be the man I was meant to be. Someone important. Someone who matters. Respected by others. Not looked down on with pity and guilt...I was born for something greater. I wasn't *born* to be poor and miserable like those—

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

You are wrong, my son. It is not the will of God, that some have everything, and others have nothing. That cannot be of God. God's will is that all his children be happy not destined to lives of poverty and suffering. No one is born to *be* poor. But everyone has the right to happiness. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MUSA

(laughs) I am not talking about the afterlife, Father, I am talking about *now*, the life we live *now*, here in this fucking place! Those people back there, they don't matter... the reality is if you don't have money or power in El Salvador you don't exist. Do you?
(beat)

(more images of the road are projected we have now reached what looks like the city or more populated area. MONSIGNOR ROMERO looks outside the window. Moment of silence.)

Have you ever felt power, Father? In your own hands?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

It is not my ambition to have power. I am merely a servant of—

MUSA

Don't give me that bullshit. This isn't your radio show. Just you and me. On the road. Now... have you ever wanted to feel power in *your* hands? Father.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I—

MUSA

(takes out a shiny black automatic from a hoister on his right hip. He holds it up for MONSIGNOR ROMERO to see and stares lovingly at his gun. He points the gun at the rearview window towards MONSIGNOR ROMERO)

Cause this here...*this* is power!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

What is your name, son?

MUSA

(waving the gun around as he speaks)

Why do you want to know my name so much?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

To pray for you.

MUSA

(laughing)

Are you gonna forgive me for all of my sins, Father?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I can...If you'd like me to.

MUSA

Here in the car? (laughs) I think it's too late for me. I was born bad. Evil. (laughs)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

No child is born evil...

MUSA

(looking at gun)

If I told you some of the things I have done, with *my own* hands...you wouldn't have the words to speak.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I would say: Convert! You cannot find God in the paths of torture or bloodshed...God is found on the roads of justice, of conversion, of truth.

(MUSA remains silent tapping the gun to his chin as if thinking to himself)

Pray with me. I can take that weight off your hands, my son.

MUSA

(looks at rearview mirror to MONSIGNOR ROMERO smiling)
...No thanks, Father. My hands are clean, as I see it...*white even*.

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO realizes he is in the car with a member of the death squad a.k.a *La Mano Blanca* "The White Hand." *Beat.*)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Tell me your name, son. I will pray for you.

MUSA

Why??

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Because you are *still* a child of God.

MUSA

(softly laughs)

There are no children of God in El Salvador. We are all orphans. *Father.*

(MUSA looks out the window unmoved by MONSIGNOR ROMERO's words.
Sound of a car stopping. He puts his gun back on his right gun strap)

We're here...you should leave before I change my mind.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Son—

MUSA

I have places to go.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

If you—

MUSA

Come on! Out! Get out now!

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO looks outside. He has reached his destination. He looks at MUSA and grabs his luggage, his little bag of cut up pineapple and his two waters in plastic bags. MUSA looks to the side but does not look at MONSIGNOR ROMERO as he exits the car.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

God bless you, my son! (exits the car)

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO steps out and takes a few steps. Stops. And turns around to MUSA.)

(Lights down on MUSA as we hear the sound of the car driving off. It fades out and we then hear the sounds of the ocean. Spotlight on MONSIGNOR ROMERO. He remains standing for a few seconds in the same spot as 1ST and 2ND ANGELS ENTER. They stand to his left and to his right. Lights change in the space.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

And then he just took off and disappeared. I never saw him again...until—

1ST ARCHANGEL

You couldn't have known.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Why didn't I do more? I didn't even think to—If *only* I had welcomed him into the house of God...if he had come inside...maybe...

BOTH ARCHANGELS

Maybe.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I would have forgiven him, even then...Why didn't I do more? Why *didn't* I try harder?

1ST ARCHANGEL

It's time, Monsignor.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Why didn't I save him? What was I thinking?!

1ST ARCHANGEL

They are waiting (puts his hand out towards MONSIGNOR ROMERO. He does not respond)

2ND ARCHANGEL

Monsignor?? (puts his hand out towards MONSIGNOR ROMERO. *Beat*)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I cannot with good conscience allow this sainthood to take place. It would dishonor the sanctity that I have held in my heart as a servant of the people. Whom I abandoned and have caused so much pain. I don't deserve it. Please help me intervene.

(both ANGELS look at each other and then back to MONSIGNOR ROMERO)

1ST ARCHANGEL

You are asking us to intervene in one of the holiest of—

2ND ARCHANGEL

We would need to defy direct orders from above and that would—

1ST ARCHANGEL

It just doesn't work that way! They have called for you and it is time for us to bring you to them. Please come with us. (extends his hand out to MONSIGNOR ROMERO)

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO takes a breath and takes off the cross around his neck and places it on the 1ST ARCHANGEL's open palm.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I'm sorry (he *disappears* from the stage.)

(*beat*)

2ND ARCHANGEL

He is never going to understand, is he? What is it going to take?!

1ST ARCHANGEL

...a *miracle*.

(the ANGELS look at each other and begin to flap their wings passionately. A bright light emanates from them until the entire stage is blindingly lit. Quick blackout.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene 9

(Spotlight on the same cardboard papier-mâché radio somewhere on the stage. We see CARMEN in silhouette as she appears on stage. She has a small backpack and light sweater. She prepares for a trip and begins to pack what looks like small wrapped packages into her backpack. We hear static and then MONSIGNOR ROMERO's sermon coming from the radio:)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

“God in Christ dwells near at hand to us

Christ has given us a guideline:
'I was hungry, and you gave me to eat'
When someone is hungry there is Christ near at hand
'I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink.'
When someone comes to your house and asks for water,
It is Christ if you look with faith...
How many today are afraid to testify for the innocent!
What terror has been sown among our people
That friends betray friends whom they see in trouble!
If we could see that Christ is the needy one,
The torture victim,
The prisoner,
The murder victim,
And in each human figure
So shamefully thrown by our roadsides,
Could see Christ himself cast aside,
We would pick him up like a metal of gold
To be kissed lovingly.
We would never be ashamed of him.
How far people are today—
Especially those who torture and kill
And value their investments more than human beings—
From realizing that all the earth's millions
Are good for nothing,
Are worthless, compared to a human being.
The person is Christ,
And in the person viewed and treated with faith
We look on Christ the Lord."

CARMEN

(Takes out a wooden cross hanging around her neck, holds it close to her mouth
and kisses it.)

Monsignor Romero...walk alongside me. Amen.

(Puts the cross back inside her shirt. Blackout.)

Scene 10

Projection reads:

***Stage III:
MIRACLE
1996***

SETTING: somewhere near Veracruz, Mexico, December 1996. On the top of *La Bestia* (The Beast).

(Lights up on stage as we hear the sounds of the train moving. It is early morning on a beautiful sunny day as the train crosses through some spectacular sights of plants, trees and mountains in Mexico. These moving images are projected on two screens SL and SR of the moving train. The first time we see *La Bestia* it is simply a freight train on stage, like a one-level platform. On top of the cargo train we see CARMEN and MIGRANTS wearing papier-mâché masks. Some are sitting, or lying down, while CARMEN is standing, moving with the train, and feeling the breeze run through her hair. This is the first day everyone has climbed up on the train. There is a sense of hope and happiness in the air. They are all enjoying the beautiful sights around them. They have started their journey and are on their way to a new life.

We hear the train start to make noises, as trains often do, this time the sound of metal beating like a drumbeat. It repeats several times until it resembles the first beats of *Cumbia, Sabrosa Cumbia* (Cumbia, Delicious Cumbia) by the Salvadoran cumbia group, *Marito Rivera y su Grupo Bravo*. The repeated sounds of the train continue for a few seconds until CARMEN recognizes the rhythm and its similarity to the beat of a famous dance song. SHE begins to tap the roof of the train adding to the beat. A MIGRANT follows her lead and begins to rub their hands to mimic the sound of the *Guiro* (a stick or hand drum that is played by running a stick over its notches to produce a ratchet sound), maybe someone else claps their hands adding to the music, other MIGRANTS follow the musical cue each using their hands, pens, shoes, mouths, zippers of their sweaters, and any other items to make the sounds of the instruments from the song. Once they have a groove, CARMEN begins to sing the song a cappella with the MIGRANTS singing along.)

CARMEN

Yes la furia musical de El Salvador (It's the musical fury of El Salvador)
Come on, sing it with me!

CARMEN

(Tapping the roof of the train. MIGRANTS start to recognize the beat of the song.)

Vamos, you know it.

Cumbia...Sabrosa cumbia (Cumbia...Delicious Cumbia)
Por ti yo bailo hasta amanecer (For you I dance until the sun sets)

CARMEN AND MIGRANT #1

Cumbia...de mis amores (Cumbia...of my heart)
mueve mi cuerpo (Move my body)
Hasta nocheser (Until the night ends)

CARMEN

(continues to beat on the roof of La Bestia)
Eso! Now the chorus. You *have* to sing the chorus!

MIGRANT #2 & #3 & #4

(everyone is moving, dancing, playing their instruments while the train moves)
Es la cumbia la que manda en mi pais (It's the Cumbia that rules in my country)
Es la cumbia la que manda en mi pais (It's the Cumbia that rules in my country)

MIGRANT #1

Ese ritmo sabroson de
El Salvador
Ese ritmo sabroson de
El Salvador

MIGRANT #5

Ese ritmo sabroson de
Honduras
Ese ritmo sabroson de
Honduras

MIGRANT #2

Ese ritmo sabroson de
Guatemala
Ese ritmo sabroson de
Guatemala

ALL

(laughing while playing their “instruments.” A celebration takes place. Real instrumental version of the song is heard as they sing along.)
Es la cumbia la que manda en mi pais
Es la cumbia la que manda en mi pais
Es la cumbia la que manda en mi pais
Es la cumbia la que manda en mi pais

Ese ritmo sabroson de—

(Sound of a GUNSHOT is heard. ALL drop lying still for safety as lights go to blackout.)

(Lights up on stage. We are still on the roof of the train but now it is nighttime and several days have passed. CARMEN has not slept, and you can tell. She watches over MIGRANTS as they sleep. She is in the midst of a conversation with MIGRANT #1, who also can't sleep, as they look at pictures of MIGRANT #1's children.)

CARMEN

(smiling looking at picture)

And what about her? How old is she?

MIGRANT #1

(smiling looking at the picture)

That is my daughter, Yulisa. She is four. Dimples, *piel morena*, and really curly hair. A beauty, like her mother, of course. (laughs)

CARMEN

And these two? The boys. They are so big...teenagers?

MIGRANT #1

Almost, not yet. God help me with those two. Oh, and this picture of my two-year-old boy. He is so close to me, and my other daughter, the ten-year-old, she is such a good daughter. She will be helping with the kids while I am gone. (Staring at the picture. Her smile has faded.)

CARMEN

(noticing a shift)

Was it hard to say goodbye to your children?

MIGRANT #1

I didn't have the courage...I just couldn't. My husband, he knew, but my children...they wouldn't understand. They don't know how bad things have been—the crisis. We don't even have food to feed them—I held them all so tight before I left. Told them I loved them so much...I will call them once I cross the border. Or maybe once I start working and sending them money for food. That's what I'll do. It will be better that way. Less painful for them...right?

CARMEN

Right...

Are you hungry? I have a little something if you—

(takes out a small, cold *pupusa* wrapped in paper and gives it to MIGRANT #1)

MIGRANT #1

God bless you. I didn't have any food to bring with me. (Takes the *pupusa* piece and scarfs it down in seconds) I am telling you...*your pupusas*...the BEST *pupusas* I have EVER had. (laughs) I am serious. You will see, hon. With time, you'll go from selling street food to gourmet food. *Bien cachimbona*, with tableware and everything!

CARMEN

No, there is *nothing* like eating *pupusas* with your own hands. Like our ancestors did. It's indigenous Salvadoran food you know.

MIGRANT #1

Well, maybe you can sell street food AND American food like the hamburgers in your restaurant. The ones the gringos like so much! (laughs)

CARMEN

Hamburgers? (laughs) Yeah, I think I'll stick to *pupusas*...but thanks for the idea. With the help of my blessed Monsignor Romero we will get there (takes out a wooden cross she wears around her neck and kisses it) ...and you already know. Once I get the business going, you can work with me. We will make money and you can send it to your husband and children.

MIGRANT #1

Thank you, sweetie.

CARMEN

I expect you to come visit me. So, don't lose the address I gave you.

MIGRANT #1

I memorized it already. The City of the Angels, with your sister.

CARMEN

Good...(yawns, trying to stay awake)

Now what about your husband? Do you have pictures?

MIGRANT #1

I do! I only have one (takes out small folded picture) Not my best look, but he looks very handsome...that was last summer when—

(The conversation ends. Lights fade to blackout.)

(Lights up on stage it is still nighttime on another day. CARMEN, MIGRANT #2 and MIGRANT #3 are the only ones awake watching over the group. They are each eating one of CARMEN's *pupusas* she brought for the trip.)

MIGRANT #2

I can't believe it! How? (laughs)

MIGRANT #3

How old were you?

CARMEN

(laughing)

I am serious! I must have been like six years old. People were complaining and bringing them back to the house. And I just wanted to help. I was so excited! I finally figured out how to make perfect circles...do you know how hard it is to make a perfect *pupusa* when your hands are smaller than the *pupusa* you are trying to make?—so then I *forget* to add the cheese, and the beans, and the—

MIGRANT #2

Good Lord, don't tell me. Even the pork??

CARMEN

Yes, even the pork!

MIGRANT #2

No! That's the best part!

MIGRANT #3

And then what happened to the *phony pupusas* you made? (laughing)

CARMEN

Well, all the ones I made had no filling, no meat, no cheese, no beans. Nothing! (laughs) So we couldn't sell them. They ended up being really thick tortillas that we were forced to eat for several days. I consider that my first day on the job. But, as you can see, I have come a long way since my first batch (laughs)

(they continue to savor the cold *pupusas* in small bites)

MIGRANT #2

The first day I started teaching, in Antigua, my hands were trembling so hard. I couldn't write my name on the chalkboard without squiggly lines. (laughs) Have you ever been in a room filled with hormonal teenagers? And been completely outnumbered? I turned back and looked at them... They *knew* I was afraid. They could *smell* it! (laughs)

MIGRANT #3

And that's why I prefer working in the fields, with animals. They are less intimidating than teenagers. (laughs)

CARMEN

(to MIGRANT #2)

Will you be teaching math again in the States?

MIGRANT #2

...I don't think so. They won't recognize my degree, or my years of teaching. Ten years of teaching. I am hoping...if I take some odd jobs for few years, and then save enough to go *back* to school and then get my degree...*again*...maybe, some day?

CARMEN

I will keep you in my prayers. You'll be teaching again. You'll see.

MIGRANT #2

Maybe a whole new start is a good thing? At least I will be safer that way.

MIGRANT #3

I just want to work. Steady work. Whatever I can get. And hopefully pay for these damn medications. (touches his stomach) Get the surgery I need...hey, can you include *me* in your prayers too? Put a good word in for me? (softly laughing)

CARMEN

Of course! (places her hands on her wooden cross, grabbing it from outside her shirt) I will add you to my list. I have an in, you know. (they all laugh)

MIGRANT #2

(finishes the final bite of his cold *pupusa*. Licks his fingers)
Okay, so you ruined the first batch of *pupupas*. But how long did it take before you made the *perfect pupusa*? Cause these were to *die* for! (laughs)

CARMEN

The *perfect pupusa*. I like the sound of that...

MIGRANT #2

Or maybe we are just that starving? (laughs)

MIGRANT #3

Right!

MIGRANT #2

I mean after a few days of nothing to eat—

MIGRANT #3

Even my shoelaces would taste delicious (they all laugh) I'm kidding! Thank you for sharing your food.

MIGRANT #2

God is certain to bless you.

CARMEN

Thank you... (yawns, trying to stay awake) Well, if you want to know the key to making a *perfect pupusa* it's all in—

(The conversation ends. Lights fade to blackout.)

(Lights up on stage it is still nighttime on yet *another* day. CARMEN looks more exhausted than before. She still can't sleep, and neither can MIGRANT #4, #5, a married couple who stay up with her. They are in mid-conversation.)

MIGRANT #5

So they just beat and raped her...at least three of them...right in front of her child. And none of us could do anything, or they would shoot us.

CARMEN

And what happened to her...and her son?

MIGRANT #5

They pushed her, and then her son, off the train...while it was moving. They do that sometimes. Throw you off the train if you don't pay them or give them what they want. Sometimes they even make you take off all your clothes in front of everyone in case you are hiding some money. Or they beat it out of you.

CARMEN

Is it always the *Mara*? I heard sometimes it's even the local police.

MIGRANT #4

The police, the MS-13 gangs, the cartel, sometimes even the security guards at each station. They surprise you, late at night, when everyone is asleep.

MIGRANT #5

Which is why you can't fall asleep. *Ever*.

MIGRANT #4

Or you'll wake up *The Beast!* (they all laugh)

CARMEN

How many times have you been on this train? On the Beast?

MIGRANT #5

On the Beast? This is my third time. And the *first* time with my wife (looks at MIGRANT #4) I've been deported from Oaxaca, and once I even got as far as Sonora! (*Beat.*)

I was so far from home...from Honduras...and so *close* to the border.

CARMEN

Third time's a charm, right? Keep courage. This time it will happen.

MIGRANT #5 and #4

(looking at each other),
God willing.

MIGRANT #4

I insisted on coming this time.

MIGRANT #5

I tried to convince her not to but—

MIGRANT #4

I didn't have a choice. If I stayed...they would have killed me. And I figured traveling together was safer right? For women and children at least. (touches her belly)

CARMEN

How many months are you?

MIGRANT #4

Six months! Just three more to go.

CARMEN

Can I ? (reaches to touch MIGRANT #4's belly)

MIGRANT #4

Of course. She is not moving as much anymore. I am thinking it's just...the stress.

MIGRANT #5

We'll get you some food soon. *Las Patronas* will come with food, and water. They always do.

CARMEN

Las Patronas?

MIGRANTS #4

Those women are angels!

MIGRANTS #5

They prep lunches for migrants riding on the train.

CARMEN

How do they—?

MIGRANT #5

They pack the lunches — beans, tortillas, bread, tacos, whatever — in these plastic bags and then throw them up at the passengers as the train passes by their town. And if you climb down the edge, hang off the step rails, hold your hands out to them—

MIGRANT #4

You might grab hold of a lunch! Or a bottle of water even...but not everyone gets food sometimes—

MIGRANT #5

Depending on the train conductor, they either slow down for us giving us a chance to grab the food...*or* they speed up.

CARMEN

Las Patronas.

MIGRANT #4

The Patron Saints (smiling) but all female! *Real badass*, huh?

CARMEN

It *is!* Like the *Virgencita de Guadalupe*, the patron saint of Mexico...that's powerful...
(pulls her wooden cross and kisses it, putting it back inside her shirt)

MIGRANT #4

How long do you think till we see them?

MIGRANTS #5

If we are where I think we are...at least two more days, I think.

MIGRANT #4

Two more days?!

MIGRANT #5

You have to hang on a little longer. Just a few more days.

(CARMEN digs inside her bag and pulls out her last *pupusa* wrapped in a paper)

CARMEN

Here (hands it to MIGRANT #4)

MIGRANT #4

Are you sure? You've been giving away all your food since we got here. Is there nothing left for you? What will *you* eat?

CARMEN

You know, I am actually not even hungry. Maybe it's the fresh air or the excitement, but surprisingly... I am not hungry at all. And besides, you are eating for *two*.

MIGRANTS #4 & 5

God bless you.

(MIGRANT #5 unpacks the *pupusa* for MIGRANT #4 and begins to feed her)

CARMEN

When *The Patronas* come, I will make sure to stretch my hand out as far as possible so I can grab one of their famous lunches. See what the fuss is all about. (laughs)

MIGRANT #4

What if you can't grab a lunch? Or...what if they don't come this time?

CARMEN

I am sure they will... I'll pray on it. (yawns, trying to stay awake)
It must have been exciting to get to Sonora! Could you see the border from—

(The conversation ends. Lights fade to blackout.)

(A single spotlight on CARMEN as she sits on the roof of the train in the dark night. SHE holds out her wooden cross, looks up and begins to pray)

CARMEN

Monsignor Romero... (makes the sign of the cross) I am hungry and afraid... This train, it's a beast and I *need* to stay awake. I pray to you, Monsignor Romero, shelter us with your guiding light. Guide us on this difficult and dark journey. Do not forsake us. Walk alongside us. Protect us like you have protected so many of your people before. I believe in you. Amen.

(CARMEN continues to sit. SHE is the only one awake at this point. She rocks her head back and forth fighting off her body's desire to sleep. She closes her eyes and opens them quickly. She closes her eyes, and opens them quickly, she closes her eyes... Long Blackout.)

(We hear the sound of GUNSHOTS as lights come up on stage. More time has passed. It is nighttime. Everything has changed. The train has transformed into a hideous BEAST puppet made of cardboard papier-mâché. CARMEN is in the same position as she was before, sitting on the top of the *Beast* cargo container. She wakes up to the sound of GUNSHOTS. This time she is alone.

The BEAST begins to move and roars as CARMEN stands up and tries to maintain her balance. CARMEN searches for the others on the train. No one is there but her. GUNSHOT. The BEAST now has arms or claws (puppeteered by others) and tries to grab CARMEN from the roof to feed its gigantic mouth. She avoids the claws of the BEASTS running in each and every direction, while trying not to fall off the moving train.)

CARMEN

Monsignor, please help me!

(GUNSHOT. In the distance we see a bright light as LAS PATRONAS arrive on SL and SR of the train. They enter like the fierce warriors they are. They are dressed as *campesina* women walking on large circus stilts. They carry white bags of lunches, and wave them around like weapons. They hover over CARMEN on their stilts. They are taller than the train and begin to fight off the BEAST using the food from their packed lunches. You see *pupusas*, beans, tortillas, bread and other items used as weapons. An epic battle takes place between the BEAST and LAS PATRONAS, as they dance around the train like angels on stilts.

The BEAST continues to roar as LAS PATRONAS continue to kick its ass.

CARMEN kneels to the ground. She grabs her cross from inside her shirt and begins to pray silently as the battle continues around her.

LAS PATRONAS grab hold of the claws and sides of the BEAST and begin to tilt it violently, back and forth to its side. The BEAST roars in agony. We suddenly hear the voice of MONSIGNOR ROMERO from the radio.)

LAS PATRONAS

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Testify for the innocent!

Testify for the innocent!

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

The tortured!

LAS PATRONAS

The tortured!

(The BEAST roars)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

The prisoner!

LAS PATRONAS

The prisoner!

(The BEAST roars)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

The murdered!

LAS PATRONAS

The murdered!

(The BEAST roars)

LAS PATRONAS

The IMMIGRANT!

(The BEAST gives one final giant roar. Until...GUNSHOT. BLACKOUT)

(A spotlight on CARMEN. SHE stands up slowly as lights come up on stage. SHE clutches to her wooden cross. We are back on the normal train, on top of the cargo container. The MIGRANTS all behind CARMEN giving their testimony to the audience.)

MIGRANTS

In the blink of an eye...

They would have raped her.

They could have *killed* her.

The train started rocking

Left and right

Right and left
They could have raped her
They would have *killed* her.
Left and right
RIGHT AND LEFT!
In the blink of an eye...
One lost its balance
One falls to the ground
As they fall
One grabs the leg of the other
One grabs the arms of the other
Out of nowhere...
The train started rocking
Left and right
RIGHT AND LEFT!
Was it the wind?
In the blink of an eye...
They are thrown off the train
Was it the wind?
Fall to their deaths
While the train is still moving
GUN SHOT!
They were going to rape her.
They were going to *kill* her.
It was...A MIRACLE!

CARMEN

(kneels to the ground in prayer. SHE looks above)
Monsignor Romero...*my blessed saint!*

MIGRANTS

In the blink of an eye...
We made it. We crossed the border
It was...A MIRACLE!

(Blackout.)

(Sound of the ocean. In the darkness, we hear a few seconds of the muted, almost underwater, sounds of 1st and 2ND ARCHANGEL calling for Monsignor Romero, as in ACT One.)

Scene 11

*Projection reads:
Usulután, El Salvador
2005*

(Lights up on stage. We are in a juvenile detention center. There are three jail cells with metal bars lined next to each other on stage. The space is dark and only the moonlight comes through small windows, high on the wall of each jail cell creating beautiful and mysterious shadows/silhouettes in each cell. The most lit cell is the one in the center where we see SANTIAGO, a fifteen-year-old *Mara Salvatrucha* gang member. He is shirtless and we can see his MS tattoo across his chest above another tattoo of a small cross. To his SR is the cell filled with countless MALE PRISONERS wearing head masks with fixed expressions. They are also shirtless and squeezed into the cage like sardines. There is no room for them to move so they remain heads pressed to the bars with their arms and hands sticking out through the metal bars. SL of SANTIAGOS is the other jail cell where we only see the silhouette of WILLIAM, a veteran MS gang member serving life in jail. We can never fully make out what he looks like, but his presence is *always* there. SANTIAGO begins to pace around in his cell.)

WILLIAM

What's wrong, son? You can't sleep?

(SANTIAGO remains quiet, pacing back and forth. He doesn't say anything.)

WILLIAM

You've been pacing back and forth for the past three hours.

(SANTIAGO remains quiet, pacing back and forth. Still he doesn't say anything.)

WILLIAM

You'd think tonight you'd get the best sleep, cause tomorrow *you* are a free man. (laughs) I guess it could go either way. Can't sleep cause you are praying for tomorrow to come already. Am I right?

(SANTIAGO remains quiet, pacing back and forth. Still he doesn't say anything.)

Nothing, huh? I can't sleep either. Guess we'll both be up tonight.

(SANTIAGO remains quiet, pacing back and forth. Still, he doesn't say anything.)

Son. I have something that might help you relax a bit.

(WILLIAM lights a cigarette from inside his cell. The light of the cigarette creates a nice shadow on his face. We still can't make out who it is. He approaches the jail bars, smokes the cigarette, and extends his hand out with the cigarette towards SANTIAGO's cell.)

Take it. For a restless night.

(SANTIAGO approaches the metal bars. He smells the cigarette smoke and extends his hand out, twisting his body to grab the offering. He grabs hold of the cigarette. Inhales and exhales. The lighting changes on stage. He gives it back to WILLIAM through the bars.)

SANTIAGO

Thank you. (exhales smoke)

WILLIAM

Keep it...now tell me, young man, what is weighing so heavy on your heart?

PRISONERS

Heavy on my heart.

(SANTIAGO realizing something has changed.)

SANTIAGO

What are you talking about? (laughs) There is nothing weighing on my heart. Excitement, I guess.

PRISONERS

Weighing on my heart.

(SANTIAGO approaches the bars certain he has heard something. He continues to smoke his cigarette becoming more relaxed each time he exhales.)

WILLIAM

Of course...and have you made a decision yet?

SANTIAGO

A decision?

PRISONERS

A decision.

WILLIAM

What have you decided?

SANTIAGO

What do you mean? There is nothing to—

WILLIAM
What keeps you up at night?

PRISONERS
Keeps me up at night.

SANTIAGO
Look man, I don't know what you are talking about.

WILLIAM
What weighs heavy on your heart?

PRISONERS
Heavy on my heart.

(SANTIAGO continues to smoke the cigarette. He continues to hear voices but can't make out where they are coming from)

WILLIAM
Do you *still* think it's the only way?

SANTIAGO
I don't know what's going on. *Who* are you?

WILLIAM
Is vengeance *all* you know? What about *forgiveness*?

PRISONERS
Vengeance! All I know.

SANTIAGO
Am I hearing things? What the hell is happening? (Inhales and exhales cigarette)

WILLIAM
Is murder the *only* way? What about human life?

PRISONERS
Murder! The *only* way.

WILLIAM
Are you willing to take someone's life...for vengeance...for power?

SANTIAGO
How do you *know* that?!

How does he know that?!
PRISONERS

What path will you take?
WILLIAM

What path will I take?
PRISONERS

Am I awake? Fuck. What is happening?! (slaps himself on the face)
SANTIAGO

Am I awake? (slapping themselves on the face)
PRISONERS

What choice will you make?
WILLIAM

Am I awake?
PRISONERS

How do you even know—what the hell?
SANTIAGO

What choice will you make?
WILLIAM

AM I AWAKE?!
PRISONERS

I...I haven't decided...I am not sure what to do—
SANTIAGO

I know what to do.
PRISONERS

I don't have a choice!
SANTIAGO

There is always a choice, *Santiago*.
WILLIAM

Wait. Do I know you? Have we—
SANTIAGO

PRISONERS
Met before? Have we met before?

WILLIAM
Santiago.

PRISONERS
He knows my name.

SANTIAGO
How do you know my name?!

WILLIAM
You are only fifteen. You run the gang from the outside with the other youth, while the adults, we are here. And now you are here too...in the inside. But tomorrow you return to the outside. And you have a choice to make. A war you are creating for yourself, young man.

SANTIAGO
No.

PRISONERS
Yes. (they smoke from the cell)

SANTIAGO
I'm not doing this to myself. There is a war out *there*!

PRISONERS
A war out there!

SANTIAGO
I am just trying to fight my way out of it. I'm trying to survive.

PRISONERS
A war out there!

WILLIAM
"Survive as a pacifist. Not because you can't fight, but because you prefer the power of peace. Live your life in peace."

SANTIAGO
Peace? What is that gonna do? (laughs)

PRISONERS
Peace! (they laugh)

WILLIAM

“Peace is not the silent result of violent oppression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.”

SANTIAGO

I don't know what peace is.

PRISONERS

I have only known *war*.

WILLIAM

“Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.”

SANTIAGO

If I don't take the hit someone else will have to. It won't save a life whether I do it or not.

WILLIAM

If you *don't* do it, *you* would have spared an innocent life. You are more than just their soldier.

SANTIAGO

This is who I am now. This is my destiny.

PRISONERS

What is my destiny?

WILLIAM

“Create your own future. If God has given you free will. Choose *not* to kill.”

SANTIAGO

You don't understand, I was born into this life.

PRISONERS

No one wants this life.

WILLIAM

“No one is born with inclinations to kidnap...”

SANTIAGO

It is too late to leave the gang now...even if I wanted to.

WILLIAM

“No one is born with inclinations to be a criminal...”

PRISONERS

Is it too late to leave the gang now? I *want* to!

WILLIAM

“No one is born to be a murderer.
We have all been born to be good,
To love one another,
To understand one another.
We are *all* called to holiness.”

SANTIAGO

How can you talk about love, when there is so much hate in the world?!

PRISONERS

Talk to me about love. (they smoke the cigarette as more smoke fills the stage)

WILLIAM

Let us not tire of preaching love...

SANTIAGO

And violence...and poverty...and corruption!

WILLIAM

It is the force that will overcome the world.

PRISONERS

Talk to me about love! (they smoke the cigarette as more smoke fills the stage)

WILLIAM

Let us not tire of preaching love.
Though we see the waves of violence
Succeed in drowning the fire of Christian love

SANTIAGO

Talk to me...about *love*. (smoke fills the stage)

WILLIAM

Love *must* win out; it is the *only* thing that can!

(the stage is filled with smoke. A door opens US. A bright light enters and spills on the stage. Two guards enter wearing grotesque masks. They open SANTIAGO's cell and take him out. He passes through WILLIAM'S cell and tries to approach the cell but is being pulled by the TWO GUARDS in the opposite direction.)

SANTIAGO

But what does that mean? How? How can it win? Tell me! Just tell me!

WILLIAM
He wants to forgive you. He wants to save you.

SANTIAGO
What?

PRISONERS
Forgive me! Save me!

SANTIAGO
Wait, wait!

WILLIAM
You too are called to forgiveness.

SANTIAGO
Tell me what to do! What should I do now??!!

WILLIAM
Renew, new wheat, newly sown crops, field still fresh from God's hands.

SANTIAGO
Wait! Wait! *Who are you?!*

(the guards pull SANTIAGO away from WILLIAM'S cell and push him through the door. The door shuts. Blackout.)

Scene 12

Projection reads:

STAGE IV:

SAINT

Present time

(Sounds of the ocean. A single spotlight on 1ST and 2ND ARCHANGELS who stand to the right and left of ROMERO wearing his traditional black priestly robe and red sash belt. 1ST ARCHANGEL hands ROMERO the wooden cross he took off in Act I. ROMERO hesitates at first. 1ST ARCHANGEL places the wooden cross in ROMERO's hands. ROMERO decides to take the cross and places it around his neck)

(1ST and 2ND ARCHANGELS begin to flap their wings as a powerful light emanates from their bodies. Lights up on stage. We are on the steps of the entrance of a small chapel. There is a beautiful door entrance US of the steps. The

ARCHANGELS and MONSIGNOR ROMERO walk up the steps and stop somewhere in the middle.)

1ST ARCHANGEL

We are finally here after all this time—

2ND ARCHANGEL

And you are here with *us* again.

1ST ARCHANGEL

You understand that we had no choice?

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

My friends--

1ST ARCHANGEL

We had to honor the order and the process.

2ND ARCHANGEL

What *they* wanted. What *they* called for.

1ST ARCHANGEL

It was time for you to return, Monsignor. We couldn't protect you any longer.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I understand....

2ND ARCHANGEL

He requested we bring you to him...*directly*.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Then I am ready to face him.

(The grand door opens, and a powerful bright light spills out onto the cathedral steps and the entire stage. In the light we see a silhouette of a figure. A man with powerful papier-mâché wings, larger and more breathtaking than those of the ARCHANGELS. The silhouette stands in the doorway.

The ARCHANGELS and ROMERO kneel to the ground in reverence to the figure in the doorway. It is FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE, the revolutionary priest and ROMERO's dear friend, but we do not know this yet.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

(still kneeling with his head down)

Forgive me, Father, for disobeying—

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

You refused the nomination granted by the Heavenly Courts of Justice.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Father, accepting the nomination would—

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

You were summoned to appear before us, and you refused to comply. Instead you chose to wander your own path...changing destinies, without consent, on mortal grounds.

(FATHER RUTILIO takes a step out of the doorway and towards MONSIGNOR ROMERO.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Father—

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

A serious violation and an insult to the sanctity of the process. The sacred honor bestowed upon you and to the blessed who *nominated* you.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

An honor I deemed I am not worthy of, Father.

(He continues to walk until he stands above MONSIGNOR ROMERO who is still kneeling with his head down.)

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

(standing directly above ROMERO)

An *honor*, you had *no right* to deny...But it is done and now the time has come...

(placing his hand on MONSIGNOR ROMERO's head)

please...stand.

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO lifts his head up and recognizes his good friend FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE standing above him. He has not seen FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE since he was murdered. MONSIGNOR ROMERO grabs RUTILIO'S legs and begins to weep in profound sadness. We have never seen him this broken. A few seconds pass. The ARCHANGELS stand beside FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE as MONSIGNOR ROMERO holds on tight to FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE's legs, weeping like a child.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

RUTILIO??! Is it you??! My dearest friend, it is *you!* I have missed you...Please forgive me! Forgive me, PLEASE forgive me! (weeping and holding on to FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE's legs)

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

Oscar. My brother.

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I tried. God help me, I *tried* to carry on your legacy. Your labor of justice, of love of peace. I tried to keep your spirit alive after your death...but I failed you, my friend. I failed you *too!*

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

My dearest friend. You could never fail me. Please—

(MONSIGNOR ROMERO stands up and is embraced by FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE.)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

I started a war. It's because of me that my people have suffered for so long. I was supposed to protect them. To save them. *All* of them. But all I have done is forsake them!

FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE

Monsignor Romero, your death did *not* start the war. Nor are you responsible for the suffering of our people, in your lifetime and even after your death. Don't you see? You have *never* abandoned the poor, the oppressed...in fact, you have *continued* to walk alongside them. And will continue to do so *forever* in this and all lifetimes...It is *not* the will of the Catholic Church...nor of the heavens...not even of God himself, but it is the will of the Salvadoran *people* who have proclaimed you a saint. It is the people, the same people you claim to have abandoned, who revere you as holy, as blessed, akin to our heavenly Father. You did not fail them. You spoke truth to power. You *empowered* them! That is why they killed you; your body. But they could not kill the voice of justice. Romero, you have resurrected through the people. Just as you promised.

(A spotlight appears on SAINT OSCAR ROMERO as all the "good" characters from the play enter the stage: EDUARDO, PEASANT WORKERS, STREET VENDORS, GINA, CARMEN, SANTIAGO, MIGRANTS, PRISONERS.)

(FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE cont.)

And despite your protest and interventions, the people's process has been fulfilled. It is the people who first made you a saint and it is the *people* who have spoken...Blessed *Saint* Oscar Arnulfo Romero of the Americas.

(FATHER RUTILIO and the ARCHANGELS kneel down in reverence to SAINT OSCAR ROMERO who stands in complete awe as his transformation to sainthood takes place. The people bring offerings and lay them by his feet, including candles, flowers, frames with photographs of loved ones, missing and murdered victims of the war, of gang violence, of poverty—as well as loved ones from the present time—pieces of food, wine, etc., that ultimately create a living altar around him. SAINT OSCAR ROMERO is moved by the showering of love. Once the people place an offering, they kneel on the steps surrounding SAINT OSCAR ROMERO as he stands in place. The last person to enter the stage places

a beautiful cardboard papier-mâché halo above SAINT OSCAR ROMERO as a bright light begins to emanate from his entire body. SAINT OSCAR ROMERO opens his arms, as saints often do, in a final embrace to the people who are kneeling around him. ROMERO has finally accepted the people's will. He is now a saint.

Spotlight on cardboard papier-mâché radio. ROMERO, the actor, stands still as a statue as we hear the following *real* recording of Romero's voice:)

MONSIGNOR ROMERO

Therefore, I call on you who make up this enormous multitude, who find themselves between the two extremes, to seek their place in order to participate in the common political work of our nation. Seek your vocation, and in the light of the word of God reflect. Now is the time when the people have to use their ingenuity and carry out new initiatives. It is not necessary to use established means. Rather there are other approaches where Christian inspiration can lead our deeply Christian people...the awakening of the people and the need for the organization and participation of the people so that they do not remain passive spectators, but rather become the architects of their *own* destiny.

(SAINT OSCAR ROMERO's light shines bright as lights slowly fade to black on the stage. Beautiful sounds of the ocean...Blackout. Curtain.)

END OF PLAY

CONCLUSION

In the morning, Nidia made me my favorite Salvadoran breakfast, fried plantains, black beans, and table cream. She told me she was my Nicaraguan mother and that I was her 'mija,' a popular term of endearment in Latin America meaning "my daughter." It was my third day in Costa Rica with Nidia, and we were enjoying a casual conversation filled with laughter and silliness (as we usually did before I started interviews for the day) when we heard a sudden loud crash outside. Nidia lived right across the street from a busy intersection. She recognized the sound as a bad car crash and began to pray.

In a matter of seconds, she rushed outside to offer her assistance. On her way out, she tells me "Tenemos que ayudar."³¹⁶ I nodded my head and quickly followed her outside to the scene of the car crash. We were both still in our pajamas when we got to the intersection and a small crowd has gathered to see the crash. There was a blue pickup truck and the driver still inside the car when we arrived. The other car involved in the accident was a white grocery delivery truck with most of its merchandise, crates and large boxes thrown all over the ground. The driver of the white truck was outside of his vehicle, seemingly unharmed but still angry and distressed, while the driver in the blue pickup truck was still in the driver's seat more visibly injured and in shock.

I stood close to the cross walk and heard the spectators complain about the dangerous intersection and how much they need a stop light to prevent more accidents from occurring. It appears this is a common occurrence in the neighborhood. When I turned toward Nidia, she was standing right outside the driver's door of the pickup truck with her hands over the driver's left forearm, praying. Her eyes were closed, and her head tilted down; the driver's eyes were closed, and he didn't seem to be bothered with Nidia touching him. I was so deeply moved by that moment, seeing Nidia praying over the driver. She is still the only person who has bothered to check in with the drivers interacting with them both.

After the prayer, Nidia rushed back to the apartment. I walked over to both drivers making sure everyone is okay and confirming that someone has called the ambulance. Nidia came back in what felt like seconds with a small bottle of alcohol and a bag of cotton balls. She dabbed the cotton balls with alcohol and gently pressed them on the driver's arm where he was bleeding from a small gash. The driver didn't budge and let Nidia take care of him, while we wait for the ambulance and police. He had yet to step outside of his vehicle and looked to be in more pain than we anticipated. Nidia rushed back to the house, one more time, this time I followed. She headed directly to the kitchen, grabbed a plastic glass and filled it with water. She ran outside to the car crash again and handed the glass of water to the driver. He took the glass and drank all of the water. He thanked Nidia for her help and the ambulance arrived.

316 My English translation, "we have to help."

Once the medics began to treat both drivers, and police arrived, Nidia and I headed back to her apartment. No one said anything about what just happened, and we sat to continue our breakfast. Our food was cold. Nidia began the conversation with a story about her children when they were young. I sat there eating my cold plantains, listening and laughing with Nidia, watching her in complete awe, marbled at her kindness and amazed by her genuine compassion for others.

This was Nidia, who was recently awarded the prestigious Prince Claus Awards of the Netherlands honoring her “progressive and contemporary approach to culture and development,”³¹⁷ and which, in her humble nature, she insisted no one make a big deal out of, nor did she conduct any interviews or engage in any press conferences or major celebrations. At that moment, I understood why Nidia was so deeply connected to Romero, why she has always followed his social and spiritual teachings of social justice and equality, why she revered and loved him the way she did. Nidia was a direct embodiment of Romero, and much like him, she was also a saint.

The Bread and Puppet’s *The Nativity* was the first documented theatrical work in the Americas that explored Romero’s claim to resurrection through radical puppet theatre, specifically *The Nativity* of 1985 which was the first production toured in Central America shortly after Romero’s death. And yet, *The Nativity* was not the last time performance would play a principal role in upholding and preserving Romero’s social justice legacy. This project analyses the role of performance, both as a theatrical act on the stage as well as a repeated series of behaviors, actions, and political and spiritual beliefs, which ultimately became effective vehicles to “resurrecting” Romero’s spirit long after his assassination in 1980. Through this comprehensive study, I unpack the following questions: How has the life and legacy of Archbishop Romero been “resurrected” through performance? In what ways can the Bread and Puppet Theater preserve Romero’s

317 “AV Design for Prince Clause Awards | Mr. Beam,” accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.mrbeam.com/work/prince-claus-awards/#:~:text=The%20Prince%20Claus%20Fund%20was%20established%20in%201996%2C,the%20culture%20and%20their%20society%20with%20exceptional%20work.>

teachings years after his death? How does a performance about Romero's life, death, and resurrection like *The Nativity* influence solidarity between Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE during times of civil unrest? What were the unique circumstances in which Romero's "resurrection" through *The Nativity* occurred and how did the participants interpret the political and personal significance of the performance? And lastly, how can the act of performing Romero's resurrection in a contemporary context through dramatic writing help interpret his claim to "resurrection"? In addition, I explore my relationship with Romero, and his continuous presence and impact in my personal, spiritual, and professional life. My study reveals that Romero's claim to "resurrection," a response to numerous death threats by the right-wing national guard, was not farfetched. As my study reveals, he has remained alive in the minds, hearts, and lives of people worldwide in exceptional and meaningful ways.

Beginning with the 1985 *Nativity* tour and theatrical performance, participants experienced Romero's spirit throughout the touring process and the Nicaraguan people, a unique performing experience heightened by the current Nicaraguan revolution. Following a historical contextual section, in chapter II, "Bread and Puppet Performs *The Nativity*, Nicaragua 1985," I create the first comprehensive theatre historiography using primary and secondary sources, still images from the only existing documentary on the tour, personal correspondence and journal entries, and in-person and virtual interviews with participants of the tour. My study reveals those participants, consisting of mostly North American Bread and Puppet company members as well as Nicaraguan and Costa Rican collaborators, were deeply impacted, politically, personally, artistically, and professionally by the 1985 *Nativity* tour experience. In this case, it was the theatrical

performance, along with the exceptional touring experiences, that “resurrected” Romero's spirit of “hope, revolution, truth, friendship, and love” (all themes addressed in the play) and was directly manifested in the unforgettable experience for tour participants.

The Bread and Puppet Theater, despite not having a specific religious affiliation, has maintained a longstanding relationship to Christian folklore, and consequently Romero’s social justice teachings (specifically liberation theology) are at the forefront of its praxis. Through autoethnographic methods used in my 2016 apprenticeship with Bread and Puppet (specifically field notes, interviews, and narrative and photo autoethnography), my study in Chapter III “*Cheapicity*, Communal Work, Collaboration: The Bread and Puppet Performs Liberation Theology” highlights specific acts of performance of liberation theology as praxis by the theatre staff and apprentices that uphold the Romero’s core values on the farm. In this chapter, I unpack *Cheapicity*, communal work, and collaboration as three critical Bread and Puppet Theater philosophies parallel to those of Romero and liberation theology, while still addressing the complexities and challenges of performances of liberation theology, specifically distribution of power on the farm and women's contributions to the company. As evident through my apprenticeship, Romero’s teachings of liberation theology are a central part of Bread and Puppet Theater history that recognizes the long-lasting significant impact of Latin American politics, like liberation theology, on the company. Thus, Romero’s legacy is upheld and maintained through the company’s creative praxis, political and ethical values, and social justice theatre work.

Bread and Puppet and MECATE’s performance of solidarity, throughout the *Nativity* tour of 1985 and in people's response to the Romero puppet, offers a successful

model for transnational solidarity activism in the context of post-revolution Nicaragua that also preserves Romero's legacy. In chapter IV, "Bread and Puppet Theatre and MECATE Perform Solidarity," I analyze U.S.-based Bread and Puppet's formation of solidarity with Nicaragua's MECATE and its citizens, as well as noteworthy moments of tension that occurred during the process. In this chapter, I draw from primary sources like interviews with Bread and Puppet company members and tour participants during geezer week and in Costa Rica with MECATE lead organizer, Bustos. Through the integration of social justice movement theory, like collective identity, master frameworks, and symbolic interactionism, I interpret examples of transnational solidarity activism that occurred during the tour, as well as Bread and Puppet's performance of affirming and maintaining its status as allies during the *Sandinista* movement. Despite facing several obstacles, like geographic distance and language barriers, Bread and Puppet and MECATE fostered a personal and working relationship that has been sustained for over thirty-six years. What is more, Romero's spirit of solidarity with the oppressed manifested throughout Bread and Puppet and MECATE's solidarity building, which was built on a foundation of comradery friendship, and love.

Through dramatic writing and performance, we can imagine and realize Romero's claim to "resurrection": "I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador." My fifth chapter "Voice of the Voiceless: Dramatizing Romero's Resurrection through Play," a full-length original play with music, puppetry, and projection, explores Romero's claim of resurrection through a contemporary context. I incorporate theatre historiography research methods and use primary and secondary sources, most importantly the most recent investigations of

Romero's assassination -- including the US-backed civil war of the 1980s and its role in Romero's murder -- the canonization process, as well as the subsequent impact on the region, to inform the narrative structure, characters and world of the play. In creating the play, I step into Romero's shoes and explore the realization of "resurrection" through various people, his personal struggles with canonization, as well as the manifestation of Romero's love and service for all oppressed people.

The recently canonized Saint Oscar A. Romero's claim to "resurrection" through the Salvadoran people was a performative act that ultimately served as both a symbolic and political victory for Saint Romero, all liberation theologians, the people of El Salvador, and social justice activists around the world, including Bread and Puppet Theater and MECATE. Though the U.S.-backed right-wing military were proven responsible for the assassination of Saint Romero's body -- and are yet to be held accountable -- they were not successful in killing Saint Romero's spirit and legacy. What is more, this study revealed Saint Romero's resurrection was evident, not only in the Salvadorans, but in people all around the world, including Nicaragua, all of Central America, the Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont, and my family in Los Angeles, as well as countless others worldwide who joyously celebrated Romero's canonization in 2018. Saint Romero will forever be alive in Bread and Puppet's 1985 *The Nativity*, the 20-foot Romero puppet, the tour participants' life-changing experiences, and the company's over sixty-six-year praxis, as well as transnational solidarity activism developed in partnership with MECATE, and now, this comprehensive study, including the *Voice of the Voiceless; the Romero Play*. Most importantly, Saint Romero is alive and

present within me, my social justice theatre work, artistry and scholarship, a direct manifestation of his eternal legacy.

San. Oscar A. Romero, Presente! Long live, Saint Oscar A. Romero!



Figure 85. Xiomara Cornejo sits in front of the Romero puppet at the Bread and Puppet Theatre in Glover, Vermont, July 2016.

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VITA

Xiomara Cornejo is a first-generation Salvadoran American theatre director, designer, dramaturg, and playwright from Compton, California. Her professional work includes theatre directing, after-school arts programming, Theatre of the Oppressed, and community arts organizing. Xiomara received a BA in Theater Directing/Performance from California State University Long Beach, an MA in Public Art Studies from the University of Southern California, and her Ph.D. in Theatre and Performance Studies from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For over eight years, Xiomara worked as a community organizer/supervisor under the Asset Based Community Development and Relationship-Based Community Organizing model and facilitated Neighborhood Action Councils (NAC) and after-school art programs with youth and adults throughout South Los Angeles. She designed and implemented social justice community projects, including theatre, art workshops, photography exhibitions, and street murals with community residents.

Xiomara's scholarship centers on protest and radical theatre history of the Americas, Latinx theatre, political puppetry, performance ethnography, dramaturgy, and projection design. Her research has received funding from the Mellon/American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Completion Fellowship in 2020, the John D. Bies International Research Travel Award, and the MU Dissertation Research Award in 2019.

In 2018, Xiomara was the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) National 1st Place Winner for her Dramaturgy on *Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parts 1, 2 & 3*. In 2017, Xiomara was the KCACTF National 1st Place Winner – Allied Crafts and Design for her Projection Design of *Good Kids*.