

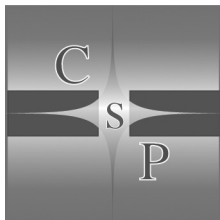
# Mediating Chicana/o Culture



Mediating Chicana/o Culture:  
Multicultural American Vernacular

Edited by

Scott L. Baugh



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Mediating Chicana/o Culture: Multicultural American Vernacular, edited by Scott L. Baugh

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## INTRODUCTION

# MEDIATING A VERNACULAR: CHICANA/O CULTURAL IDENTIFICATIONS AND AMERICAN MULTICULTURALISM

It is not easy writing this letter. It began as a poem, a long poem, I tried to turn it into an essay but the result was wooden, cold. I have not yet unlearned the esoteric bullshit and pseudo-intellectualizing that school brainwashed into my writing.

How to begin again. How to approximate the intimacy and immediacy I want. What form? —Gloria Anzaldúa (1983, 165)

We should test different forms, and combinations: didactic, documentary, symbolic, dramatic, *novelas*, serials, etc. The conflict between the artist and political activist is a particularly difficult one. Once the difference becomes ideological the artist finds it increasingly harder to resolve. It is difficult indeed for the artist to reconcile aesthetic sensibilities with political necessities.... to find our own unique idiom. —Francisco X. Camplis ([1975] 1992 295, 298)

[O]ne form of a Chicano vernacular, the verbal-visual codes we use to speak to each other among ourselves ... [*rasquachismo*] is rooted in Chicano structures of thinking, feeling, and aesthetic choice .... it is something of an insider private code. To name this sensibility, to draw its contours and suggest its historical continuity, is to risk betrayal. Yet, as the dimensions of *rasquachismo* expand to include public art, the private aspect of the sensibility alters, while remaining the same. The tension between public and private is central ... and the critical codifying of this phenomenon is but an extension of the paradox.... Turning inward to explore, decipher, and interpret elements from the Chicano cultural matrix, artists and intellectuals found strength and recovered meaning in the layers of everyday life practices. —Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (1991, 155-9)

In other words, folklore is of particular importance to minority groups such as Mexican Americans because their basic sense of identity is expressed in a language with an “unofficial” status, different from the one used by the official culture. —Américo Paredes (1982, 1)

We have not one movement but many.... Ours are individual and small group *movidas*, unpublicized *movimientos*—movements not of media stars or popular authors but of small groups or single *mujeres*....we and our *movimientos* are firmly committed to transforming all our cultures.... Even when our bodies have been battered by life, these artistic “languages,” spoken from the body, by the body, are still laden with aspirations, are still coded in hope and “*un desarme ensangretado*,” a bloodied truce.

—Gloria Anzaldúa (1990, xxvii, xxv)

How have I internalized my own oppression? How have I oppressed? Instead, we have let rhetoric do the work of poetry. Even the word “oppression” has lost its power. We need a new language....it is frightening to acknowledge that I have internalized a racism and classicism, where the object of oppression is not only someone outside my skin, but the someone inside my skin. In fact, to a large degree, the real battle with such oppression, for all of us, begins under the skin.

—Cherríe Moraga (1983, 30)

One day I'll jump  
out of my skin.

—Sandra Cisneros ([1984] 1991, 60)

The search continues for identity—for individual consciousness and for belonging and for strategies to sustain this pursuit. Perhaps within a hierarchy of needs, aligned with survival strategies in abeyance of terror and amidst everyday occurrences of violence and tyranny, remain methodologies (*transitory yet revolutionary*) surrounding the pursuit of humanistic consciousness. This pursuit, this search for identity and these revolutionary methodologies, can exist in the time and space of an activity or a text but also can resonate in considerations of the mediation of that activity or text. Content follows form, Marshall McLuhan has taught us. Mediating, all at once, is the means and mode of communicating and conveying information; it contains its own formative power; it enacts a negotiation or “middle position” among the ideas being communicated; and it embodies an “extension” of the mediator ([1964] 1994). While it seems clear that identities have been informed by social movements, indefatigable struggles for civil and political rights, less obvious are the processes of identity formulation and the discursivity that surrounds statements of identity or acts of identification. Twenty-first-century identity formulation is shaped by a growing self-awareness of authorship and audience, by profound intertextualities, and by digital-age convergences of technologies that allow rapid, near-global exchanges of information. At the same time, poststructuralism disavows the capacity of grand narratives and master theories

to “structure” all of this information. More to the point, current scholarly perspectives have placed relationships of signifier and signified in crisis and imbricated subjectivity and enunciation; they have undermined rationalist, “Western” epistemology; and, ultimately, drawing on humanity’s own ambivalence, its own contested desires and impalpable spiritualities, they have raised for question the very basis and logic of individual and collective identity. It is at this unique juncture—social, historical, theoretical, and discursive—where *Mediating Chicana/o Culture* begins. With critical eyes on a relatively wide and unconventional array of cultural topics, the chapters in this collection examine and interrogate the underlying tensions between personal expressions and public demonstrations in their on-going formulations and negotiations, their mediations, of Chicana and Chicano identities as part of a contemporary American multicultural vernacular.

Vernacular derives conceptually and semantically from Latin [*vernaculus* from *verna*, “estate-born slave”] and can refer to things *created by the slave born in the master’s house*. Within a conqueror’s imperial imagination, the vernacular hold an intractable stigma of being low and native, originating from those who speak a barbaric tongue and live according to base customs; and still, those individuals and their customs gain some cache of respect and valence simply for having been born within the master’s reach and purview. An enslaving legacy of Eurocentrism has dominated the political and cultural history of the Americas, landmarked by the Spanish conquest, Manifest Destiny, the creation of and policing along international borders, and myriad forms of institutionalized discrimination. To what extent, *Mediating Chicana/o Culture* asks, might personal expressions and public demonstrations—traversing a range of genre and media, radically fashioning socio-linguistic codes and multiply discursive modes—reappropriate a vernacular<sup>1</sup> that decolonizes this legacy, constructing a forum for traditionally muted voices to call out and be heard?

The mid-sixteenth-century conquest of Mexico marks the fall of an Aztec empire and the rise of another, decidedly Eurocentric empire, a “New Spain” in design. This conqueror’s history is often mythologized around leading figures: Cortes, military “captain” and diplomat, en route to claiming American lands, enslaves Nahuatl princess, La Malinche, who is Christianed Doña Marina, complies with the overthrow of the indigenous societies, bears the first *mestizo* child, Don Mahin Cortes, and from whom springs generations of contentiously wrought American identities, *los chingados*. Mexico’s nationhood and Mexican citizenship frame particular issues up to and beyond the nineteenth century, especially as patrilineal imperialism conceived an “official” American discourse around Western epistemology, Eurocentric systems of communication, Spanish and English languages, and Catholic and Protestant religions. With a pen’s stroke across the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe in 1848, tens of thousands

Mexican citizens instantly were enveloped by an expansionist cause, as portions of the present-day states of California, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico joined Texas in ceding to the westward reaching United States. Over the next half century, ethnocentric and racist discrimination against natives of the newly acquired territories and their families persisted, at times scaling inhumane levels of brutality. While there were occasional retaliations and even slightly more solidified counterattacks by nativist vigilante groups (consider the White Caps, *las Gorras Blancas*, in late-1880s New Mexico), equally significant responses took shape in independently written accounts of the events; in nearly silent performances of ideologically bent detachment from the dominant culture; and in day-to-day subsistence in the face of such mistreatment. By the time of the 1910 revolution, Mexicans returning to *el Norte* carried a stigma of being “foreign,” crossing a line of demarcation that would resonate deafeningly with state-political and cultural-figurative implications over the next century. Mexican (im)migrants and native inhabitants of these American borderlands continue to suffer the burdens of colonization, contrapositionally, within the homeland of Aztlán.<sup>2</sup>

The cultivation of *mexicanidad*—*lo mexicano* folklore and a reappraisal of those things as part of Mexico’s beauty, *Mexico lindo*—especially in the southwestern United States flourished in the 1920s and 1930s as part of *el México de afuera* or “another Mexico.” These cultural trends gravitated by the middle of the century toward the acceptance of a distinction: a sense of obligation to and pride in Mexican heritage at the same time as an adoption of U.S. citizenship and tradition. Mexican Americanism, then, generally balanced assimilation and acculturation with politically based mobilization efforts, especially centered around community organizations—from local and grassroots groups throughout the United States and parts of Mexico to LULAC. By the 1960s, as some leaders of the Mexican American era including Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez met an emerging, especially youthful generation dissatisfied with the “dignified” but slow-moving approaches of previous generations, a wave of pragmatic radicalism swept the American socio-political and cultural landscape. *Chicanismo*<sup>3</sup> was born of a “militant ethos” that combated the mistreatment and discrimination through openly aggressive resistance to tradition and apparatuses of mainstream society.<sup>4</sup> In many cases, to the exclusion of other facets, militancy and resistance have become key definitive characteristics of Chicano culture (and for scholarship on Chicano culture) beginning in the 1970s and carrying forward to today.

Initial attempts to review this one hundred and fifty years and to define the “Mexican American experience” call attention to the paradoxical failings of American democratic ideals including U.S. constitutional rights, civil liberties, religious freedoms, and free enterprise, even as a general tendency essentializes

Chicano identity around its oppositionality to a mainstream culture.<sup>5</sup> Only recently have cultural studies begun to reevaluate the significance of nationalist resistance and coordinative survival strategies, *movidas*, by exploring the wealth of diverse themes and forms within Chicana and Chicano cultural topics and even re-envisioning the terms of academic studies.<sup>6</sup>

This collection aims to join the debate led by *Chicano Renaissance: Contemporary Cultural Trends* (2000), edited by David R. Maciel, Isidro D. Ortiz, and María Herrera-Sobek. While foregrounding the history of resistance as key to affirmation of Chicano identity, the introduction to *Chicano Renaissance* indicates the manner in which the study of untraditional (disciplinarily<sup>7</sup> speaking, especially) topics of scholarship fairly and significantly “offers conflicting answers” to the co-optation of the Chicano counterculture by the mainstream (xxii); in this bifurcated paradigm, however, “assimilation” into and institutionalized “commodification” by the dominant mainstream perhaps overshadow an even fuller range of socially transformative processes. In their more specifically focused volume, Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell in *Looking High and Low* (1995) insightfully propose that art (and aesthetic production, more generally) enacts social and cultural processes that tie directly to national constructions and ethnic identities, even while the editors insist that the volume embodies an “intervention” against the institutions of the “art culture system,” attempting to redress the “disjunctions between people and objects” that result from dichotomized aesthetic categories and the “low” from “high” divisions (2-11). Seeing Chicana/o culture and literature as a “matrix” of “collisions, disjunctures, cohesions, and hybridizations,” *Decolonial Voices* (2002), edited by Arturo J. Aldama and Naomi H. Quiñonez, places a premium on the diversity of interdisciplinary topics (including focus on gendered bodies and reclamation of bordered spaces) that advance the “messages” surrounding “*mestizaje* consciousness” (2).

*Mediating Chicana/o Culture* extends the significant questions posed in these exceptional studies as well as in the body of contemporary scholarship on Chicana/o culture<sup>8</sup> by drawing on a range of *revolutionary methodologies* that transcend disciplinary categorization and inquiry—Gloria Anzaldúa’s redrawing of *la Frontera* and *mestizaje* (1987), Emma Perez’ imagining of “third space” (1999), Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith’s heterogenizing autobiographical subjectivity (1992), Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s disclosing of *rasquache* sensibility (1991), Alfred Arteaga’s articulating of quotidian Chicano discourse (1997), Chela Sandoval’s mapping of “differential consciousness” (2000), among them. This collection closely reads a variety of processes that promote openly and self-consciously shifting points of reference for identification that seem built into the performative acts, the material culture, and discursivity of identifying—individually (bodily, personally, locally) and coalitionally (nationally, globally).

Individual chapters, then, both employ and critically lay bare the methodologies of identity formulation, disclosing the very processes of mediating cultural identification. As one frame of reference, for example, James C. Scott suggests that public statements and actions (“performances”) made in socially modulated persona disguise authentic identities of those involved in power-laden relationships (and all relationships are power-laden in some manners—slave-and-master, conqueror-and-conquered, colonizer-and-decolonized); while under different kairos and constraints of power, these same individuals transmit and enact “hidden transcripts” (“off-stage” remarks, gestures, activities, dress, even existence itself) that betray the actual power relations and can erode the foundations of domination (1990, 1-16).

The revolutionary methodologies examined and employed in *Mediating Chicana/o Culture*, among other things, offer a reorientation of critical discourse analysis significantly different from established ethnographic studies<sup>9</sup> by emphasizing figurations of “internal” and “external” distinctions even as they complicate this dichotomization. As such, chapters are organized into two sections: the first, “Discursive Bodies, Bodily Discourses,” proposes conceptualizations of the body and various discursive relationships surrounding the body or embodied in manifestations of “self”; where the second section, “Public Testimonials, Honorable Demonstrations,” builds on the first by problematizing notions of authorship and textuality surrounding testimonials, public demonstrations, material production and interaction, and performances. Initially, readers might recognize a continuum, personal to public, across these two sections, but in their intermingling of decolonizing methodologies, chapters offer unique perspectives through which to view Chicana and Chicano cultural studies and individual-collective matrices of representation and identification. Across the range of chapters, the “spaces” in which Chicana and Chicano culture exists (the body and its spiritual, psychic, and material manifestations, as well as sources of literal and figurative nourishment of the individual and community), the “placement” from which these topics might be viewed (especially given figurations and transfigurations of “borders,” northern exposures, and southern vantages), and the many “languages” and codes of communication surrounding Chicana and Chicano culture provide cues for analyzing the interactions of individual and group dynamics within Chicana and Chicano cultural identifications. Several chapters question textual-generic categorization, particularly given assumptions surrounding ethnography, biography, autobiography, and testimonial/*testimonio*.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, of particular importance, many of the chapters in this collection follow the lead of the finest scholarship on Chicana art and literature—from Gloria Anzaldúa and Judy Baca, for example, to the Latina Feminist Group—placing a concentration on gender and sexuality revolving around Chicana and Chicano cultural

identification. Thus, this collection aims to advance the parameters of Chicana/o cultural studies by reviewing and challenging the very terms in question—the message, the media, and literal and figurative *mediations*—while it equally recognizes and operates around the delimitations of potentially neo-colonizing factors associated with late-capitalist “postmodern” American multiculturalism.<sup>11</sup>

Multiculturalism, especially as a term within scholarly discussions of American culture and alongside notions of popular and mass-media cultures, has fallen in and out of favor over the last few decades and educes a great deal of controversy and debate.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps a critical multiculturalism, especially in conversation with postcolonial notions of vernacular, can orchestrate effectively current technologies and multiply mediated discourses to respond to the types of domination—whether social, cultural, economic—precisely by allowing greater access to the means of production, expression, and demonstration, in many cases outside the strictures and constraints of tradition. Further, critical multiculturalism, harboring much of the dynamism of current social theories on hybridity and liberal pluralism, balances the exigencies of individual need for singularity in congruence with coalitional value sharing of communities and nation in shifting geographies and polyvalent grammars of identity. Consider, for example, that hybridity theories alone, according to Robert Young among others, ironically retain and can emphasize notions of racial purity (1995, 8-11) and might overlook precisely the discontinuities and, in Floya Anthias’ words, the “translocational,” “multiple belongings” associated with contemporary identity formulation (2001, 625-6, 633-5).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, connotations of vernacular lend critical multiculturalism a significant sense of decolonization—to translate “official” discourse, dismantle dominant apparatuses, and defuse instruments of oppression. *Mediating Chicana/o Culture*, admittedly and self-consciously, proposes no single answer to these complex questions, enters no radical jargon as a panacea, but does provide a forum for critical investigation of many of these convoluted and compelling issues, especially surrounding Chicana and Chicano cultural identifications within a multicultural American vernacular. And a final comment on language in this collection: per current formatting convention, non-English-language text appears italicized, indicating to a certain extent the multiplicity of languages in this study. Also, though, because several of the chapters in this collection make use of unpublished interview material and various testimonials, italicization sometimes is used to highlight this material, accentuating its revelatory and revolutionary status, within the individual-collective interchanges and mediating processes so central to this collection and in between, perhaps, traditionally understood “primary” and “secondary” sources; these instances are noted within particular chapters for further clarification.

## Overview of Chapters

Victor A. Sorell leads off the collection by contextualizing Chicana/o studies with background information that further extends the historical coverage on *Chicanismo* initiated above in the introduction. His chapter, “Illuminated Handkerchiefs, Tattooed Bodies, and Prison Scribes: Meditations on the Aesthetic, Religious, and Social Sensibilities of Chicano *Pintos*,” particularly foregrounds Chicana/o identity around art, social institutions (at the “intersection” of the *barrio* and the prison), social movements (especially *el movimiento Chicano* and workers’ strikes), and spirituality. In this nexus of religious, socio-political, and aesthetic forces, “popular arts” like the mural, graffiti writing, and, even more particularly, the handkerchief and tattoo offer means of identity formulation. And with concentration on the artwork of Chicano prisoners/*pintos*, Sorell theorizes how handkerchiefs (*pañó* cloths and clothing) and tattoos enact surrogate “skins” for the inmate-*bato loco*’s body and consciousness. As such, religious iconography (across the aesthetic currents of *rasquachismo* and “outsider” art) provides survival strategies for artist-prisoners in the inhumane environment of the prison and *barrio*. Sorell presents evidence across a full catalogue of types and modes of *pañó* production, and in their collective sentiments, the personal and distinct artwork of Chicano prisoners transforms into “revelatory testimonials” that inspire faith and love and demonstrate, publicly, redemptive functions of art.

Jon D. Rossini’s “Radiohead on the Border: Geography and Desire in *El Paso Blue*” continues this section on body and discourse by reading in Octavio Solis’ play and the performative potential of the character of Duane, who transmits open airwaves through a plate in his head and dramatizes a polyphony of voices across a maze of desires. In particular, Duane’s characterization, Rossini argues, mirrors the vernacular power of the blues score to delve deeply into the interactivity of the borderland space of the play’s locale, El Paso, Texas, the various journeys across this geography, and, even more specifically, the ambivalent desires—romantic, familial, national-cultural, capitalistic, humanistic—of the Mexican, Chicana, Chicano, and Anglo-American characters of *El Paso Blue*.

Michelle Johnson Vela’s “Bridging the Borderlands/Navigating the ‘Self’ in Chicana Life Writings” also examines literal and figurative iterations of *la frontera*/the borderlands though with a more direct reading of “selfhood” and Chicana (and Chicano) cultural identity. Close reading of life writings by Mary Helen Ponce and Elva Treviño Hart fills a much needed gap in the scholarship on Chicana literature, and in Johnson Vela’s provocative interpretation, the process of writing sacredly private details for each of these two women places her in relation to her environment, which illustrates a consciousness-building

address and helps her overcome past challenges, locate an autonomous voice, and reaffirm a sense of community.

“*Sin Vergüenza: Resisting Body Shame in Real Women Have Curves and Caramelo*” by Jeff Berglund and Monica Brown takes up the thread with popular representations of Chicanas overcoming challenges. This chapter offers close reading of the script characterization and cinematic adaptation of *Real Women*’s teen-aged lead, Ana (played by America Ferrera), alongside Sandra Cisneros’ young *Caramelo* heroine, Celaya. Conceptualized across a complicated array of texts and narrative devices, shame is burdened upon these two Chicana protagonists on the basis of their gendered-bodily form—image, in terms of weight and appeal; sexuality, as they are growing into womanhood and their own desires. These two works, then, offer alternatives to the cultural-based narratives and narratologies of shame associated with Chicanas, and women in general, as Ana and Celaya use modes of storytelling (embedded within multiple textual codes and narrative levels) to displace shame and relocate agency. The two chicanas claim their multicultural identities and offer their authors’ and readers’ multicultural identifications.

The last chapter in section one, Carole Counihan’s “Food as Mediating Voice and Oppositional Consciousness for Chicanas in Colorado’s San Luis Valley,” provides a crucial pivot for the collection, bridging the seemingly more “internalized” bodily discourses/discursive bodies to the seemingly more “externalized” behaviors and artifacts associated with Chicana and Chicano identification. As a result, food appears as material culture worthy of cultural-anthropological study at the same time it nourishes the corporal body, socio-political being, and spirit. And just as earlier chapters prove that personal expressions can offer individual and collective affirmation, Counihan’s and subsequent chapters show personal associations and attachments to testimonials, public performances, and honorable demonstrations. Locating her case in the San Luis Valley in Southern Colorado, Counihan transcribes interview material centered on food-oriented life histories that help promote progressive Chicana identifications. More particularly, in this chapter Counihan demonstrates through the life narrative of one such Chicana from the town of Antonito how the familial and commercial connotations of food preparation, the meal itself, and the variety of narratives that surround these foods and foodways can act as Latina *testimonios*, political demonstrations, at the same time they equally give way to individuated self expression. Combining a Marxist-feminist framework with an application of theories of “differential consciousness” to the food-centered life history reveals challenges to the split of reproduction and production. The results, Counihan finds, include both individual and coalitional modes of consciousness building and improved egalitarian relationships within the family and across this multicultural *fronterizo* community.

Initiating the book's second section and extending the discussion of food's discursivity and modes of consciousness, "Steinbeck's Many Languages: Foodways, *Curanderismo*, Femininity, and Heteroglossia in *Zapata*" by Sally M. Giles closely reads the unorthodox literary text of John Steinbeck's memoir and script—a text that, after much revision, eventually inspired a filmic depiction of Emiliano Zapata, *Viva Zapata!* Analyzing polyphony and the linguistic mix surrounding female characters treated by this text, Giles explains that, in spite of its author's canonical status, ideological-cultural "languages" emerge and advance conflicted constructions of Chicana and multicultural American femininity, updating and redressing views of a homogenous mainstream. Moreover, the processes of centralization and decentralization in the food-oriented and curative stories of female characters in *Zapata* emulate modulations of Chicana and Chicano cultural identification in a multicultural America.

Like foods' and cures' figurations of sustenance and rebalance, devotional votives offer profound interstitial relationships among faith, physical existence, and our environments and, thus, can serve especially effectively as multimedia statements on multicultural American identity. Echoing the spiritual explorations and the recovery of psychic dimensions of previous chapters, Cecilia Olivares' "Seeking Divine Intervention: Votive Iconography and Processes of U.S.-Mexican Migration" examines the special example of the border ex-voto at San Juan de los Lagos, votives left by migrants during their journeys in the borderlands. Olivares closely reads two ex-votos left in devotion of Our Lady of San Juan as an act of spiritual thanksgiving and religious convention. And yet, Olivares insightfully argues, these texts provide equally valuable testimonial of the social constraints felt by migrants (especially the Mexican crossing the border north), displace elements of Eurocentric domination across the Americas, and rebalance questions surrounding im/migration and transgression.

"The Heart's Sweatshop': Weaving Poetries of Witness in *The Devil's Workshop*" by Jeanetta Calhoun Mish pays critical attention to the poetry collection by Demetria Martínez and, as in earlier chapters, addresses a specific need in scholarship on Chicana literature. Calhoun Mish first analyzes *The Devil's Workshop's* prosodic modes across a public-private continuum and shows that they ultimately dismantle this polar structure as well as certain binary thematic notions such as birth-death, celebration-sorrow, reason-feeling, and, synthetically and most significantly, community-individual. Martínez's poetry, Calhoun Mish persuasively reads, invokes the Latin American tradition of *testimonio* as it applies metaphors that witness injustices and enact holistic healings. As a result, Martínez's "postmodern poetries of witness" demand that

there are no qualitative differences between individual suffering and healing and those on a communal, national, or global scale.

Celia Álvarez Muñoz' multimedia installation work provides discursive sites of investigation in Asta Kuusinen's "The Machine in the Desert: Decolonial History and *El Limite*." Reading the image of the locomotive alongside historical and historiographic cues of American imperialism and aesthetics of epic style, Kuusinen insightfully shows how Álvarez Muñoz' installation displaces dominant "official" history (specifically grounded in the El Paso-Juarez international exchange) through her visual and verbal imagery (specifically related to her family's past), decolonizing history's hold on her, her family's, and her community's transnational identities. Employing a "decolonial imaginary," the installation relocates historical discourse from the public sphere to the private sphere of the artist and her family; furthermore, Kussinen argues, this becomes part of a multiplicity of perspectives that help to shape bases of knowledge and a broader, more diverse American history.

The penultimate essay, "*Hecho en Mexico*, @cross 'Digital Divides': Border Graffiti and Narrative-Cinema Codes in *Una Ciudad's* City," also looks at the interchange—historical, cultural, economic, political—along the border, specifically grounded in Fran Ilich's conceptualization of San Diego-Tijuana as not only "one city," but "the 'i' city"—and "tagged" as such. Ilich's most recent moving-image-and-sound art addresses digital-age American transnationalism, but by looking back to his mid-1990s video aesthetic as typified in "*Una Ciudad sin Estilo*" viewers "browse" a video-digital inter-code in diegetic and paradietic forms of graffiti writing. Graffiti showcase individual writer's styles at the same they unite a crew of writers, offering individual-coalitional identification; moreover, as it is first lensed in video and later adapted to a web-based aesthetic, graffiti writing encodes viewers into this narrative's borderless, deterritorialized American city-space. And just as the collection opened with historical backgrounds on *Chicanismo* and popular arts, this chapter bookends that discussion and further foregrounds the texts and the forms by which American, Chicana, and Chicano identity might be mediated. It is in this broader context that we turn to the final chapter in the collection.

Fernando Delgado offers a coda to this orchestration of vernacular studies with his chapter, "Being Mexican: The Irony of U.S. Soccer's Home-Field Advantage." With rich implications, reaching back to the contest of identities, national-cultural narratives, and "internal colonialism" surrounding U.S., Mexican, Chicano, Chicana, and multicultural American formulations since *el movimiento*, Delgado closely reads the 2006 World-Cup showdown between the Mexico and U.S. teams. Nationalism and cultural resistance survives in certain contexts, to be sure, especially in confrontation of the "myth of assimilation." Understanding the global soccer phenomenon, according to Delgado, provides

unique frameworks by which citizenship and nationhood may be analyzed, especially when grounded in the economic, political, social, and cultural confluences across the Americas. These issues, Delgado reveals, are only magnified by current-technological means of information and value sharing—cable television, satellite transmission, the Internet. Boundaries have grown permeable, identity and culture remain fluid, and social activities such as a soccer match can mediate an affirmation of self and community in our digital-aged, multicultural America.

*Mediating Chicana/o Culture* presents a challenge—to traditions and to traditional scholarship. Just as the opening epigraphs reflect a history of dialogue on the benefits and obstacles of studying Chicana and Chicano identity formulation and multicultural American expression and demonstration, the following pages hope to extend this dialogue by reading closely methodologies of identifying and processes of mediating identification. No one language nor code, no one methodology nor form can adequately resolve all of the issues related to the search for human consciousness and belonging. Still, the search continues for identity.

## Notes

I would like to thank Sara Spurgeon, Mike Borshuk, and Jon Rossini for their input to an early version of this introduction, for which I accept sole responsibility [c/s]. I also would like to acknowledge Víctor A. Sorell, Asta Kuusinen, and Kirk St. Amant, who offered valuable leads on sources used in the research on introductory material.

<sup>1</sup> Consider definitive conceptualizations of “vernacular” by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988) and Houston A. Baker, Jr. (1984), helping to redirect African American literary studies. Of particular importance, notice that Baker describes his methodological point of view as “suspended” between traditional schools of thought; moreover, Baker’s vernacular—the blues, specifically: a “synthesis” and “multiplex, enabling *script*”—serves as a “matrix” from which cultural translations and interpretations may grow (1984, 2-7). Gates, too, acknowledges a vernacular as a translational code, one in which strict semiotics break down by the “sheer play of the signifier” (1988, 63, 251). More recently, in their coverage of the marginalized culture of Japanese American “localized” communities, Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop theorize a “vernacular discourse” comprised of multiple layers of textuality that “upend[s] essentialisms, undermine[s] stereotypes, and eliminate[s] narrow representations of culture” (1995, 20, 25).

<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance on this point, refer to the first edition of Rodolfo Acuña’s *Occupied America*, which definitively articulates the “internal colonial” model (1972). In subsequent editions, this model significantly loses much of its radical Chicano-nationalist urgency from the 1972 edition.

<sup>3</sup> A note on the variety of labels and terms used in this introduction, throughout the collection, and throughout scholarship: “*Chicanismo*” is a term that can reference a philosophical attachment and allegiance to ideals and aspects of Chicana and Chicano culture. One evocatively impacted definition of “Chicano/Chicana” reads: “Mexican

American, but with special meaning” (Polkinhorn 1986, 18). This entry further suggests historical-linear digressions for the terms: “In the 1920s and 1930s it was an in-group term used by Americans of Mexican descent to refer to themselves and was not derogatory. Some time afterwards the meaning changed and became somewhat disrespectful. During this period Mexican Americans, as well as other Latinos, were calling themselves ‘Spanish,’ and their goal was assimilation into dominant Anglo culture. In the late 1960s Chicano began taking on its present meaning, that is, identification with the whole movement toward improving the socio-economic status of Mexican Americans, mainly through political activism and cultural awareness. Although today [mid 1980s] Chicano stands for such positive concepts as racial/cultural pride, autonomy, political power, and social equality, some Mexican Americans still find it an uncomfortable term” (Polkinhorn 1986, 18). “Chicana” and “Chicano,” owing to Spanish/Mexican linguistic heritage, are gendered terms, often typifying or qualifying things or people. “Chicana/o” has been used in scholarly and some other contexts as an attempt to conflate or erase the masculine and feminine differences in the terms, and the untraditional use of feminine first, one might see, redresses patriarchal associations with the original difference—and, rarer, “Chican@” for the same purpose but with an entirely different typography, perhaps more technologically aware and with a currently radical connotation. Most basically, “Chicana,” “Chicano,” and “Chicana/o” traditionally refer to an American citizen who resides in the United States and was born in Mexico and/or is a descendent of someone born in Mexico. These three terms are in some respects synonymous with “Mexican American,” though allowing shifts in meaning depending on the historical context and ideological perspective. “*La Chicánada*” and “*La Raza*” are equally important terms that suggest group dynamics and unity through cultural awareness and individual consciousness outside the bounds of State-politics and nationalisms; of particular interest, consider José Vasconcelos’ classic statement on *la raza cósmica*, the cosmic race ([1925] 1997). “Mexican national” and “Mexican” can refer to one who retains Mexican national citizenship regardless of where that person momentarily resides. One might also consider the multiple biases invested in the term “*pocho*,” which can describe something that has lost color or has “faded” but, when used to describe a person, carries the pejorative association of a Mexican or person of Mexican heritage who has lost cultural identification especially through an appreciation of mainstream North American and United States social aspects; particularly, one dictionary defines “*pocho*” as a “gringoized Mexican,” but is synonymous with “Mexican-American, Chicano” (Galván 1996, 162). Importantly, “America” and “American” are used throughout this collection in a continental context, drawing attention to their differences from state-political nomenclature—“United States,” “Estados Unidos,” “Mexico,” for example. “Latina” and “Latino” are widely used terms currently, which can reference more broadly and inclusively to Americans of Mexican, Central American, South American, and Spanish/American heritage. To be sure, these are important concepts and can be misleading and confusing. Several of the chapters in this collection aim, rather than to pin these complex concepts to any one singularly defined term, to propose more openly shifting terms and to place emphasis on the dialogue and *mediations*, themselves. Perhaps, one of the casualties of the “culture wars” over the last three decades, oversimplifying all-crucial human worldviews and life-affirming value systems into, seemingly, two camps in battle for political and moral high ground, has

been these types of terms of debate. Quite literally, the debate over the words we use to carry these conversations has removed us in some significant ways away from the concepts behind the terms and the importance of exchanging ideas and perspective with others and clarifying our own, all paramount to humanism.

<sup>4</sup> Ignacio M. García's *Chicanismo* contextualizes the founding of Chicano culture around the "forging of a militant ethos" (1997), and Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera describe U.S. imperialism as a social and cultural "poison" (1972, 74). Consider also Juan Gómez-Quiñones' *Chicano Politics* (1990) and F. Arturo Rosales' *Chicano!* (1997), among a host of valuable historical resources on the militant aspect of Chicano culture. Mario T. García uses the militant connotation of the "Chicano Generation" precisely to define the "Mexican American Generation" preceding it (1989, 16-8).

<sup>5</sup> Among the earliest and most influential postcolonial social theories, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 1967) and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* ([1957] 1965) initiates an antithetical conceptualization of colonizer to colonized.

<sup>6</sup> One noteworthy exception to the early scholarship on "the Mexican American experience" can be read in Joan W. Moore and Alfredo Cuéllar's *Mexican Americans* (1970); in a strikingly progressive move, its epilogue points to the "contradictions" that are bound into Mexican Americanism and the need for scholarship to pay critical attention to the "diversity" of Chicana and Chicano identities (159).

<sup>7</sup> Consider George Lipsitz' explanation for what he calls the "anthropological turn" within American studies over the last few decades (2001). The use of mixed methodologies, for Lipsitz and scholars from across cultural studies, provides access to the "microsocial" and "macrosocial" movements, to "sites for the transformation of individual and collective consciousness" (57-69, 117-9). Consider also the irony of the neocolonizing effect of bound disciplines shaping Chicana/o studies through the rubric of cultural studies (Chabram-Dernersesian 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Among current scholarship on Chicana/o culture, see Charles Tatum's *Chicano Popular Culture* (2001), which provides a highly accessible orientation to a catalogue of topics. For a broader but comparable context to the present volume, consider Cordelia Candelaria, Peter C. García, and Arturo J. Aldama's *Encyclopedia of Latino Popular Culture* (2004), Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero's *Latino/a Popular Culture* (2002), Bill Beezley and Linda A. Curcio-Nagy's *Latin American Popular Culture* (2000), Eva P. Bueno and Terry Caesar's *Imagination beyond Imagination* (1998), and William Rowe and Vivian Schelling's *Memory and Modernity* (1991).

<sup>9</sup> Ethnographic discourse analyses broadly tend to follow one of two trends: structuralist and, later, deconstructionist approaches to critiques of dominant "official" discourse (think about, for example, Habermas to Lyotard, or early to late work by Geertz, Foucault, and Barthes); a parallel trend recovers traditionally "marginalized" discourses. The bulk of these studies, though, tend to focus on polarized social relations or inter-group power structures to the detriment of an understanding of individuated identity and precisely the interplay within individual-collective identity formulation. Florencia E. Mallon, in outlining postcolonial (and possibly postmodern neo-colonial) forces of ethnic nationalism, points out that identity based on (racial, ethnic, cultural, e.g.) "authenticity" *and*, somewhat paradoxically, "marginality" is essentializing and

closes pathways to “more flexible and contingent approaches” to our questions of identity (1996, 171-2, 174).

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the breakdown of traditional genre categorization, see, for example, John Beverly’s *Against Literature* (1993), Ellen McCracken’s *New Latina Narrative* (1999), as well as the collection of arguments in Marjorie Perloff’s *Postmodern Genres* (1989).

<sup>11</sup> Of course, Frederic Jameson’s discussion of late-capitalist postmodernism comes to mind (1991).

<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, the decision to use this term of reference over admittedly equally valid terms for this collection’s title grew into a matter of discussion and healthy dissent among some of the contributors. Definitive scholarship on multiculturalism includes Will Kymlicka’s *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (1989) and Iris Marion Young’s *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). Of special interest, also see Brian Barry’s controversial *Culture and Equality* (2001) and the discussions it spawned, several of which collected in *Multiculturalism Reconsidered*, edited by Paul Kelly (2002). Fair criticism points to the manner in which aspects of “Americanization” might be viewed within a network of popular-cultural processes of domination, most significantly maligning genuine liberal democratic (class- and gender-oriented, etc.) impulses and transfusing racial diversity and multi-ethnic social composition in the manner of a world-scale, capitalist-corporate takeover. In the view of some critiques, the expansion of popular/mass culture inherently and insidiously maintains legacies of oppression derived through conquest, though updating (in newer forms, mostly) colonialism through commodification and desires of consumption. See Dominic Strinati’s discussion of mass/popular cultural critiques (1995), which makes references to Duncan Webster’s *Looka Yonder* (1988) and Dick Hebdige’s *Hiding in the Light* (1988). In addition to the reservations over cultural imperialism, critiques of multiculturalism insist that, semantically, the term advances exclusively the uniqueness of minority groups and merely their differences apart from the mainstream, separating rather than uniting disparate segments of a society.

<sup>13</sup> Readers might consider the interaction of Stuart Hall’s body of cultural studies, Roland Robertson’s conceptions of globalization, and Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system model in *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System*, artfully managed by Anthony D. King (1997). Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* importantly points to ambivalence as a key to postcolonial identity formulation (1994).

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## Section I: Discursive Bodies, Bodily Discourses

## CHAPTER ONE

VÍCTOR A. SORELL

# ILLUMINATED HANDKERCHIEFS, TATTOOED BODIES, AND PRISON SCRIBES: MEDITATIONS ON THE AESTHETIC, RELIGIOUS, AND SOCIAL SENSIBILITIES OF CHICANO *PINTOS*

### **I. Banality Transcended**

Considered a clothing accessory, the handkerchief is no less ordinary than a sock. Contextualized within the visual culture of Chicano prison inmates incarcerated in certain southwestern regions of the United States, that same handkerchief becomes an extraordinary object.<sup>1</sup> Prison abolitionist Angela Davis argues that prison itself is conceived in the popular imagination as somewhat ubiquitous, if not outright banal: “it is virtually impossible to avoid consuming images of prison...[given that] the prison is one of the most important features of our image environment” (2003, 18).

### **II. The Artist Turned Prisoner, The Prisoner Turned Artist, and Prison Artistry Turned Exhibition Object**

The subject of celebrated artists turned prisoners due to their criminal character and conduct was ably documented by the distinguished German-born British art historian, Rudolf Wittkower ([1963] 1969). The unruly behavior of sculptors Benvenuto Cellini [1500-1571] and Veit Stoss [1440/50-1533] as well as their near-contemporary painter, Caravaggio [1573-1610], was eclipsed for posterity by their artistic genius. As Wittkower observed, art historians appear complicit in minimizing criminal and unruly behavior by artists (181). By contrast, contemporary prisoners-turned-artists are viewed first as prison inmates, second as artists. Often, their circumstances afford them surfeit amounts of time to devote to their inventive artistry.<sup>2</sup> In a Chicana/o frame of reference, *la vida loca* or the crazy life lived on the outside is supplanted by creative and curative expressive behavior on the inside.

### III. The “Apostolic” Chicano Movement, Rural Farm Workers, and Visual Culture in the Mexican American Urban *Barrio*

*Bato Loco!* Take off that handkerchief  
from around your head,  
and wipe away *la sangre*  
of a thousand years of  
bloodshed *y miseria*.<sup>3</sup>

This epigraphic fragment speaks to a backdrop of a thousand years of suffering, shed blood/*sangre*, and misery/*miseria* endured by the ancestors of the “*Bato Loco*”/“Crazy Dude” invoked in the poetic snippet. The suffering continued unabated for the *Bato*, who directly anticipated and lived through the Chicano Movement.

Writing previously about Chicano visual culture in what German philosopher Jürgen Habermas calls “the public sphere” (1991, 398-404), I have acknowledged what Chicano sociologist Julius Rivera characterizes as an “apostolic stream” within the Chicano cultural revolution (Sorell 1991, 142; Rivera 1976, 184). Rivera argued that the content of this apostolic communication—voiced through its principal prophetic rhetors, Reies López Tijerina, César Chávez, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, and José Ángel Gutiérrez—“is not only the plight of *raza* (Mexican American) people, but advocacy for a reconsideration of their culture” (1976, 184-5). “The total society,” he added, “[has been] the target of this apostolic action,” (185) initially inciting resistance, and, subsequently, affirmation.<sup>4</sup>

The late César Chávez, a deeply devout activist and prominent leader of the United Farm Workers (UFW), is one of the key “apostles” who affirmed the religious ethos of *el movimiento Chicano*/the Chicano Movement. For him, faith, revolution, and social justice went hand-in-hand:

In the “March from Delano to Sacramento” there is a meeting of cultures and traditions; the centuries-old religious tradition of Spanish culture conjoins with the very contemporary cultural syndrome of “demonstration” springing from the spontaneity of the poor, the downtrodden, the rejected, the discriminated against bearing visibly their need and demand for equality and freedom...throughout the Spanish-speaking world there is another tradition that touches the present march, that of the Lenten penitential processions, where the *penitentes* would march through the streets, often in sack cloth and ashes, some even carrying crosses, as a sign of penance for their sins, and a plea for the mercy of God. The penitential procession is also in the blood of the Mexican-American, and the Delano march will therefore be one of penance...the revolutions of Mexico were primarily

uprisings of the poor, fighting for bread and for dignity. The Mexican-American is also a child of the revolution. (1972, 385-6)

Largely intended to publicize the boycott launched by the National Farm Workers Association against Schenley Industries (now Schenley International Corporation), the Pilgrimage of 1966 from Delano to Sacramento, California, was a procession in the name of “*la causa*” (the [Mexican American]cause) under the gaze and protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Marian icon and patron saint of Mexicans and Chicana/os south and north of the border. From her commanding station on the fabric banner carrying her image, *la Guadalupeana*—a spiritual connection between farmworkers and the earth they tend—shepherded her protesting pilgrims on their journey, one which ended symbolically on Easter Sunday.<sup>5</sup> A tradition dating back at least to the Mexican Revolution and Emiliano Zapata’s southern forces, in particular, marches and parades have tended to carry talismanic Guadalupe-emblazoned cloth standards.<sup>6</sup> Consistent with this devotional custom, a mass held in Delano and attended by Robert Kennedy and César’s fellow rhetor, Reies López Tijerina, following Chávez’s twenty-five-day fast of 1968, was celebrated and delivered from the “Farm Workers Altar,” which I have described as a “virtual pulpit for *el Movimiento*,” commissioned in 1967 of Chicano artist Emanuel Martínez (Sorell 1995, 26). This “pulpit” incorporates into its iconographic program a stylized Crucifixion of Christ, a number of non-figurative cruciform images, and the *huelga*/strike eagle-thunderbird motif associated with the United Farm Workers. While that imagery can be read merely as figurative and abstract pictorial content, in this situational context it is intended to afford spiritual edification and solace for the faithful.

Another prophetic voice, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, delivered his “Message to Aztlán” speech of 16 September 1975 on the steps of the Colorado State Capitol Building in Denver (2001, 76). He addressed his remarks to all the people of Aztlán, “a popular symbolic name for either the southwest of the United States, where most Mexican Americans live, or the metaphorical space that exists wherever Chicano culture flourishes” (Polkinhorn 1986, 4).<sup>7</sup> His audience was inclusive. He didn’t overlook *pintos* (prison [*pinta*] inmates),<sup>8</sup> “critics” of the Movement, or artists. Speaking directly to “the critics,” Gonzales decries the fate of *pintos* left to the capricious devices of an arbitrary justice blatantly at odds with a spirit of redress sought by *el movimiento*’s liberating, proactive agenda. His rhetoric is pungent and vitriolic, even, some might say, self-righteous: