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Camp as a Weapon: Chicano Identity and Asco's Aesthetics of Resistance

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Camp as a Weapon: Chicano Identity and Asco's Aesthetics of Resistance

By

Jez Flores Garcia

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the aesthetic phenomenon of camp in the work of the East Los Angeles-based art group, Asco. Founded by Harry Gamboa, Jr., Gronk, Willie Herrón, III, and Patssi Valdez in the early 1970s, Asco produced a distinct blend of conceptual and performance-based art, which they exhibited in alternative art spaces and distributed as correspondence art. The group's name, which means "nausea" in Spanish, speaks to the sensation their often provocative and politically motivated art ostensibly produces. The basis of this reaction lies in the stark contrast of Asco's work to established Chicano art that emerged during the Chicano Movement.

I organize my study through a consideration of each of Asco's camp targets, or the objects of their critiques. These include the exploitation and oppression of the Chicano community, the limitations and liberation in Chicano muralism, and the glamour and biases of Hollywood. Each of these denote cultures and movements with which the young artists were enamored as well as alienated from in a complex insider/outsider relationship that enables camp critique.

Through analysis of Gronk's proto-Asco performance *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969), I establish a clear foundation for camp that corresponds to Moe Meyer's assertion that camp is a specifically queer tactic of disidentification. I refer to the infamously provocative scene in Gronk's play starring Cyclona (Robert Legorreta) as horror drag to emphasize the intended camp target: homophobia within the Chicano community. Through a investigation of Asco's early street performances and No Movies I further demonstrate that Asco uses Chicano *rasquache* and *domesticana* tactics, as described by Tomas Ybarra Frausto and Amalia Mesa-Bains respectively, in order to critique Chicano and Anglo-American cultures. Asco deploys these three aesthetic tactics to challenge problematizing identifiers of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

For Paxton

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INTRODUCTION

A 1974 photograph captures three assailants confronting a member of the press in a shop-windowed vestibule at night. The dark-clad criminals loom over their target who cowers in the corner of the tiled floor. Dressed in the drab hat and trench coat of a newspaper reporter, he clutches an oversized camera with the block letters "ASCO" legible above the lens. His attackers don costumes accessorized with silver sequins, feathers, and platform boots. The central figure wields a comically gigantic chrome axe—also bearing the brand "ASCO"—while her two male accomplices lean forward, poised to pounce on the man. The suggestion of a narrative, dynamic poses, over-the-top wardrobes, and tightly framed scene imbue the image with cinematic anticipation. *The Gores* (1974, fig. 1), created by the East Los Angeles Chicano art group Asco, pairs a vernacular setting with glam fashion.[1] In one aesthetically astute gesture, the photograph mocks and critiques the media's portrayal of Chicanos as criminals. *The Gores* illuminates camp's function as a weapon.

Asco produced this camp image along with stage performances, street processions and public interventions from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. This dissertation explores how these projects—all generated by Asco—developed a provocative aesthetic that campily juxtaposes "glitter and gangrene," delivering the glamorous in equal proportion to the disgusting, base, or abject.[2] The group's name, meaning "nausea" in Spanish, reflects reactions to their early work. Their projects incorporate and attack both Anglo and Chicano cultures. Informed by gay liberation and brown pride, Asco's tactics borrow from queer performance as well as *rasquache* production. I argue that Asco not only "browns" previous understandings of queer camp, but also changed the course of Chicano art.[3]

Chicano art emerged as the creative arm of the Chicano civil rights movement, and its mission was to bring the community together as one. Asco's performances pivoted from earlier Chicano art's conventions of earnest murals and standard icons. Instead, they crafted conceptual actions in public spaces. Asco demonstrated, for their generation and for those after them, that art could be playful, provocative, and critical of Chicanismo itself, without surrendering the movement's activist core. In order to understand Asco and its significance within United States contemporary art and culture, I trace its invention and deployment of what I theorize as *nausea camp*, in reference to the group's moniker. I use the targets of Asco's nausea camp to organize my dissertation into three chapters. The first, Processing Against Processions, targets homophobia and internal community conflict. The second, Murals against Muralism, targets the

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[1] Chicano is a name actively chosen by Americans of Mexican descent to reflect solidarity with the Chicano civil rights movement and Chicano culture. Not all Mexican Americans choose to call themselves Chicano.

[2] Harry Gamboa and Chon A. Noriega, *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 54.

[3] Hiram Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!," in *A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 103. Pérez explains brown as a verb that "designates a kind of constitutive ambiguity within U.S. racial formations…As a repository for the disowned, projected desires of a cosmopolitan subject it is alternately (or simultaneously) primitive, exotic, savage, pansexual, and abject." See also Claudia Milian, "Indigent Latinities," in *Latining America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latino/a Studies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013): 93–122.

rigid iconography of Chicano art. Finally, Movies Against Movies, targets Hollywood stereotypes and omission of Latinos.

Two narratives of Asco's formation exist: the earliest literature on Asco tends to emphasize its political aspects, while scholarly interest in the group's relationship with queer culture has emerged more recently. But accounting for both of these aspects helps expose more about Asco's genesis than either could alone. In what follows, I provide a brief overview of the group, which is discussed in greater detail throughout the dissertation. In this Introduction, I examine Asco's emergence as a group and describe the formative moments of its four founders as artists. I then outline the main contours of the Chicano rights movement with special attention given to the Blowouts and Chicano Moratorium, two major events in which the young artists participated. Next, I provide an overview of Chicano art in East Los Angeles, both before and contemporaneous to Asco. This review uncovers the attitudes and conventions that Asco resisted and borrowed from in their critique of the Chicano art movement. With this contrast and resistance in mind, I then propose the concept of nausea camp, detailed later in this Introduction. I frame this concept through my research into camp and its adjacent phenomena, *rasquache* and *domesticana*. I conclude with a brief review of the literature on Asco and an outline of the chapters.

Throughout my examination of Asco's artwork and performances, I endeavor to understand how queer and Chicano cultures inform Asco's development. Asco's tactics, I show, stem from these marginalized cultures and act as methods of disidentification, the phenomenon outlined by José Esteban Muñoz. He explains that "[d]isidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship."[4] By recognizing Asco's disidentification tactics and the cultural sources of those tactics, we can comprehend how their work functions within the realm of Chicano art, specifically as a form of cultural critique and resistance.

THE ORIGINS OF ASCO

Harry Gamboa Jr. (b. 1951), Gronk (b. 1952), Willie Herrón, III (b. 1951), and Patssi Valdez (b.1951) began using the name Asco in 1973 or 1974.[5] However, they worked together in various combinations beginning in 1969 with *Caca Roaches Have No Friends* (1969, fig. 2), a stage production conceived of by Gronk and starring Valdez. In 1971 Gamboa, Gronk, and

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[4] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

[5] C. Ondine Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective, 1972–1987* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 40; C. Ondine Chavoya and David Frantz, *Axis Mundo* (New York: Prestel, 2017), 31; Thomas Crowe, "The Art of the Fugitive," in *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art, 1974–1981,* Paul Schimmel and Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), eds. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art ; Prestel, 2011), 50; Gamboa and Noriega, *Urban Exile*, 11; Willie Herrón, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, March 5, 2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Marci R. McMahon, *Domestic Negotiations: Gender, Nation and Self-Fashioning in US Mexicana and Chicana Literature and Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 204n1. Noriega and Crowe cite 1973 as the year the group took the name; however, most of these sources cite 1974, which is the date given by Herrón.

Herrón performed *Stations of the Cross* (1971, fig. 3)*,* sans Valdez. The first Asco work created by the complete group was *Walking Mural* (fig. 4) in 1972.[6] Gamboa explains the term *asco*— meaning both disgust and nausea— as one used by observers both in reaction to the members as individuals and the quality of their art, which often employed dark subject matter.[7] Based on the title of a 1974 exhibition, either *Da Me Asco* or *Asco: An Exhibition of Our Worst Work,* many audiences presumed that the four were collectively named Asco, a presumption that became reality.[8]

Critics and curators often use the name Asco to refer to the four founding members. However, throughout the group's existence, over thirty different artists and performers collaborated with the original members; Asco's membership was in constant flux, teeming with unofficial affiliates and co-conspirators.[9] Some joined Asco for a few projects, and some became recognized members. For example, Humberto Sandoval (b. 1951) appears in *First Supper (After a Major Riot)* (1974, fig. 5) and *Instant Mural* (1974, fig. 6)*,* both discussed in Chapter Two. However, Sandoval does not consider himself to have been part of Asco.[10] By contrast, in the 1980s Diane Gamboa (b. 1957) established herself as an iconic member of Asco. Her older brother and co-founder, Harry Gamboa, describes Asco as "a group of competitive individuals"

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[6] The Getty Research Center's Union List of Artist Names database lists Asco as active from 1971 through 1987. This date range, as evidenced by an examination of Asco's actual production, is only an estimation. See "ASCO: Full Record Display," Getty Research Center, accessed February 20, 2020, http://www.getty.edu/vow/ULANServlet?english=Y&find=Asco&role=&page=1&nation=.

[7] Juan Garza, *Asco Is Spanish for Nausea*, PBS Heritage: Latino Arts Documentary Series (San Antonio: KLRN, 1994), https://youtu.be/u2ieIoWvz3c. The effect of Asco's art, whether organic or provoked, also informs my term "nausea camp."

[8] Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 40; Chavoya and Frantz, *Axis Mundo*, 31. These sources contain differences in the location and title of the exhibition. Chavoya and Franz write that it was titled *Da Me Asco* at Cal State University Galleries, yet Chavoya and Gonzalez in an earlier publication state that the exhibition took place at Self-Help Graphics, a community arts center, and was titled *Asco: Our Worst Work*.

[9] Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 38. There are thirty-six members, in addition to Gamboa, Gronk, Herrón, Valdez, and Sandoval, listed in the exhibition catalogue: Eddie Ayala, Robert Bletran, Max Benavidez, Hames Bucalo, Jerry Dreva, Guillermo (Billy) Estrada, Consuelo Flores, María Elena Gaitán, Diane Gamboa, Karen Gamboa, Linda Gamboa, Rubén García, Juan Garza, Kevin Gunn, Robert Legorreta (Cyclona), Adam Leventhal, Daniel J. Martinez, Mundo Meza, Roberto Gil de Montes, Armando Norte, Marisela Norte, Lorraine Ordaz, Alfonzo Pando, Raymond "Ray Red" Rodriguez, Betty Salas, Teddy Sandoval, Debra Taren, Alfonso Trejo, Gerardo Velasquez, Daniel Villareal, Virginia Villegas, Diane Vozoff, Kate Vozoff, Rene Yañez, Marisa Zains, and Ruben Zamora.

[10] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Pseudographic Cinema: Asco's No-Movies," *Performance Research* 3, no. 1 (1998): 1, https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.1998.10871583. In his artist lecture at UC Davis (May 21, 2020) Gamboa referred to Sandoval as the fifth member of Asco. https://youtu.be/nA1X5VrCxKQ

working with specific tactics and methods, not a collective.[11] In the case of Asco, artists could come together for a project and then disperse without obligation.

It is important to recognize this fluid nature and Asco's embrace of a temporary, one-off approach—in which the group's membership might change depending on the project—especially since historians and critics often overlook this fundamentally improvisational structure. Though I emphasize the crucial roles of the four co-founders, I also attend to Asco's ability to pull from different sources and work with different artists, as this practice was at the center of their anti-establishment character. As such, I note collaborators and acknowledge their contributions to the overarching concept of Asco throughout this dissertation.

It is striking to note that Asco created what are now recognized as art historically significant conceptual works when its founding members were in their late teens and early twenties. Their individual backgrounds and experiences in East Los Angeles prepared them to be self-reliant, innovative, and bold. Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez grew up in single-parent households.[12] Gronk recalls that because of this, he spent a great deal of time at the local library, where at a young age he discovered artist monographs and art magazines.[13] "I was an avid reader . . . I was reading about theater history, about cinema history. I was enamored by the character by Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi."[14] These encounters with historical avant-garde performance informed many of Asco's tactics.

At Garfield High School Gamboa, Herrón and Valdez were part of a clique known as jetters. Jetters stood out for daring fashion choices that were inspired partly by the developing glam rock scene of the early 1970s. Valdez's motto, "if you can walk in it, wear it," captured the spirit of their extreme style.[15] In fact, it was their signaling of outsider status via garments that brought the founding members of Asco together. Gronk and Valdez remember noticing each other around East LA and through Valdez's sister Karen.[16] Slightly younger than the other members, Gronk, who identifies as gay, often joined friends Robert Legorreta (b. 1952) and Mundo Meza (1955–1985) for drag walks down Whittier Boulevard.[17] Gronk soon approached Valdez and asked her to appear in his play *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*. I discuss this meeting and Gronk's play in Chapter One as a genesis moment for the group. It is an event infused with drag provocation, which I refer to as horror drag, that heavily influenced Asco's aesthetics and tactics. Valdez's familial and social contacts aided in bringing the future collaborators together. She had noticed Herrón based on his style and quiet demeanor, and the two later began dating.[18] At the time Valdez's sister was dating Gamboa, who was well-known to all the students for his efforts in organizing the student walkouts, or Blowouts, which I discuss later in this Introduction.[19] The jetters also developed their own "tricky talk" built on puns and

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[11] Harry Gamboa, Jr., interview with the author, October 24, 2017, Los Angeles.
[12] Gronk, interview with the author, December 3, 2018, Los Angeles.
[13] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, January 20–23, 1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Gronk, interview with the author.
[14] Gronk, interview with the author.
[15] Gronk, interview with the author.
[16] Gronk, interview with the author; Valdez, oral history interview with Rangel.
[17] Robb Hernandez, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta-Cyclona Collection* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2009), ix.
[18] Gronk, interview with the author.
[19] Gronk, interview with the author.

witty phrases.[20] This combination of styles, both in self-presentation and language, served as practice for their future work as Asco.

The members of Asco began working together after graduating from high school; their initial street performances began in 1971. Soon after, Gamboa received a grant as part of his funding at California State University, Los Angeles.[21] He used the funds to purchase a camera and cases of 35mm film. He began documenting Asco's work with *Walking Mural*, the first performance to include all four founding members, in 1972. Gamboa's increasing comfort and creativity with the camera developed in tandem with the sophistication of Asco's performances. Soon his documentation became an art piece in itself—as well as its own medium, the No Movie. Asco's iconic format, the No Movie, uses photography to create film stills without a cinematic antecedent. No Movies present hyper-stylized images that mimic and mock Hollywood cinema. Undeniably aesthetically advanced, Asco's No Movies predate the work of Anglo American artists of the Pictures Generation, notably Cindy Sherman's (b. 1954) celebrated film stills, demonstrating that the group's practice should not be considered marginal to the existing art historical narrative.

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

From civil rights struggles across the U.S. to the urban concerns specific to East Los Angeles, the Chicano Movement forms the foundation of Asco's art and the roles Gamboa, Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez took in creating it. Here I provide a brief background of the Chicano Movement and its relationship with Chicano art. This historical background contextualizes Asco's insider-outsider status with their own community and informs their development of nausea camp. The Chicano civil rights movement emerged in the United States during the 1960s, and Asco's four founders spent much of their adolescence immersed in an atmosphere of political awareness and activism. Through exposure to Chicano grassroots organizing, as well as queer culture, Asco's members learned about identity, collaboration, and critiques of power.

The term "Chicano" was once a disparaging term shunned by older generations of Mexican Americans, but the younger leaders of the movement reclaimed this term as a call to ethnic pride for politicized American-born Mexican Americans.[22] It marked a shift, yet not quite a severing, from the rich history of Mexican American activism from which it emerged. In contrast to descriptive terms such as Mexican American, the use of Chicano is an active,

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[20] C. Ondine Chavoya and Erika Suderburg, "Internal Exiles: The Interventionist Public and Performance Art of Asco," in *Space, Site, and Intervention: Situating Installation Art,* ed. Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 191.

[21] Harry Gamboa, Jr., oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, April 1, 1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[22] Another term used by some Chicano activists is *la raza*, which translates as "the race," referring to the mixed indigenous, African, and European heritage of Latin Americans. The term is taken from the 1925 essay "La raza cosmica," by José Vasconcelos, which is highly controversial for its foundation in false concepts of race, including eugenics. Chicano use of the term often refers to a cultural idea of "the people," as seen in the organization National Council of La Raza, which changed its name in 2017 to avoid misinterpretation as "anti-white."

politically aware declaration of one's identity.[23] The illegibility of the term to non-Latinos, and the discomfort the term provoked among older generations, spoke to the agency and youth that would propel the movement.[24]

Throughout the modern era, activism and organizing became part of the working-class Mexican American vocabulary. For example, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), founded in 1928, fought segregation and aided Mexican Americans navigating the judicial system.[25] During the 1930s, agricultural workers unionized, leading some of the largest boycotts and strikes in that era.[26] More directly, Cesar Chavez (1927–1993) and Dolores Huerta (b. 1930) began the National Farm Workers Association in 1962. This organization became the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1965, the same year of the historic grape boycott that brought them national attention.

This same year, Chavez met and recruited Luis Valdez (b. 1940), who established El Teatro Campesino. The worker-run theater group entertained the workers, but more importantly, it provided an opportunity for catharsis—as Chavez put it, a chance to "ridicule" bosses.[27] UFW's actions provided an example to younger, urban Mexican Americans who would eventually form the Chicano movement.[28] However, it is important to note the contrast between the two. Chavez distanced himself from the Chicano movement.[29] The rural and urban demographics of each movement were distinct, as were their respective goals. Similarly, while Asco participated in political demonstrations and street performances, Gronk cites avant-garde theater like *Ubu Roi* rather than El Teatro Campesino as informing their practice.

In cities with large Mexican American populations, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, and Chicago, the civil rights struggle focused on education. Youth groups formed throughout these areas, many calling themselves Chicano. One such group was the Chicano Youth Liberation Movement in Denver, Colorado. One of its members was Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales (1928–2005), an experienced activist and former prizefighter.[30] In the first weeks of 1967 he

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[23] George Hartley, "I Am Joaquín: Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales and the Retroactive Construction of Chicanismo," Electronic Poetry Center, SUNY-Buffalo, accessed April 22, 2017, http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/hartley/pubs/corky.html.

[24] Richard L. Nostrand, "'Mexican American' and 'Chicano': Emerging Terms for a People Coming of Age," *Pacific Historical Review* 42 (August 1973): 399n39; Edward A. Stephenson, "Chicano: Origin and Meaning," *American Speech* 44 (1969): 225. I retain the term Chicano throughout this project for historical accuracy rather than employing "Chicanx," while recognizing that Asco's culture position fits seamlessly with the latter term.

[25] Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996), 94.

[26] Ronald W. Lopez, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 1, no. 1 (October 1970): 101–2.

[27] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 136.

[28] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 151.

[29] Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "The Chicano Movement," in *Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies*, eds. Francisco O. Lomeli, Denise A. Segura, and Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe (New York: Routledge, 2019), 65.

[30] Gutiérrez, "The Chicano Movement," 59–60.

published his epic poem, *Yo Soy Joaquin /I Am Joaquín.*[31] As literary historian George Hartley remarked, "through this poem the various elements that would make up Chicano identity came together for the first time."[32] Gonzales led a meeting of the Chicano Youth Liberation Movement in 1969. Participants in this meeting, members of one of the many youth-based Chicano groups throughout the country, drafted the first manifesto of the Chicano movement. Titled "El Plán Espiritual de Aztlán," the manifesto solidified their concerns and aspirations, serving as a model for other Chicano groups throughout the United States.[33] The document focuses on Chicano ideology without mention of gender.[34] Laura Pérez explains:

> "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" reproduced the theoretical paradigm of the division and hierarchical ranking of simultaneous struggles below one principal contradiction—cultural/"racial" oppression. The rest, class and gender, for example, was presumably to be attended to after resolution of the key struggle."[35]

The absence of any mention of Chicanas in the manifesto reflects pervasive patriarchy in the country and is not limited to the Movement. It also belies the early and sustained presence of Chicana feminists in the movement, many of whom are widely celebrated authors today.[36]

With Valdez as a founding member of the group, Asco also contended with gender expectations from its beginning. Their very first procession together, *Walking Mural* (discussed in detail in Chapter One), features Valdez's reinvention of the archetypal female icon of Chicano culture: the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her innovation and central role in *Walking Mural* contrasts with narratives surrounding *Spray Paint LACMA* in Chapter One, where she is sidelined. Nevertheless, Valdez notes that she felt the men in the group supported her: "At the time in the group we were equals." [37] Although Asco grappled with gender equity in their group to varying degrees of success, the four founders asserted themselves as Chicano artists although their aesthetics differed from their peers. Their commitment to the movement is evident in their

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[31] George Hartley, "I Am Joaquín: Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales and the Retroactive Construction of Chicanismo," Essay, *Electronic Poetry Center, SUNY-Buffalo*, n.d., http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/hartley/pubs/corky.html. Luis Valdez of El Teatro Campesino created a film version of the poem in March of that year, demonstrating its popularity and resonance.

[32] Hartley, "I Am Joaquín."

[33] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 210. The manifesto's title uses the term Aztlán, which refers to the mythic homeland of the Mexica (Aztecs). Many Chicano activists consider the location of this land to be the territory that Mexico ceded to the U.S. under the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty of 1848.

[34] Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, "Chicanas and El Movimiento," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (Spring and Fall 1974): 156.

[35] Laura Elisa Pérez, "El Desorden, Nationalism, and Chicana/o Aesthetics," in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Minoo Moallem (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 25.

[36] Frederich Luis Aldama, *Brown on Brown: Chican@ Representations of Gender, Sexuality and Ethnicity*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2005) 21. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back,* one of the most influential books in Chicano literature, demonstrates the presence and key role of Chicana feminists.

[37] Patssi Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond" (Lecture, UC Berkeley, March 6, 2014).

participation in two of its most iconic events: the school walkouts of 1968 and the Chicano Moratorium of 1970.

BLOWOUTS AND THE MORATORIUM

The Vietnam War weighed heavily on the minds of young Chicanos and informed their protests for better education. The five high schools in East Los Angeles included Belmont Senior High School, James A. Garfield High School, Abraham Lincoln High School, Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School, and Woodrow Wilson High School. In the late 1960s the dropout rates in these schools were some of the highest in the country. Notably, at Garfield, where the future members of Asco attended, fifty-seven percent of the students quit prior to graduation.[38] Even for their graduates, the schools did little to prepare students for either gainful employment or college. These poor conditions resulted in a de facto funneling of students into military service. The problems in the school system affected not just the lives, but the early deaths of many Chicanos. Approximately nineteen percent of all Vietnam War casualties have Spanish surnames, while the Latino population at the time was at just under twelve percent of the US population.[39]

In East Los Angeles, the Young Citizens for Community Action met at a local coffee house.[40] This group eventually became the Brown Berets. Supported by input from college students, the Brown Berets aided planning of the high school Blowouts of 1968.[41] This series of student walkouts spanned one week, from March 1 through March 7, and involved the five East LA high schools.[42] The protests demanded better education and facilities, including bilingual instruction, college prep courses, and an improved industrial arts program to train students for jobs.[43] The Blowouts started on a Friday at Wilson High School and spread the following week, with more schools joining each day.[44] According to the *Los Angeles Times,* 22,000 students

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[38] Louis Sahagun, "East L.A. 1968: 'Walkout!' The Day High School Students Helped Ignite the Chicano Power Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-1968-east-la-walkouts-20180301-htmlstory.html.

[39] Ralph Guzmán, "Mexican American Casualties in Vietnam," *La Raza*, 1971. The US military does not record ethnicity statistics, so Guzmán used Spanish surnames to estimate the number, which may be much higher. Historically, Mexican Americans have participated in military service at disproportionately higher numbers. For example, approximately 350,000 Mexican Americans served in World War II. The Vietnam War lacked the overall public support of previous conflicts, which affected voluntary enlistments unpressured by economic status.

[40] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 188.

[41] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 189.

[42] Sahagun, "East L.A. 1968." For a detailed account of the Blowouts see Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Rethinking Grassroots Activism: Chicana Resistance in the 1968 East Los Angeles School Blowouts," in *The Subaltern Speak: Curriculum, Power, and Educational Struggles*, eds. Michael W. Apple and Kristen L. Buras (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[43] Jack McCurdy, "Student Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools; Policeman Hurt," *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1968, 26.

[44] McCurdy, "Student Disorders Erupt," 3. Published the day of the final walkout, this article states that Jefferson High School, which is predominately African American, also participated. However, other sources do not mention this.

participated in the Blowouts.[45] Standing in solidarity with the students at each school were Brown Berets, teachers, college students, and journalists. Los Angeles police clashed with both protesters and press, arresting many.[46]

Gamboa served as vice-president of the planning committee for the Blowouts.[47] As a result, police surveilled him, and the U.S. Senate subcommittee of the Judiciary 1971 listed him among the one hundred most dangerous subversives.[48] Gamboa's handwritten notes, scrawled in blue ink, document both the frustration and hope that he and many other activists felt at that time (fig. 7). He cites Hispanic casualties in Vietnam and loss of leadership alongside notes about tactics and strategies.[49] Gamboa's activist experience at the age of eighteen, as well as the other founders' participation in such activities, contributed to Asco's confrontational street tactics. Specifically, Gamboa has noted that the Blowouts made him acutely aware of how visual media could be manipulated to serve those in power.[50]

The East Los Angles Blowouts were just one event from 1968 that would prove decisive for the Movement; in 1968, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago made headlines not for the nominees but for the thousands of anti-war protesters outside. Support for the war in the U.S. had plummeted, and Chicanos, who made up a disproportionate number of those on the front lines, took to the streets. The National Chicano Moratorium Committee organized events across the country to protest. In East LA, double-sided leaflets in both English and Spanish (fig. 8) announced the gatherings as a way to collectively "express [our] disgust at this country's participation in the immoral and unjust Southwest Asian war."[51] On the flyer, a figure in overalls holds his head and asks, "Why mother why?," next to a tombstone for La Raza. A simplified map marks the time and locations.

The Chicano Moratorium began at ten in the morning at Belvedere Park on August 29, 1970. Families, including grandparents and children, were in attendance. The gathering moved from the park by peaceful procession to a rally at Laguna Park. Film from that day shows youngsters performing folk dances to music.[52] The map on the flyer indicates this route exiting the park at Third Street, swerving slightly south onto Beverly Boulevard, then on to Atlantic where it turns again onto Whittier Boulevard. At South Arizona Avenue, just a few blocks after

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[45] Sahagun, "East L.A. 1968."

[46] McCurdy, "Student Disorders Erupt," 3.

[47] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism: The Performance Art of Asco," in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000), 241.

[48] Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism," 241.

[49] Harry Gamboa, "The Social Nature of the Blow-Out," April 26, 1968, box 2, folder 26, Harry Gamboa Jr. Papers, Special Collections M0753, Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections and University Archives.

[50] Gamboa, interview with the author.

[51] "For the People . . . The Chicano Moratorium!" (National Chicano Moratorium Committee, 1970), Box 3, Folder 8, Dreva Weber Papers, 61, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

[52] TheGASMass, "Chicano Moratorium [Documentary]," November 10, 2013, video, 9:52, https://youtu/be/XD9GM7UkVdo. Tom Myrdahl shot this video of the moratorium as a film student at Loyola Marymount University.

that final turn, police provoked a riot by launching tear gas canisters into the crowd.[53] Chaos erupted, and clouds of black smoke could be seen across Los Angeles. Police arrested hundreds, and three people died, including journalist Ruben Salazar (1928–1970).[54] A few years later, Asco staged street processions along a portion of this same route, the popular business district of Whittier Boulevard (fig. 9).

The high visibility offered by the shopping area on Whittier provided Asco with incidental audience members. However, the echoes of the Moratorium through that route are an intentional aspect of the processions. Through this seemingly mundane choice, Asco referenced the Moratorium and its attendant issues of education and police violence. Pairing this reference with a critique of the county's cancellation of the Christmas parade, Asco takes aim at the powers that erase and oppress Chicanos. Their decision to perform processions parallels the actions and spaces of both protest and parade, without necessitating permission from the law. This is just one example of Asco's camp tactics.

FROM CAMP TO NAUSEA CAMP

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that Asco creates and deploys nausea camp. With this term, I refer to the provocative nature of their work in concert with the phenomenon of camp.[55] Nausea camp is, as evident from Asco's Chicano activist objectives, an undeniably racial application of camp. This exists side-by-side with camp's origins as a form of queer resistance. Camp remains a contested field because the phenomenon lacks a stable definition. In her influential 1964 essay, "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag attempted to define the sensibility while acknowledging the difficulty of such a task:

> A sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about; but there are special reasons why Camp, in particular, has never been discussed. It is not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such. . . . And Camp is esoteric—something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques.[56]

Sontag's essay flits between descriptions and examples of camp, an approach also employed by subsequent scholars. Her list of fifty-eight musings on camp has served as the authority on the sensibility yet has left readers struggling to pin down exactly what camp is. Her essay alone does not and cannot capture the full range and complexity of Asco's aesthetic—one which scholars often refer to as camp or campy, as I note throughout the literature review. Thus, instead of relying on Sontag's essay alone, I draw upon commentators who, writing after Sontag, apply a rigorous analysis informed by the history of gay rights as well as the fields of queer and cultural studies. Ultimately, these authors frame camp not by descriptions but by its function and relationship to the normative culture. This functional framing provides a productive manner for understanding the camp-adjacent Chicano aesthetics of *rasquache* and *domesticana.* These too inform Asco's nausea camp.

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[53] Mark Simon Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 70.

[54] Edward J. Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968–1971" 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1484, https://doi.org/10.2307/2080213.

[55] Although I define camp through its subversive relationship to power, some scholars including Sontag allow for a "campy" mainstream, non-subversive, or low camp that is not inherently subversive and therefore also not provocative.

[56] Sontag, Susan, "Notes on Camp," *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 515.

Mark Booth notes several contradictions in Sontag's essay as he traces the origin of camp in his attempt to define the concept.[57] The etymology**,** he reveals, stems from the French military term *se camper* and the silk tents of Louis XIV.[58] Members of court would watch the king's military maneuvers while wearing their finest costumes.[59] This term corresponds to the modern usage of camp with its emphasis on the body, performance, and posing. Fabio Cleto writes that camp first entered English usage in late Victorian slang to refer to the over-the-top gestures of those lacking good character. [60] This emphasis on personal behavior also appears in Moe Meyer's research that dates the earliest "label of homosexuality onto a person," rather than homosexuality as naming a sexual act, to 1869.[61] Per these three scholars, camp's origins and initial characteristics include pomp in the service of national agendas (French) and particular acts by bodies marked as having questionable integrity (English). These nationalistic and bodily backgrounds clearly resonate with queer camp, as well as Asco's nausea camp.

Meyer, one of the most prolific writers on camp, stresses that camp and the modern understanding of homosexuality are entangled.[62] While other camp scholars take a permissive stance regarding who can create camp, Meyer emphatically states that camp belongs exclusively to homosexuals. In his critique of Sontag, whom he accuses of removing the homosexual from camp and creating confusion regarding types of camp, he declares, "there are not different kinds of Camp. There is only one. And it is gay."[63] What appears as camp by the "un-gay," he contends, is a "camp trace" that subsumes the queer into the normative.[64] I believe that nausea camp, which Asco members developed as a group, both satisfies and complicates his strict criterion. Asco's nausea camp evolves out of gay camp practices, primarily introduced by Gronk. Furthermore, I claim that the group members—notably Valdez—expand these tactics and explore their intersections with race and gender through an application of *rasquache* and *domesticana*. Collectively, their queer-influenced and multi-gendered aesthetic practices set their work apart, leaving them shut out from mainstream galleries and shunned by the Chicano community. Surveys of Chicano art position Asco as outliers, and until recently, these surveys have largely overlooked the group's ties to the queer community.[65] Gay camp, even in the strictest sense per Meyer, appears in Asco's work because of their exclusion from Chicano or Anglo-American normative cultures. Asco's camp is not, to use Meyer's term, a "camp trace" or any other normalizing attempt, as Asco itself is inherently non-normative.

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[57] Mark Booth, "Campe-Toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 67.

[58] Booth, "Campe-Toi!," 78.

[59] Booth, "Campe-Toi!," 78.

[60] Fabio Cleto, ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 9.

[61] Moe Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing: Essays on Camp, Drag, and Sexuality* (Chicago: Macater Press, 2010), 55.

[62] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 55, 68.

[63] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 41.

[64] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 41.

[65] This changed drastically at the hands of art historian and curator Ondine Chavoya with the 2011 LACMA retrospective as well as the 2017 exhibition *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*

In addition to understanding the history of camp and different accounts of the communities to whom it belongs, an exploration of how camp functions further clarifies its definition. The slippery yet recognizable nature of camp results from its consistently subversive relationship to power. I submit that camp appears when the marginalized use the dominant culture's vocabulary to critique that same culture. Meyer's argument for a singular gay camp includes a discussion of camp's function. He cites linguistics professor Gregory W. Bredbeck's 1993 essay on Roland Barthes.[66] In it, Bredbeck sets aside Sontag's division and classification process. Applying a semiotic analysis to locate the function of camp, he explains that camp appropriates conventional language and strips it to create new meanings. This description applies to Asco's borrowing of Hollywood elements or traditional Latino processions. However, to borrow and make new meanings is not enough to meet the criteria for camp. Meyer, citing Bredbeck, makes function central to the definition of camp; the appropriation must produce social visibility.[67] My own definition of camp relies on this approach to its function: camp takes conventional vocabularies, including visual norms and standards, and reinterprets them via parody to make space for marginalized voices. Thus, in my reading, camp is a minoritarian strategy that does not "belong" solely to gay men (in Meyer's formation, such gay men are de facto white) but is open to a range of practitioners— in the case of Asco, a mobile group that included brown, queer, female, working-class, and activist bodies—speaking back to hegemonic cultures.

Andrew Ross's article "The Uses of Camp" also explores the function of camp, specifically where and how it occurs in relation to cultural power structures.[68] In contrast to Meyer, who regards camp as exclusive to homosexuals Ross essay instead allows for a broader understanding of camp.[69] He acknowledges the "pseudoaristocratic patrilineage of camp," which prompts his exploration of how class impacts its deployment.[70] Camp, Ross explains, occurs in a middle space, in which those performing camp have access to the vocabulary of the mainstream or privileged ranks. [71]

As artists, Asco's members possess specialized knowledge of avant-garde art, yet as Chicanos, they remain outside of any legitimizing cultural institution. Additionally, they share experiences with the typical working-class East Los Angeles citizen. They operate from a space in-between, which according to Ross, is where camp occurs.[72] Asco, in keeping with camp, performs a critique of the high from the in-between. Ross designates this aspect of camp practitioners as follows:

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[66] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 38–39.

[67] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 40.

[68] Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 54-77.

[69] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 45. In the essay, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp" Meyer criticizes Ross's essay directly, writing, "Andrew Ross's influential essay, 'Uses of Camp' (1989), is a noteworthy example of the dehumanizing results achieved by applying an objectivist methodology to the study of Camp." He explains that because Ross' theories permit for non-gay camp, he erases the representation camp relies on, making it apolitical.

[70] Ross, "Uses of Camp," 62.

[71] Ross, "Uses of Camp," 63–64.

[72] Ross, "Uses of Camp, 64.

> [b]ecause of their marginality, because they lack inherited cultural capital, and thus the accredited power to fully legitimize dominant tastes, these groups parody their subordinate or uncertain social status in "a self-mocking abdication of any pretensions to power."[73] (My emphasis.)

In Chicano studies, this liminal condition is such a prevalent experience that it has been named: *nepantla*.[74] The term originates in the Aztec Nahuatl language to describe the uneasy space between two cultures.[75] It is not a hybrid place that combines the two cultures, but a distinct space. Walter D. Mignolo explicitly distinguishes the concept from hybridity, stating that *nepantla* is "a space in-between from *where to think,* rather than a hybrid space *to talk about.*"[76] *Nepantla* gives the group access, or a place from which to think, where distinct cultural vocabularies incite nausea camp.

RASQUACHE AND NAUSEA CAMP

I have coined the term "nausea camp" to gesture toward Asco's own moniker and to refer to their post-Stonewall approach to performances. In addition to deploying drag as part of the camp process, I submit that nausea camp features *rasquache.* This term relates to the colloquial Mexican adjective *rascuache*, meaning poor quality.[77] In 1989, Chicano studies professor Tomás Ybarra-Frausto published an essay codifying *rasquache* as a descriptor of art.[78] Later republished elsewhere with minor variations, this text remains the authority on the *rasquache* aesthetic. Within his text Ybarra-Frausto uses a numbered list, mirroring Sontag's "Notes on Camp," yet includes only three "notes" in contrast to Sontag's fifty-eight. Note one, the most frequently quoted in discussions of the topic, reads "Very generally, *rasquachismo* is an underdog perspective—a view from *los de abajo.* An attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability yet mindful of stance and style."[79] He follows this with the clarification that this quality can belong to objects and places, as well as a person or their behavior.[80] He writes that this working-class sensibility features visually elaborate objects while the emphasis remains on the ability to make do, what might be otherwise referred to as an up-cycled or do-it-yourself approach.[81] This contrasts with the previously noted middle or "pseudoaristocratic patrilineage" of camp set forth by Ross. Ybarra-Frausto provides "a random list" of examples to aid his readers in an

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[73] Ross, "Uses of Camp," 64. Cultural capital here refers to one's culture being of the perfered and influential.

[74] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, n.d.), 100–101.

[75] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera:* 78.

[76] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), xiii.

[77] Núria Leucena Cayuela, eds., "Rascuache," in *Larousse Gran Diccionario Usual de La Lengua Española* (Barcelona: Larousse, 2004), 1462: "que es pobre, miserable, o escaso; se aplica a lo que es de mala calidad" (That which is poor, miserable, or lacking; applied to that which is of poor quality).

[78] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo* (Phoenix, Arizona: Movimiento Artistico del Rio Salado, 1989), 5–8.

[79] Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 5.

[80] Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 5.

[81] Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 6.

understanding of *rasquache,* again calling to mind Sontag's essay.[82] In the first set, he lists the actor Cantiflas, the art collective The Royal Chicano Art Force, and "the 'No Movies' of ASCO."[83]

Alicia Gaspar de Alba elaborates on Ybarra-Frausto's theory in 1998 in her book-length critique of the 1990 exhibition, *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation (CARA)*.[84] She positions *rasquache* as "more than an oppositional form; it is a militant praxis of resistance to hegemonic standards in the art world."[85] *Rasquache* shares this resistance with camp, leading many to describe it as Chicano camp, a topic I will address presently. However, Gaspar de Alba illustrates her concept of *rasquache* by turning to Celeste Olalquiaga's description of three types of kitsch in religious paraphernalia.[86] Gaspar de Alba employs this reference to advocate for three kinds of *rasquache.* The first level consists of quotidian, self-produced items such as home altars.[87] The second includes mass-market items such as souvenirs.[88] The third level, as with Olalquiaga's study of kitsch, refers to *rasquache* in the fine arts.[89] According to Olalquiaga, kitsch does not share camp's critique or opposition to power; instead, it reinforces such power. Gaspar de Alba, however, does not attend to potential parallels between *rasquache* and kitsch in terms of their power relations or functions.

Laura Pérez expands further on the concept of *rasquache,* emphasizing the power dynamics involved in its distinct cultural position. In "El desorden, Nationalism, and Chicana/o Aesthetics," Pérez theorizes that Chicana/o cultural practices challenge the dominant Anglo society because they can operate both within and its boundaries of the proper and the rational.[90] She writes: "The Chicana/o nation and its cultural practices are *rasquache*, fly-by-night productions."[91] This declaration stresses that to create Chicano art is to practice *rasquache*, just as to be Chicano is to be of many cultures, assembled, and always taking from but never fitting with the status-quo. She reiterates this in a 2017 lecture, stating that "art self-identifying as Chicana/o is *rasquache* with respect to Eurocentric dominant art canons."[92] In that lecture, part of a tribute to Ybarra-Frausto, she also highlights the role and position of the sensibility.

> [T]he *rasquache* is the practice of the deconstructive, it is the slippage, the gap, the parasite, the arboreal, the assemblage, it is what French post-structuralist philosophy has labored to map on its own cultural terrain, but from above. The *rasquache* theorizes not just the critique of authority and the myths of cultural and social reality of the dominant,

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[82] Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 7.
[83] Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 7.
[84] Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).
[85] Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside*,12.
[86] Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside*, 12.
[87] Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside*, 13.
[88] Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside*, 14.
[89] Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside*, 14.
[90] Pérez, "El Desorden, Nationalism, and Chicana/o Aesthetics."
[91] Laura Elisa Pérez, "El Desorden, 19.
[92] Laura Elisa Pérez, "Decolonizing Theory: Rasquache-Style," in *Roundtable: Rasquache Aesthetics* (Otro Corazón II: Queering Chicanidad in the Arts: A Valentine for Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, UCLA: unpublished, 2017). I am grateful to Pérez for sharing this text with me.

> nor does it only decode: it produces and circulates new signifiers, tracing what from dominant cultures is the unmappable, even the supposedly non-existent.[93]

The way that *rasquache* appears differs from camp, as do its practitioners. In Pérez's account, *rasquache* functions not as a parody, which mimics, but as a defiant disordering. *Rasquache* and camp possess a strikingly similar relationship to power, and when combined in Asco's nausea camp, both sensibilities participate in a blend of messy insolence and critique.

Asco's *rasquache* also features a distinctly Chicana sensibility set forth by Amalia Mesa-Bains in 1999 called *domesticana*. Mesa-Bains builds and borrows from Ybarra-Frausto's theory of *rasquache.* She establishes the basis of this defiant sensibility:

> Chicana *rasquache (domesticana*), like its male counterpart, has grown not only out of both resistance to majority culture and affirmation of cultural values, but from women's restrictions within the culture. A defiance of an imposed Anglo-American cultural identity, and the defiance of restrictive gender identity within Chicano culture, has inspired a female *rasquachismo.*[94]

Among a handful of case studies included in the article, Mesa-Bains looks to Valdez's art after Asco as an example. She attests that "her image became a material reality in an objectified image of glamour. Valdez's emancipation from object to subject required a development of her own visual language beyond Asco."[95] However, as Pérez notes in her book *Chicana Art*, themes of Chicana empowerment appear in Asco's *Walking Mural.*[96] Throughout my project, I investigate Valdez's tactics that correspond to concepts of *domesticana*. This includes an exploration of Valdez's agency and ostensible objectification in the No Movies, per Mesa-Bain's statement.

THE PARTS OF NAUSEA CAMP

The colloquial use of *rasquache* as Chicano camp collapses the function and relationships to power in these two phenomena. Ramon García resists this collapse while affirming that camp is a tactic of disidentification.[97] He asserts that based on camp's usefulness against the normative, camp is not limited to gay culture but must in some way intersect with it.[98] He states, "*rasquache* in Chicano culture is not the same thing as camp. For Ybarra-Frausto *rasquache* appears to be a Chicano version of Euro-American camp, minus the gay sensibility that invents it."[99] Considering the white hegemony that exists in gay communities and that Chicano identity implies heterosexuality, Asco's performances, which García calls "campy confrontations," expose tensions at the intersection of queer and Chicano identities.[100] They are one of the few examples where the two phenomena co-exist. García's assertion that *rasquache* and camp do not blend or occur as the same keeps sexuality and ethnicity separate.

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[93] Pérez, "Decolonizing Theory: Rasquache-Style."

[94] Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 161.

[95] Mesa-Bains, "Domesticana," 165.

[96] Laura Elisa Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 267.

[97] Ramón García, "Against Rasquache: Chicano Identity and the Politics of Popular Culture in Los Angeles," *Critica*, Spring 1998, 25 n. 43.

[98] García, "Against Rasquache," 12.

[99] García, "Against Rasquache," 5.

[100] García, "Against Rasquache," 2.

Karen R. Roybal challenges García's claim that *rasquache* and camp constitute separate phenomena in her 2013 article.[101] She offers a hybrid model: camp-*rasquache*.[102] Her proposal rests on analysis of works by artists directly addressing the U.S.-Mexico border. She admits that her application of *rasquache* is an extension of concepts intended for Chicano culture, yet she applies the term because of its frequent use to describe art by Guillermo Gomez-Peña (b. 1955), one of her subjects. While I maintain that *rasquache* remains a distinctly Chicano phenomenon and recognize that Roybal's border subjects may or may not identify as Chicano, her suggestion of a hybrid model invites important discussion regarding terms for relationships that also denote function.

In my project, I am concerned with the relationship between camp and *rasquache* phenomena and their functions, but with a specific focus on Asco. It is my contention that Asco's nausea camp involves a relationship between camp and *rasquache* that is not fully described by Roybal, García, and Ybarra-Frausto, yet is indebted to each of their models.[103] Nausea camp does not present a camp and *rasquache* relationship where one appears as an ethnic or queer version of the other; nor do these two phenomena occur completely separately. Nausea camp retains both queer and Chicano characteristics. Still, I do not observe a hybridity in Asco's processions or No Movies, as the two do not blend methods to create a separate and distinct third. Instead, nausea camp presents as a conglomerate of resistance assembled from both queer and Chicano traditions. In this conglomerate, camp and *rasquache*, along with *domesticana,* all remain independently recognizable. For example, camp tactics such as drag inform how the group costumes itself in a procession such as *Stations of the Cross.* Separate but in the same mix as drag, *rasquache* offers the tactics of upcycling or making do that appear in the execution of that drag performance. *Domesticana*, omitted from other models, addresses restrictive iconography through the critical feminist perspective evident in *Walking Mural.* Like a machine made of distinct parts carrying out a single task, nausea camp contains these methods as a conglomerate and puts them to work for Asco's task of disidentification.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through my research, I have identified three phases of Asco literature that discuss the group's decades-long emergence into American art history. In the 1970s, exhibition catalogues such as *Chicanismo en el Arte* and interviews printed in *New World* and *Chismarte* documented the group's production and self-promotion.[104] After Asco disbanded in the mid-1980s, a second

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[101] Karen R. Roybal, "Pushing the Boundaries of Border Subjectivity, Autobiography, and Camp-Rasquachismo," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 71-93.

[102] Roybal, "Pushing the Boundaries," 81.

[103] Latin Americanist art historians have long wrestled with the terminology for cultural intermingling, notably George Kubler's concepts of convergence, juxtaposition, explants, transplants, and fragments which Serge Gruzinski felt "can perfectly well coexist within a single work." These models of disidentifying methods may mark a similar struggle in Chicano art. See Kubler, "On the Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of Pre-Columbian Art," in *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, ed. Samuel K. Lothrop, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 14–34; Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization,* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 231n35.

[104] Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Chicanismo En El Arte* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1975); Harry Gamboa, "Gronk and Herrón: Muralists," *Neworld*,

phase of publications commenced as their work became the subject of scholarly research. In 1988, S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas completed the first dissertation on Asco, with an emphasis on Gamboa's role.[105] Her project, along with the exhibition and catalogue *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (1991), solidified Asco's position in Chicano art history. This allowed for the third phase that introduced Asco to mainstream art audiences, first in LA-based group exhibitions and ultimately in the retrospective exhibition *Elite of the Obscure* (2011). The retrospective catalogue provided a wealth of insights that laid the groundwork for an already-emerging fourth phase. This dissertation joins that fourth phase, which features a sustained theoretical focus on aesthetics, decolonial theory, and queer/gender theory.

In the above-listed phases of Asco literature, "camp" appears frequently as a descriptor of the group's practice. Indeed, Valdez herself affirmed the presence of camp in her 2014 UC Berkeley lecture.[106] Such notations act as a critical first step in understanding both how Asco's aesthetic stands apart from Chicano art and how it serves an overall purpose of disidentification. Here I present Asco literature that recognizes camp or the elements necessary for its manifestation. I also consider texts that address artists closely associated with Asco as possible routes of influence or creative support. The widespread recognition of camp qualities also invites a theoretical engagement with the group's aesthetics and cultural influences, which have thus far received relatively little attention in art history scholarship. My project fills this gap by providing a functional definition of camp that makes Asco's tactics legible while also revealing an overall strategy regarding queerness that challenges the status quo.[107]

In the 2011 exhibition catalogue *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, co-curators Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez present the definitive scholarship on Asco to date. The over four-hundred-page volume includes nineteen essays, many of which describe the formation of the group. Several of the essays in the catalogue acknowledge camp or "campy" qualities, and document Asco's affiliations. In the opening essay "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," curators Chavoya and Gonzalez cite Asco's "language of rejection and refusal" paired with the "rebel[lion] against

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Spring 1976; Harry Gamboa, "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," *Chismearte*, Fall 1976. Gronk and Gamboa most frequently participated in interviews, Herrón occasionally. Valdez's shyness kept her from joining her male peers. She has spoken about her time in the group frequently during and since 2011's retrospective at LACMA.

[105] S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas, "Harry Gamboa and ASCO: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971–1987" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1988). This dissertation is the first and (until mine) the only full-length one on Asco; others have featured Asco as a case study among other artists or groups. Kosiba-Vargas' project harnessed previously dispersed information about Asco and set forth the now dominant activist narrative of the group's formation. In my investigation, I juxtapose this activist genesis with proto-Asco drag performances to arrive at Asco's nausea camp.

[106] Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond."

[107] Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), iv. I use "queer" as a verb here per Sullivan's definition: "to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up—heteronormative knowledge and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by then and that (in)form them."

social victimization" informed by jetter cant and fashion. [108] In addition to these markers of disidentification, the curators invoke camp while describing a collage by the group as:

> a visual compendium of early Asco performances, imagery, and thematic interests, covering the years from about 1972 to 1976, and including the group's important play with masquerade and the production of glamour through *camp impersonation* and thrift-store-chic.[109] (Emphasis added.)

Additionally, the essay describes No Movies as works that "involved a glamorous fusion of the *campy exaggeration* found in midnight movies with the unapologetic bawdiness of underground cinema."[110] (Emphasis added.)

Two other texts focused on the work of individual members of Asco also serve my investigation of the group's aesthetic formation. *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr.* presents Gamboa's writing, laced with the political acuity Gamboa gained during the Chicano moratorium as well as a sensitivity to language that stemmed from the racism he experienced in elementary school. Echoing the jetter argot of his youth, Gamboa's writing includes puns such as the story title, "Chavalo Was Lost at 'Sí'" (1992) and the poem title, "Deleted to Meet You" (1989). His witticisms operate as bilingual jokes rather than the coded vocabularies of early camp, yet they intimate an interest in sardonic wit that lends itself to camp tactics.[111]

In 2007, the University of California Los Angeles' Chicano Studies Research Center launched a series of art history books, including *Gronk* by Max Benavidez.[112] *Gronk* provides insight into the aesthetics, vision, and role of one of Asco's founding members, while making the connections and divisions between the individual and the group transparent. This publication is among several in recent years to address Gronk's sexual orientation, perhaps signifying a shift in a larger art historical reevaluation about the status of queer identification.[113] While earlier texts reference his queer identity by association, this aspect is critical to understanding the themes, approaches, and influences in Asco's work, especially the development of nausea camp.

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[108] C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita González, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," in Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 43.

[109] Chavoya and González, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 58.

[110] Chavoya and González, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 66. Midnight movies, which emerged in the early 1970s, provided a venue for outsider films. Chilean Alejandro Jodorowsky's acid western *El Topo* (1970) is widely considered the first popular midnight movie. The practice of screening non-mainstream films at midnight originates in the 1950s when televisions stations aired low budget B-movies at midnight.

[111] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing*, 70–71. Meyer argues that the camp utterance is performative, often as a code between homosexuals. It is not legible to others, even those sharing the same language and culture. Gamboa's puns, which are legible to any bilingual speaker, remain less coded and do not perform as camp.

[112] As of this writing in 2020, there are eleven titles. According to the CSRC webpage, forthcoming titles include Patssi Valdez. See http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/research/ver-revisioning-art-history. In 2009, the CSRC also published *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta-Cyclona Collection* by Robb Hernandez, which focuses on Gronk's early collaborator and Asco associate.

[113] Max Benavidez, *Gronk*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2007), 6, 10.

Leticia Alvarado's "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection" proposes a reassessment of Asco's genesis story.[114] She observes that the artists' initial meeting during *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* initiated a queer and abject genesis for Asco that predates the traditional narrative. That narrative, which I recount in Chapter One, takes place in the aftermath of the Chicano Moratorium with Gamboa as the protagonist, drawing the group together to illustrate the magazine *Regeneración.* Alvarado's essay, published during my own research process for this dissertation, skirts around the term camp yet emphasizes the presence of queer tactics that suit its definition. In Chapter One, I recount these two ostensibly dueling origin stories to make evident the essential role that each plays in Asco's aesthetics.

Prior to Alvarado's examination of Asco's queer genesis, Julia Bryan-Wilson considers the No Movie *Asshole Mural* (1975, fig. 10).[115] Her close reading of this photograph analyzes the role of abjection together with self-presentation, particularly its mockery of the mural format that dominates Chicano Art. She explores Asco's calculated choice of costumes that reference the pachucho styles of the zoot suit era. This 1930s formal dressing expressed Latino, and later Black, self-respect and dignity in a society that marginalized and denigrated these populations. In "Orifice Baroque," Bryan-Wilson calls our attention to Asco's juxtaposition of this style with abject humor, politics, and self-presentation.

Several scholars have researched Gronk's openly gay friends and affiliates outside of Asco. Two of the most significant of these friends are Legorreta, who performed as the maniacal drag character Cyclona in several proto-Asco performances by Gronk, and Jerry Dreva (1945–1997), whose participation in correspondence art and media hoaxes paralleled Asco's own. These connections provide a route for considering the commonality of tactics used among queer artists and Asco, which in turn speaks to the shared overall methods of camp.

Two catalogues feature essays that address these connections. The first is curator Gonzalez's exploration of the group of artists who met at a Silver Lake gay bar called Butch Gardens.[116] Members of the Butch Gardens School of Art included Gronk and Asco collaborator Sandoval, as well as Jack Vargas (1952–1995), Meza, and Joey Terrill (b. 1955).[117] Through association with this circle of queer artists, Asco's founders befriended peers who employed similar tactics of camp resistance. Further exploring the queer Chicano artists, the 2018 exhibition *Axis Mundo* documents this network through Asco friend and colleague, Meza. Articles by David Evans Frantz and Iván A. Ramos document the social scenes in which Asco members participated, while Alvarado and Chavoya describe the use of mail art, specifically referencing Asco's No Movies, as part of queer Chicano creative practice. In her essay for *Axis*

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[114] Leticia Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," *Atzlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 63–94.

[115] Bryan-Wilson, "Orifice Baroque," *Artforum*, October 2011, 279.

[116] Rita Gonzalez, "Frida, Homeboys, and the Butch Gardens School of Fine Art," in C. Ondine Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 318–325.

[117] Rita González, "Frida, Homeboys, and the Butch Gardens School of Fine Art," 318; Chavoya and Frantz, *Axis Mundo*. The subsequent exhibition and catalogue *Axis Mundo* explored the network of artists surrounding Meza, many of whom were part of the Butch Gardens group. The name of the group plays on the art history term "school" and the amusement park in Van Nuys, Bush Gardens (open 1964–1979).

Mundo, Bryan-Wilson discusses the homophobia in Chicano culture, as described by Gamboa, and draws it together *rasquache* with West Coast conceptualism.[118]

Legorreta and Meza were early friends and collaborators with Gronk, and as is noted in Gronk's monograph by Benavidez, they initiated him into the practice through taunting strolls through the neighborhood.[119] For this reason, texts about Legorreta corroborate and expand upon how drag functioned as a form of provocation and resistance, informing Asco's practices. Jennifer Flores-Sternad's interview with Legorreta in *The GLQ Archive* documents his thoughts regarding *Caca Roaches Have No Friends.* Also evident in this interview is Legorreta's ongoing personal reevaluation of sexuality, politics, and performance through his rejection of identity markers, such as "gay," and descriptions of his practice as "drag."[120]

Deborah Cullen addresses both Legorreta and Dreva in Asco's retrospective catalogue. Specifically, she notes that the glam/gore-rock aesthetic, of which camp is a large component, is evident in No Movies.[121] This dovetails with her discussion of Dreva, particularly his faux-rock band, Les Petite Bonbons.[122] Chavoya also highlights the relationship between Gronk and Dreva, emphasizing the link between underground music and correspondence art, a topic Chavoya expands upon in the previously noted *Axis Mundo*.[123] However, regarding camp specifically and Asco associate Dreva, Kristin Olds makes the relationship most explicit in her article, "'Gay Life Artists': Les Petite Bonbons and Camp Performativity in the 1970s." Olds notes the distinction between Dreva's politicized camp and Sontag's apolitical variety, while also describing differences between his performances and those of Asco.[124] Her observations of camp, more in-depth than articles previously published on any East LA artist, fuel my investigation into Asco's use and development of camp.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In this Introduction, I have provided background information on Asco, camp, and Chicano art. These topics form the foundation for my exploration of the presence and use of camp in Asco's projects. As noted in the literature review, scholars have commented upon campy and *rasquache* elements in Asco's oeuvre, yet an analysis of camp in their work has yet to be performed. My dissertation is the first to focus on camp in Asco's work. It is also the first to define camp through its function, rather than lists of examples, in order to theorize its role in a racialized conglomerate, combined with *rasquache* and *domesticana.* Throughout this project I

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[118] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "'Be Easy but Look Hard': Conceptual Currents in Queer Chicana/o Art," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (New York: Prestel, 2017), 191–209.

[119] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 19.

[120] Jennifer Flores-Sternad, "Cyclona and Early Chicano Performance Art: An Interview with Robert Legorreta," *The GLQ Archive* 12, no. 3 (2006): 478, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2005-007.

[121] Deborah Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," in Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 210–211.

[122] Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," 214, 219.

[123] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Art and Life: *Dreva/Gronk,*" in Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 284–299. Also see Benavidez, *Gronk*.

[124] Kristen Olds, "'Gay Life Artists': Les Petites Bonbons and Camp Performativity in the 1970s," *Art Journal* 72, no. 2 (2013): 20, 32n84, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2013.10791028.

approach Asco's tactics, methods, and strategies as nested. For example, tactics include specific actions such as drag and public spectacle. Methods refer to *rasquache* and camp as overarching phenomena that function as specific ways to disidentify. These methods contribute to Asco's overall strategy to create space and reclaim agency for those outside of dominant identities.

In Chapter One, entitled "Revulsion Revolution: Processing against Processions," I examine how Asco created nausea camp and used it to target the homophobia and essentialism in the Chicano community. I begin with Gronk's proto-Asco play *Caca Roaches Have No Friends.* This play marks the first meeting of all four founding members and represents the stage debut of nausea camp, which outraged the audience. This early meeting also dovetails with the well-documented political narrative of the group's genesis. Furthermore, I reveal that the controversial stage performance and street protests fostered not only the group, but their aesthetic as well. I define and note the methods in the play, informed by the gay liberation movement and the Chicano movement, as well as the methods used in Asco's first street procession, *Stations of the Cross*.

In Chapter Two, "Off/On the Wall: Murals against Muralism," I focus on Chicano murals as the target of nausea camp. I analyze four actions, which I establish as two pendant pieces, all of which occur on Christmas Eve of their respective years. The first pair comprises *Walking Mural* and *Spray Paint LACMA/Project Pie in (De)Face* (fig. 11), both created in 1972. The second pendants, which Asco created two years later, are *First Supper (After A Major Riot)* with *Instant Mural*. Each of these works involved all four founding members of Asco and shows a refinement of the street performance practices that were just emerging in the works covered in Chapter One. In my analysis of the first pair, *Walking Mural* and *Spray Paint LACMA*, I show that Asco creates a parallel between those with limited expectations of Chicano art, both in their community art spaces and the museum. The former set a de facto standard of Chicano art, and the latter stereotyped Chicano art as vandalism. Both the local art scene and the elite spaces of the museum demanded a specific type of Chicano, and one's work would be accepted or rejected based on that standard. I then turn my investigation to the second pair of actions, *First Supper (After A Major Riot)* and *Instant Mural.* These street performances no longer function as processions. I argue that these actions located in single locations instead use iconography, the body, and restriction of motion to draw parallels between government oppression in East LA and in Chile.

In Chapter Three, "The Means of Promotion: Movies against Movies," I examine how Asco targets Hollywood for its omission and stereotyping of Latinos. Asco makes this critique through the creation and distribution of the No Movie, which is a type of staged photograph functioning as a film still from a non-existent movie. I posit that the film still is its own medium, which I position in the expanded field of photography. My assessment of No Movies begins with *Fountain of Aloof/ La Dolce* (1975, fig 12), in which I examine the visual elements that Asco employs, including lighting and gaze. I also compare Asco's production process with those of other later artists who reference film stills, Sherman and Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962). In my discussion of *Waiting for Tickets* (1975, fig. 13) I consider the logistics of shooting in a public space at night and contrast Asco's clandestine approach with other photographers on location projects. Turning to *A la mode* (1976, fig. 14) I propose that Valdez attacks Hollywood's omission and stereotypes of Latinas through a pose that mimics camp icon Joan Crawford. These two additional comparisons allow for a nuanced consideration of beauty, race, and camp via Hollywood's golden era.

In the epilogue, I focus on the impact of Asco and the future life of nausea camp. I begin with an overview of post-1970s Asco projects and the eventual disbanding of the group in 1987. Considering each founding member's independent art practice trajectory, I examine how their experience using camp, especially their racialized iteration of it, may have influenced their mature work. I also look to the afterlife of Asco and nausea camp. Specifically, I examine contemporary artists, both Chicano and non-Chicano, who are indebted to Asco, or who use camp or nausea camp in their work. My investigations ascertain to what ends Chicano artists still use camp, as well as whether and how nausea camp remains a productive tactic of disidentification.

Through an examination of how camp and *rasquache* operate, followed by analysis of performance documentation and No Movie photographs, I demonstrate that Asco uses queer and ethnic forms of camp to create nausea camp. In addition to referencing the group's name, my term reflects concepts of post-Stonewall drag and the horror punk genre of music emerging in the 1970s. In "The Aesthetics of Drag," Daniel Harris describes a change in mood after 1969 as "more than just a gimmicky spoof but an improbable symbol of our dissident heritage and a provocative challenge to the status quo."[125] Gender play no longer seeks only to entertain but now seeks to disturb as well, a phenomenon I analyze in Asco's performances in Chapters One and Two. Similarly, developing out of the very glam rock circles that Asco's founders frequented, horror punk uses camp-like performances that blend 1950s doo-wop melodies with lyrics and costumes inspired by slasher films.[126] These attitudes of confrontation, provocation, and disturbance all resonate with Asco's nausea camp.

My decision to use the terms "Chicana" and "Chicano" also stems from careful consideration of my subjects.[127] Throughout the history of the Chicano Movement, spellings have included Chicana/o, Chican@, Xican@, and very recently Chicanx or Xicanx. "Latinx," the term out of which Chicanx arose, is ultimately a U.S. phenomenon (the term is rarely used in Latin America), yet it has fostered rich scholarly arguments that inform my terminology in this dissertation.[128] The use of "Chicanx" potentially reflects the queerness that Asco embraced in order to cultivate camp. The x challenges binaries, and in many ways pushes beyond criticism of "Latinx," because it always functioned as a term of self-identification based in the United States amongst a group fluent in pronunciations of English and Spanish.

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[125] Daniel Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," *Salmagundi* 108 (Fall 1995): 67–68.

[126] Jerry Dreva, "Jerry Dreva Spiral Bound Journal," n.d., box 14, folder 2, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8. Dreva and Gronk frequented Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco on Los Angeles' Sunset Strip, which catered to an all-ages crowd of mostly teenagers.

[127] From 2004 to 2016, the use of the term "Latinx" grew exponentially in academic publications and popular culture. The "x" endeavors to create an inclusive alternative to the Spanish language endings of a and o, for feminine and masculine nouns respectively. As noted in discussions on both sides of the argument, the term "Latino" is itself a contested expression of identity fraught with colonialism. Although the letter x does occur in Spanish, the pronunciation of Latinx does not follow the spelling or pronunciation conventions of that language.

[128] As Chicanos are U.S. people of Mexican descent, that term and its spelling variations are used even less frequently than "Latinx" is used in Latin American countries.

Ultimately, however, I have considered the historical context of Asco and the ongoing processes of naming by each generation that parallels new priorities and concerns. Like the term "Chicano," seized upon by the first generation of the Movement in the late 1960s, the current move towards non-binary endings reflects the goals of this generation of activists. Chicanos of the first generation have yet to broadly embrace "Chicanx." Further, in interviews I and others have conducted, the members of Asco frequently used the terms "Chicana" or "Chicano" rather than "Chicanx." In order to respect the chosen vocabulary of the group and remain consistent with the verbiage of their generation, I use the terms "Chicana" and "Chicano" here. This choice reflects the historical aspects of the artists' work and their struggle, which foreshadowed the very discussions represented by "Xicanx" today.

I have focused my investigation on works created with the involvement of at least two of Asco's founding members. For example, *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* was penned by Gronk and performed by Valdez, with frequent Asco collaborators Legorreta and Meza. Individual projects, such as Herrón's murals or Valdez's painting, would fall outside of this scope. I also limit my study's temporal scope to the period from 1969 to 1978. This period encompasses Asco's early street processions and their development of the No Movie medium. It omits later performances and film-strip-based projects that evolved from No Movies. These later projects often involve a greater number of participants, which attenuates the early camp and *rasquache* elements. By concentrating on the members involved and the earliest years, my study establishes the sources that contributed to Asco's nausea camp.

I conducted interviews with Gamboa and Gronk, the two members who were available to be researched and the ones most cited in Asco history.[129] My discussion with Gamboa focused on the political and personal experiences that influenced his perspective in Asco's performances, notably the systemic oppression of Chicanos.[130] My formal interview with Gronk spanned nearly five hours and confirmed much information, while also uniting queer and proto-punk cultures as critical to his development as an artist and a member of Asco.[131] Quite generous with his time, Gronk also described the social connections between Asco founders, how they met, and their shared interests. He detailed how his interest in film, theater, and performance made him well-versed in these areas, and he discussed the provocation found in Asco's nausea camp. Gronk's willingness to speak specifically about Asco's aesthetics and conceptual development significantly aided my project.

[129] My attempts to contact Herrón were unsuccessful. I met Valdez in person briefly, but due to personal reasons, she did not have time for an interview.

[130] Gamboa, interview with the author.

[131] Gronk, interview with the author.

CHAPTER ONE: REVULSION REVOLUTION—PROCESSING AGAINST PROCESSIONS

In this chapter, I examine how Asco emerged in a place and moment loaded with the potential for self-invention: Los Angeles. For Asco, this self-invention necessitated borrowing and critiquing elements of both mainstream Anglo culture and the Chicano movement to allow for the development of a feminist, queer, Chicano art. José Esteban Muñoz describes this process of reformulating normative categories to create new possibilities as disidentification.[1] Munoz's theory, inspired by Chicana authors Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Chela Sandoval, proposes an identity-in-difference, or a suspended "not yet" moment that points to future potentiality.[2] Disidentification, as evidenced in Asco's nausea camp, is not a project of assimilation or anti-assimilation.[3] Instead, disidentification, like camp, exists in an in-between space that borrows from and critiques the status quo, because "a politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does within discourse."[4]

Asco's nausea camp, I argue, uses the vocabulary of mainstream art movements (performance art, avant-garde European theater), Chicano culture (*rasquache,* murals, Mexican Catholicism), and queer culture (drag, especially horror drag) to express the group members' complex individual identities while challenging stereotypes. I begin by mapping the postwar art scene in Los Angeles and outlining the emergence of the Chicano art world in the 1970s. These set the backdrop for my examination of the staged, unscripted play *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) written by Gronk. All four founding members of Asco were involved in this play, either as participants (Valdez) or in the audience (Gamboa and Herrón); as such, the play provides a first glimpse of Asco's social beginnings, political concerns, and creative influences.

I follow this with a close reading of Asco's first processional performance on Whittier Boulevard, *Stations of the Cross* (1971). This procession introduces location and culture as richly layered elements in Asco's strategy of critique and development of camp methods. Throughout this analysis, I propose a definition of camp based on its relationship to power, which informs my theorization of Asco's nausea camp. I illuminate how Asco's performances developed from Gronk's experience in queer Chicano Los Angeles and were informed by Gamboa's involvement in the student walkouts of 1968. I argue that both queer and Chicano activism provided Asco with the tactics of drag and *rasquache* that intertwine throughout the group's genesis and its members' careers. As highlighted by Leticia Alvarado's recent scholarship, this dual narrative draws upon both queer and Chicano activism.[5] It complicates Asco literature that relied on Gamboa's writings, which positions the Chicano Moratorium as the catalyst to the group's beginning. I believe that by establishing two converging themes as formative to Asco's aesthetic, the complexity of their work can be best understood.

In Asco's performances, nausea camp emerges as a weapon against layers of social structures that ostracized the members of the group. The group's campy provocation makes its grand entrance with *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*, a public performance where all founding

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[1] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), x.

[2] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 6–7. This concept also relates to what Derrida describes as *différance.*

[3] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 18.

[4] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 18–19.

[5] Leticia Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 64.

members were present. By charting the group's Chicano and queer political concerns from that proto-Asco moment into their street performances, I reveal Asco's development of nausea camp. As I demonstrate in this chapter, Asco employed drag to camp conventional gender and sexual roles and to challenge homophobia in the Chicano community. With assembled scraps of their surroundings of America, Los Angeles, and East LA, they invented a nausea-inducing *rasquache*. In doing so, they made space for their own culture by using the very cultures of those who refused to see them.

MAPPING LOS ANGELES

In Los Angeles, the civil rights movements and cultural shifts of the 1970s occurred against a backdrop of smog and highways. Moving east from downtown, just over the concrete bed of the Los Angeles River, stands a tangle of freeways. Officially named the East Los Angeles Interchange, it ostensibly joins the 5, 10, 60, and 101 freeways, making it one of the busiest interchanges in the world. However, not all of the routes connect to each other, so drivers sometimes need to continue miles beyond the interchange to transfer.

Underneath and encircled by these elevated roadways stands East Los Angeles, an unincorporated neighborhood awkwardly isolated by that flubbed transportation connector. On the streets, the predominantly Mexican American working-class citizens make do in a space where heavy policing has persisted for decades. During the early 1970s, teenagers in East LA, as evidenced by the members of Asco and their affiliates, came of age in an environment that honed their cultural and political sophistication. Despite limited access to cars, they frequented underground art and music venues. In those spaces they learned about foreign films, encountered performance art, and forged alliances through art and activism. As misfits of the marginal, they discovered the potency of revulsion. It is in this neighborhood, below tangled overpasses and the haze-obscured Hollywood sign, that Asco formulated its glitter and gangrene aesthetic.

The wild west permissiveness of Los Angeles contrasted sharply with the art world of New York. In the postwar era, New York seized the title of art capital from Paris as artists from Europe flocked to the United States. During that time, New York's museums, including the Museum of Modern Art and The Whitney Museum of American Art, gained international acclaim for their collections featuring avant-garde artists from both sides of the Atlantic. Manhattan also boasted numerous blue-chip art galleries throughout Midtown that forged the modern art market. Additionally, artists transformed New York's industrial buildings into studios and alternative art venues. The vertically oriented city nurtured the arts community through its density, which packed artists, patrons, and venues onto the island. On the West Coast, Los Angeles struggled to define itself as distinct from, though in many ways indebted to, the New York art world. The openness of the west created a city of horizontal sprawl, which offered artists expansive room paired with the danger of isolation. This difference of geography and space led Los Angeles artists to develop their own distinct approaches to art and community from the 1950s onward. Artist Robert Irwin (b. 1928), a key figure of the west coast Light and Space movement, stated, "People in New York assume everything there is to know is either known or eminently available. Growing up on the West Coast, you start out with the assumption that everything there is to know is to be found out."[6] While New York could offer a young artist

[6] William Hackman, *Out of Sight: The Los Angeles Art Scene of the Sixties* (New York: Other Press, 2015), 9–10.

an established art world with a legacy rooted in Europe, Los Angeles challenged artists with the burden of open possibility.

The establishment of local galleries played a key role in Los Angeles' ascent as the second city of art. In each case, there were balances to be struck between the existing art world and the one being formed on the West Coast. For example, the Ferus Gallery, which operated from 1957 to 1966 on La Cienega Boulevard, exemplified an openness to new art practices from both coasts.[7] Ferus served as the venue for the first West Coast exhibition of Pop Art when Andy Warhol (1928–1987) debuted his thirty-two Campbell's Soup Can paintings (1962). It also represented and promoted Los Angeles-based artists including Larry Bell (b. 1939) and Ed Ruscha (b. 1937). Dwan Gallery, established by Virginia Dwan in 1959 in Westwood, also exhibited the New York School alongside Los Angeles-based painters. Dwan opened a second gallery in New York in 1965, inverting the presumptive east-to-west progression of American art.[8] Throughout the 1960s, Dwan represented artists from both coasts, especially those engaged in Minimalism and Land Art. Such a hybrid approach not only established bridges between the two coasts but also increased opportunities for artists and patrons.

LACMA opened to the public in 1965, the same year as the Watts Riots. Younger than its East Coast peers, the museum helped mark Los Angeles as a city serious about art. It also ignited discussion regarding how encyclopedic art museums represent and engage their community. Almost immediately, the *Los Angeles Times* highlighted local artists demanding representation in the collection and exhibition programming.[9] These calls for inclusion based on geographic location demonstrate the many voices LACMA served as the only major art museum in southern California. In 1972, Gamboa would make his own inquiry regarding representation—specifically of Chicanos—in the collection. Such issues of representation in major collections remain pertinent today, not just in Los Angeles but throughout the world. Yet for LACMA, which opened on the cusp of the many civil rights movements, voices demanding inclusion have been present since the beginning.

Gallery and performance spaces associated with local colleges provided a route for emerging artists to enter the Los Angeles art scene. The art practice programs at Pomona College, California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), and Otis College of Art exposed students to performance and conceptual art through exhibitions, visiting artist lectures, and influential faculty. For example, Chris Burden (1946–2015) graduated from Pomona College (1969) and earned his MFA in 1971 at UC Irvine, where he developed performances focused on physical endurance as seen in his Master's thesis *Five Day Locker Piece* (1971).

Conceptual artist John Baldessari (1931–2020), who attended several California art programs, developed and taught an influential non-media-specific post-studio course at CalArts. It was also at CalArts that Judy Chicago (b. 1939) organized Womanhouse (1972). The project grew out of the Feminist Art Program that she initially developed at Cal State Fresno. The setting of Los Angeles played a critical role in its success, as Peggy Phelan explains: "[T]here's no way the feminist art movement could have been started on the east coast. It could only have started on

[7] Hackman, *Out of Sight*, 125–26.
[8] Hackman, *Out of Sight*, 157.
[9] "'Show More L.A. Art,' County Museum Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1965, West Side 1 edition, sec. K.

the west coast because there was a tradition on the west coast of inventing yourself, and one could only do that outside the shadow of the European art tradition."[10]

The teenage members of Asco developed as artists along the blurry edge of that shadow and many others. Taking from the broader art world and witnessing Los Angeles' growing role in it, Asco assembled an aesthetic of many parts yet entirely its own. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s East Los Angeles community arts spaces provided exhibition and collaboration opportunities for Chicano artists. Goez Art Studios and Gallery began in 1969 as a commercial exhibition space that offered art classes and promoted mural-based tourism.[11] Karen Mary Davalos explains:

> Goez is a pioneer in Chicana/o art history because of its early promotion of public art as a component of heritage tourism, an economic model intended to benefit local economies by increasing state, county, and city revenues. . . . Goez's commercial venture, therefore, reinforced self-representation and affirmation, the central tenets of the Chicano movement.[12]

Established the same year as Goez, Mechicano, Art Center focused on collaborative projects with other community organizations to promote Chicano art while also offering arts education and exhibition space.[13] The emphasis on Chicano ideology helped form a community of support for emerging artists but also promoted a unified aesthetic that risked limiting artists and their art. This restrictive perspective on *chicanismo* began with the emergence of Chicano art as such and persists in the present. Asco's members encountered these rigid expectations outside of and within East Los Angeles. One particular incident occurred at Mechicano, in which Chicano artist Carlos Almaraz (1941–1989), said Asco's work was "just too way out for [the gallerists]" or simply not "Chicano" enough.[14] Both in the wild west of the Los Angeles art world, and in the community-focused Chicano community, Asco borrowed from and challenged the nascent status quo.

CHICANO ART

Alongside the burgeoning Chicano activist movement of the late 1960s, Chicano art as a distinct, self-aware style began to emerge in urban Mexican American neighborhoods. In its efforts to bolster the political movement, much subject matter of Chicano art addressed the contexts of power in relation to ethnicity and class.[15] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, murals made up a large portion of Chicano art, with images that often proclaim Chicano pride by referencing a shared indigenous, pre-contact ancestry.[16] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s,

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[10] Peggy Phelan, "Violence and Rupture: Misfires of the Ephemeral," in *Live Art in L.A.: Performance in Southern California, 1970–1983*, ed. Peggy Phelan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

[11] Karen Mary Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix: Art and Errata since the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 68, 75.

[12] Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix*, 74.

[13] Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix*, 74–75.

[14] Edward J. McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 82.

[15] Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix*, 2.

[16] Guisela Latorre, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 2.

younger artists diversified the field, embracing a wide variety of media and art practices. This era also saw the emergence of *domesticana*, which brought a feminist reassessment of mural iconography.

Scholarly interest in Chicano art has increased recently, yet the field remains under-researched.[17] The inherent hybridity of Chicano identity—of being what Ramón Gutiérrez calls internally colonized—echoes in Chicano art, which slips through the gap between "American" and Latin American Art.[18] Here I provide a brief background of Chicano art, attending to the artists and established approaches to it, in order to provide a sense of Asco's break with their peers. Although Chicano art was dominated by the mural movement in its earlier years, I reserve a more detailed discussion of the origins of Chicano muralism and Asco's relationship to it for the next chapter.

Two distinct artist groups have come to represent two different approaches to Chicano art: Los Four and Asco. In his essay "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility," Benavidez describes the distinctions between these groups.[19] Los Four was formed in 1973 by four mural painters from East Los Angeles: Almaraz, Robert "Beto" de la Rocha (b. 1937), Gilbert Luján (1940–2011), and Frank Romero (b. 1940). In 1974, Los Four became the first Chicano artists to exhibit their work at LACMA, two years after Asco tagged the museum's entrances as described in Chapter Two.[20]

Immediately following the exhibition at LACMA, de la Rocha quit the group and Judithe Hernández (b. 1948) joined. Hernández's participation in Los Four prompts comparisons to Valdez and Asco, most explicitly in the duo exhibition, *One Path, Two Journeys* (2018). Such comparisons focus on the corresponding gender makeup of the groups (three men and one female artist) rather than the contrast between their approaches and aesthetics.[21] Though the two groups were nearly a decade apart in age and never collaborated, their histories remain tethered, simply because they co-existed in a small scene. If anything, Asco felt competitive with their older peers.[22]

According to Benavidez, the contrast between these groups rests in Los Four's "cool, intellectual approach," in contrast with Asco who "symbolized the street and barrio youth."[23] I

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[17] Karen Mary Davalos, "Knowledge, Aesthetic, Cultural Production in Chicano Re/Mix" (Lecture, Faculty Publication Night, Loyola Marymount University, March 15, 2016), https://youtu.be/KQbYUqQ_PKU. In 2016, Davalos stated that there are ten books addressing Chicano art; she was specifically referring to survey texts rather than catalogues or monographs.

[18] Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "The Chicano Movement," in *Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies*, eds. Francisco O. Lomeli, Denise A. Segura, and Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe (New York: Routledge, 2019), 61.

[19] Max Benavidez, "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility," in *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 18.

[20] Asco's retrospective, their first exhibition at LACMA, occurred forty years later.

[21] This comparison, while factually correct, does not consider other noteworthy parallels in artistic production. The sexuality of the members, specifically Gronk and Almaraz, is rarely mentioned but is potentially more salient when considering where and how camp appears in Asco's work.

[22] Willie Herrón, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, March 5, 2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Herrón describes his view of Los Four by saying, "they made me realize what I didn't want to do."

[23] Benavidez, "Chicano Art," 18.

suggest that another significant difference lies in the security of fitting-in versus the risk of queerness.[24] Los Four employed the imagery of the Chicano movement, as evident in their murals such as *Por El Pueblo* (1975, fig. 15). The UFW flag occupies the upper left side of this mural, and the right side is bordered with male and female profile portraits. Below the banner is a cluster of grapes, referencing the UFW grape boycotts from 1965 to 1970. At the center, next to a yellow lowrider car and in front of a crumbling columned building, a brown-skinned man in jeans holds a smaller figure as blood pools at their feet. To their left the stand nopal cacti and a cattle skull. According to the Mural Conservancy, the center figure is holding a dead gang member, and the building is a courthouse.[25] While the mural depicts contemporary subject matter rather than indigenous temples or Guadalupe icons, it reinforces associations of Chicanos with migrant labor and gang violence.

Hernández's original concept for her mural, *Homenaje a Las Mujeres de Aztlán* (1977, fig. 16), painted with Almaraz, celebrated the traditional roles of women in the family.[26] The text (in Spanish and English) around a central female portrait describes a continuum of women from "the days of ancient history" to the present as protectors of the family. The figure's right hand is raised while the other, along the lower foreground, cradles several traditional images, from the Guadalupe to a colossal Olmec head. The UFW flag appears again on the right. Working at the same time as Los Four, Asco seized these tropes of Chicano murals and camped them in a critique of the limited identity such iconography espoused. Valdez's reinterpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe in *Walking Mural,* which I discuss in detail in the next chapter, is but one example. Valdez's black chiffon and silver costume breaks with the colorful and submissive icon that appears in the arms of Hernández's static women. These contrasts demonstrate the rift that left Asco on the margins of both the Chicano and mainstream art worlds.

Chicano artists work in a range of media, printmaking and painting especially, yet the mural format remains foundational to the movement. As public artworks, murals serve as billboards for community uplift, reminding Chicanos of their histories and encouraging solidarity. Murals do not simply show aspects of what it means to be Chicano; they use visual means to produce such identities.[27] Their creation requires the cooperation of the community, artists, and property owners. All of this is coordinated by community arts organizations, such as the Goez Gallery and Mechicano Art Center in East LA.[28] As Holly Barnet-Sanchez reveals in her study of East LA murals, these works are remarkable because they were all created in a concentrated time and place, at the heart and height of the Chicano Movement.[29] These murals

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[24] Both Almaraz and Gronk identified as gay, but Los Four did not, perhaps could not, embrace queer culture or camp. Even in proto-Asco work, as I explain in Chapter Two, Asco's four founding members take a critical stance on the Chicano community and essentialism. In contrast, Los Four painted earnest images that served the early, and often homophobic, Chicano movement.

[25] "Por El Pueblo," The Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles, accessed October 19, 2018, https://www.muralconservancy.org/murals/por-el-pueblo.

[26] Holly Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life: Iconography and Identity in East LA Murals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 170.

[27] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life,* 3.

[28] Latorre, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*, 151, 189.

[29] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, xix.

also often include graffiti, which creates a visual dialogue between community-sanctioned art and individual expression.

Although Asco members Gronk and Gamboa worked on several murals together, the group's performances and No Movies subsumed the practice to critique it as part of their larger strategy to resist limited concepts of *chicanismo*—expanding and questioning existing ideas of what it meant to be Chicano. Participation does not preclude criticism, as Gronk frequently noted that Asco's murals avoided stereotypical Chicano imagery. Even as Asco members largely avoided and critiqued the mural medium, they remained aware of the racialization of murals and graffiti as specifically Chicano activities. Asco camped this stereotype in *Spray Paint LACMA*, which I analyze along with a history of muralism in Chapter Two.

OUT OF MANY, ASCO

A prolific writer and the primary documentarian of Asco's performances, Gamboa has established a primary timeline, an archive of considerable depth, and an authoritative voice regarding the group. He often transformed his experiences as a young Chicano into short stories laced with parody and criticism of assimilating forces. In his collected writings, *Urban Exile,* he narrates a story that Asco scholars cite most often in the group's biography.[30] It begins with a conversation during the Chicano Moratorium on August 29, 1970.[31] Gamboa describes the moment:

> As the police onslaught at the park intensified, Francisca Flores, publisher of *Regeneración,* a Chicano political and literary journal, encountered Harry Gamboa. As they ran from the cloud of tear gas and swinging clubs of the police, she handed him a copy of her journal and then disappeared into the havoc of the surging crowd.[32]

In that iconic moment when Flores hands Gamboa the journal, she asks him to edit the next issue of *Regeneración*. He then recruits three artist friends—Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez—to aid with illustrations, marking their first collaboration.[33] This scene, along with the backstory of his involvement with the school walkouts of 1968, provide activist credibility to Asco's political project in the Chicano community. Asco co-founder Herrón highlights the importance of this event:

> Working with Harry on *Regeneración,* I think that allowed us to consciously focus on each other where if we would have been separate individuals out there, not being drawn together by Harry and his project, I don't know if we would have gotten together as the group that we got together. So I really attribute the group, all of us becoming aware and focusing on each other, as sensitive as we did, because of Harry bringing us together . . . with the *Regeneración* magazine. It brought us together to become aware of each other.[34]

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[30] Harry Gamboa and Chon A. Noriega, *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 20

[31] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 67, 69.

[32] Gamboa and Noriega, *Urban Exile*, 73–75. Original text in third-person.

[33] Colin Gunckel, "'We Were Drawing and Drawn into Each Other': Asco's Collaboration Through Regeneración," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya et al. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 151.

[34] Herrón, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel.

The *Regeneración* project spanned from 1970 to 1975. Previously a text-heavy magazine recognized for its essays on early Chicana feminist thought, *Regeneración* began to foreground visual media under Gamboa's leadership as editor.[35] The black and white illustrations for the anarchist publication appear at times roughly sketched, with other sections employing a cut-and paste aesthetic. Collin Gunnel refers to the images as dark and grotesque.[36] For example, in the final issue, a full page is given over to an Asco collage divided into nine panels that are at times denoted by a dotted line (fig. 17). Poetry in the upper left has been typed, cut out, and affixed to a black background in choppy lines of text. At the center, a photobooth double portrait rests on its side, its grayscale eliminated in place of a graphic black and white image. Handwritten text anchors the center bottom edge. "ASCO 75" appears below the writing, boldly printed in its own distinct typeface.[37] When viewed through the lens of *rasquache,* this messy hodgepodge of mechanical, photographed, and handmade elements in the pages of *Regeneración* reveals an aesthetic of resistance to the restrictive visual conventions found within the mainstream Chicano movement.

Recent scholarship has regarded the proto-Asco performance *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* as a flashpoint for Asco's formation. This antagonistic camp performance occurs a year prior to Gamboa and Flores' interaction at the Moratorium. I believe that these two origin stories emphasize different aspects of Asco's art aesthetic and its function. While the lore of *Regeneración* speaks to their political engagement and place in the Chicano movement, the legend of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* highlights camp and provocation as tactics learned from the emerging gay rights movement. Without this confrontational queer influence, Asco's creative work and initial reception might have appeared more in line with that of groups like Los Four, whose murals reflected the traditional values of the Chicano movement. The stakes of one narrative over another become more pronounced in the aftermath of the group's dissolution than at the moment of their emergence.

Alvarado asserts that the preference for Gamboa's narrative in Asco biographies downplays the queer qualities of Asco in order to fit the group more easily into a normative art history.[38] However, an examination of Gamboa's writing, rich with puns, sarcasm, and carefully chosen narratives, presents a vision of Asco that he still recognizes today when he says, "Asco was not a collective; we were a group of highly creative and competitive people."[39] The voices of founders Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez have formed the basis for emerging scholarship on the group, including 2017's exhibition *Axis Mundo*, which includes Asco members as part of the Queer Chicano Networks of Los Angeles. Additionally, proto-Asco projects and the archives of those associated with the group reveal an interest the abject.

CACA-ROACHES HAVE NO FRIENDS (1969)

During the afternoon of November 20, 1969, an audience gathered on the lawn of Belvedere Park in East Los Angeles. On the lakeside stage, local teenage performers presented

[35] Gunckel, "We Were Drawing and Drawn into Each Other," 151, 153.
[36] Gunckel, "We Were Drawing and Drawn into Each Other," 158.
[37] Asco, "Untitled Collage," *Regeneración*, 1975, box 9, folder 11, Harry Gamboa Jr. Papers, Special Collections M0753, Stanford University Libraries. Department of Special Collections and University Archives.
[38] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 68.
[39] Harry Gamboa, Jr., interview with the author, October 24, 2017, Los Angeles.

Caca-Roaches Have No Friends (figs. 2, 18, 19). This one-act play, written and directed by Gronk, focused on political and social messages through themes rather than a linear narrative.[40] The play used a partial or fractured narrative, which corresponds to Ybarra-Frausto's description of a *rasquach*e perspective as doing much with very little, including embracing the fragmented.[41] *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* also relied heavily on provocation and used drag in a calculated manner to attack homophobia within the Chicano community. Gronk biographer Benavidez explains:

> This shocking eruption of transgressive sexuality and aesthetic deviance in a public-family oriented area constituted a simultaneously satiric and angry gesture against an experience of alienation and disenfranchisement. Perhaps the most significant was the fact that this performance also represented an assertion of sexual difference within a morally conservative and often hostile environment.[42]

This tactic, an iteration of camp, persists throughout Asco's time together in street performances and No Movies. Finally, *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* brings Asco's members together, either as audience, actor, or director, and allows them to witness the potential of quick, *rasquache* performances as a camp tactic.

The performance's provocative camp later combined with Gamboa's political and media savvy, to become the raw ingredients for Asco's distinct performances. Gronk assembled the cast for *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* by inviting friends and those he found interesting in the community. Working alongside his close friends Legorreta and Meza, he recruited students from school, including Valdez and her friend Sylvia Delgado.[43] Other students including Gamboa and Herrón attended.[44] While the four future Asco founders knew of each other from school, Gronk's performance marked the first time they met. As cast members arrived, Gronk directed them to materials Meza had collected to make costumes.[45] Valdez, who Gronk invited because of her "Sophia Loren-like appearance," played the role of one half of a pair of lips.[46] The play's improvisational nature enchanted Valdez, while Herrón claimed to have "hated" the performance.[47] Valdez also introduced Gronk to Gamboa, who was dating Delgado.[48] Gronk states that he sought out kindred spirits to execute his vision:

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[40] Rudi C. Bleys, *Images of Ambiente: Homotextuality and Latin American Art, 1810–Today* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 173. This fragmented approach to narrative appears in Asco's No Movies, addressed in chapter three.

[41] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo* (Phoenix: Movimiento Artistico del Río Salado (MARS), 1989), 5–8.

[42] Max Benavidez, *Gronk*, ed. Chon A. Noriega, A Ver: Revisioning Art History 1 (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2007), 20.

[43] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, January 20, 1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[44] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 19; Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel.

[45] Patssi Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond" (Lecture, University of California Berkeley, March 6, 2014); Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 70.

[46] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel.

[47] Tere Romo, "Conceptually Divine: Patssi Valdez's Virgen de Guadalupe Walking the Mural," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 10.

[48] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel; Romo, "Conceptually Divine: Patssi Valdez's Virgen

> [I had to] get people that are like-minded or that actually I can [ask],"Can we do this piece called [caca] 'Cockroaches Have No Friends'?" I'm going to take over this park and say it's a children's puppet show, and you're going to go dressed like this woman, and you're going to get this guy and he's a high school guy and he's wearing a poncho and he's going to have these raw eggs in a Coke bottle underneath him, and you pull and you squeeze the eggs and crush 'em, and then you lick it and then you get the bottle and you throw it at the audience.[49]

Much more than a one-off collaboration, Asco's founders embraced the shock of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*. At that performance, complete with *rasquache* costumes and what would later be termed horror drag, Asco's members met for the first time and carried the spirit of camp-laced improvisational attack into the streets.

The lead character, Cyclona, presented a transgressive sexuality that ran throughout the play. This role was performed by Legorreta, who appeared in smeared lipstick and patchy white face (fig. 2). Black, thick, uneven eyeliner rimmed his eyes, darkening the sockets. Dark black dots speckled his cheeks below his lashes. His sideburns and body hair were as prominent as his makeup. Cyclona made no attempt to pass as either male or female.[50] True to the character's force-of-nature name, Cyclona blended and destroyed binary gender identities. The aggressive performance culminates in a scene where actor Meza, as Billy, appears on stage with a water balloon and two eggs attached to his cutoff jeans.[51] Billy stands before Cyclona, initially wearing a poncho, intended to mark him as a Chicano activist.[52] Cyclona dons the lower portion of a nightgown and a fur stole while caressing and fondling the phallus, covering it with a fishnet stocking and breaking eggs in his fists (fig. 18). Laughing maniacally, Cyclona then twists the netting until its contents erupt (fig. 19).[53] This moment is referred to in Asco literature as "the cock scene." The audience reacted to it with screams and began throwing eggs and chairs, and—according to some accounts—setting garbage bins on fire.[54]

The audience demographics that day in Belvedere park heightened the performance's effect of shock. Gronk and his friends promoted the event with flyers and an announcement in the local paper (fig. 20). Due to either intentional promotion by Gronk or a newspaper error, the listing billed the play as family entertainment.[55] Whether *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* actively exploited or passively benefited from the expectations that a play in a public park would be a benign event, Asco did manipulate media and messages for their own ends rather than for direct communication in their later work, including No Movies. Exploiting audience expectations

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de Guadalupe Walking the Mural," 9.

[49] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel.

[50] Robb Hernandez, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta-Cyclona Collection* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2009), 7.

[51] Bleys, *Images of Ambiente*, 173.

[52] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 73.

[53] Deborah Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 208.

[54] For further details see Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco"; Hernandez, *The Fire of Life*; Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection."

[55] Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," 208; Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel. Cullen suggests that the promotion of the play as family friendly was an error however Gronk claims that it was intentional.

that were incongruent with the material of the play, Gronk ensured an appalled reaction yet underestimated its scale. His solicitation of an unprepared audience escalated the already salacious nature of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* and stoked the existing simmering discomfort with non-normative sexuality and appearance. The "family"-oriented politics of the Chicano movement, informed by Catholic and Mexican American conservatism, were deeply entrenched in the Chicano community of East Los Angeles. This included strictly defined gender roles and pervasive homophobia, reinforced by a social policing of any behavior that was perceived as queer or non-normative.

The Chicano movement and the gay rights movement emerged alongside each other at the close of the 1960s. Chicano culture, growing out of Mexican culture, defined homosexuality and masculinity in ways that differ from mainstream Anglo-culture.[56] Chicano scholar Tomas Almaguer states, "there is no cultural equivalent to the modern 'gay man' in the Mexican/Latin-American sexual system."[57] A cultural denial of the intersections of these identities suggests that queer Chicanos have two options: identify as Chicano and deny one's sexuality, or come out and risk being ostracized from one's ethnic community. Despite the default image of homosexuality in the U.S. as white and male, queer people of color have been visibly present throughout the gay rights movement, including the 1969 Stonewall Riots. In addition, the machismo stereotype still burdens Latino masculinity today, leading to complex negotiations in Mexican American culture regarding "true" homosexuality.[58]

The Chicano movement's efforts to support gay rights co-existed with homophobia. Artist Barbara Carrasco (b. 1955), an Asco peer and spouse of Gamboa, has revealed her struggle with her own homophobia both in the art community and as an organizer working with the United Farm Workers. She worried about being seen on television when Cesar Chavez asked her to organize a UFW group to attend a gay pride parade as a way of reciprocating the gay community's support.[59] She has also disclosed her past refusal to "look at" work by lesbian

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[56] These resemble the pre-1948 Kinsey era definitions of what homosexuality is, an act or an individual. In Latin American culture this most often depends on active or passive roles in sexual acts, rather than broader same-sex attraction. For more see Anthony C. Ocampo, "Making Masculinity: Negotiations of Gender Presentation among Latino Gay Men," *Latino Studies* 10, no. 4 (2012): 448–472; Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[57] Tómas Almaguer, "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior," ed. Teresa de Lauretis, *Differences* 3, no. 2 (1991): 75.

[58] Hiram Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!," in *A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 97–98; Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, "Chicanas and El Movimiento," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (Spring and Fall 1974): 156; Anthony C. Ocampo, "Making Masculinity: Negotiations of Gender Presentation among Latino Gay Men," *Latino Studies* 10, no. 4 (2012): 448–472. See also

[59] Edward J. McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 80. The date of this request is not provided. However, Chavez spoke at an LGBT event in West Hollywood in March 1983. Also, beginning in 1974, the UFW via Dolores Huerta openly welcomed and supported homosexuals. See Luis D. Leon, *The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 170.

artists because of her fear, which she attributes to her Catholic background.[60] Both Carrasco's remembrances and the horror drag tactics of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* speak to the burden placed on individuals to adhere to the Chicano movement's "formation of a normative identity cohered by the casting out of undesirable bodies."[61] Asco's use of abjection in the cock scene, as argued by Alvarado, recasts the negative as a tool for political action, not as a way of turning away from an outcast status.[62]

Gronk recalls that his artistic talent protected him from the harassment his friends experienced at the "queer table" in high school. [63] Art, he realized, could serve as a shield. His friendship with Legorreta and Meza, "self-proclaimed glitter queens" who defiantly paraded down Whittier Boulevard, initiated him into the ways of assertive queer tactics.[64] *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* debuts Gronk's approach to art as a weapon, functioning as a personally motivated and politically grounded attack on homophobia. However, Gronk made no declarations in the performance. Similarly, Asco did not issue any statements on their projects. Their self-presentation in interviews blended credible statements with cagey wordplay and digressions. As Rudi Bleys notes regarding their work, "Never did any of the group's statement contain an explicit reproach of homophobia, nor did any of its members ever proclaim to be gay. It was indirectly and in a 'carnivalesque' way that [Asco] included coded messages about sexual identity in their improvisational performance style."[65]

Gronk's relationship with Dreva, while not a declaration of his sexuality, is well-documented. Gronk met Dreva at a Willoughby Sharp (1936–2008) lecture in 1972. [66] The two were active in the Butch Gardens School of Art, a correspondence art collective founded by Teddy Sandoval (1949–1995) and named after a gay bar in Silverlake.[67] In addition to their creative projects, which culminated in the exhibition *Dreva/Gronk* (1978), the items Gronk selected for deposit in the UCLA CSRC archives suggest an intimate relationship between the two artists. In Benavidez's book, Gronk discusses their relationship and how his sexuality made him aware of identity as constructed.[68] Benavidez elaborates on this, stating, "Gronk says he knew from a young age that he was gay. As far as his work is concerned, his homosexuality has had a nuanced manifestation. . . . The effect is that of a homoerotic sexual awareness interacting with its environment in a dense interplay of sensuality, creativity, and urban intensity."[69] Although Benavidez here refers only to Gronk's paintings and characters such as Cyclona and

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[60] Randy J. Ontiveros, "Introduction: The Art and History of the Chicano Movement," in *In the Spirit of a New People: The Cultural Politics of the Chicano Movement.* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 36, https://muse.jhu.edu/; McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements*, 80.

[61] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 66.

[62] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 66.

[63] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel.

[64] Hernandez, *The Fire of Life*, ix.

[65] Bleys, *Images of Ambiente*, 173. His references to coded messages here recalls the suggestion by many Camp scholars, including Fabio Cleto, that it initially served as a private language in the era of Wilde and Isherwood.

[66] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 51.

[67] Chon A. Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me: Early Asco 1971-75," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 19 (Autumn/Winter 2008): 119.

[68] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 6, 51–52.

[69] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 7.

the later Tormenta, these elements are also evident in the early production of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends.*

As noted in the Introduction, camp exists within gay culture as a method for attaining visibility. Like the use of camp, Asco's tactic of drag would be refined over time, adapting to new targets. In his history of camp, Meyer classifies drag as part of camp yet marks it as "low camp," because it "deliberately celebrates bad taste and often intentionally offends aesthetic and social sensibilities in order to make a statement" and performs strictly on the body. In contrast "high camp" displaces the signification to the "environmental surfaces within which that body is situated." [70] Although any distinction between high and low camp remains contested (and some question whether such a distinction even exists), Cyclona's focus on menace rather than sophistication corresponds directly to drag, a form of low camp per Meyer. This type of drag, which I refer to as horror drag, emerges in the late 1960s, demonstrating Asco's close ties to queer resistance practices.[71]

In his essay on camp, Ross emphasizes the temporal shifts that coincide with major cultural changes, not least among them the Stonewall Riots of 1968.[72] Harris, also writing about gay culture, looks specifically at drag and its shift from feminine parody to "warrior drag queen."[73] In his essay "The Aesthetic of Drag," Harris notes that post-Stonewall,

> Contemporary drag performs a wicked dissection of the tastes of the dominant culture and thus functions as one of the weapons in the modern homosexual's arsenal of resistance against the homophobia that has condemned him to the marginalized status of an outcast.[74]

No longer did drag belong to the category of camp that titillated while entertaining; it now shifted to an aggressively defiant form by camping up stereotypes of queer sexualities as debased and deviant. This de-eroticism makes drag—paradoxically, Harris argues—more offensive.[75] This attack on traditional drag is accomplished "by making a willful effort to sabotage the transformative illusion of drag, to make certain that its basic purpose, to them then the appearance of women, doesn't work, that it is discredited, punctured, invalidated, that the wearer is encased in a protective sheathe [*sic*] of irony."[76] He concludes, "Drag, is suddenly at war with itself, and the truculent appearance of the warrior drag queen has become even stranger, more abrasive, less pretty."[77] Harris' language of weapons, arsenals, and warriors resonates with the tensions between the performers and the audience of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*; this language also aptly describes the defiance at the heart of Asco's nausea camp.

In discussing drag, however, we must heed Judith Butler's warning in her essay "Gender is Burning," which states that there is "no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and re-idealization of

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[70] Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 189.
[71] Daniel Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," *Salmagundi* 108 (Fall 1995): 68.
[72] Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 61–62.
[73] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 62–74.
[74] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 71.
[75] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 73.
[76] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 70.
[77] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 70.

hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms."[78] When a male performer dons drag, he may do so in order to parody the construction of gender, but he also risks reinforcing constructed gender norms. Harris addresses this concern by making a distinction between drag and transvestitism in the form of passing.[79] Harris writes, "Suffused with self-deprecating irony, drag is a farcical prank, a laughable hoax for Halloween, while transvestitism is the ultimate swindle, the calculated imposture of an accomplished illusionist who undertakes a desperately earnest act of sexual self-effacement."[80] As I explain below, Legorreta demonstrates a heightened awareness of this difference.

Drag as provocation, per Harris, emerged quickly in a new era of openly political gay culture.[81] Prior to 1969, drag "mystified and titillated" the heterosexual gaze or "gawk."[82] After Stonewall, "[g]oing out in public in women's clothing was transformed into an act of solidarity, a form of civil disobedience that celebrated the gutsiness of a new gay rights heroine, the warrior drag queen."[83] The aesthetics of the warrior drag queen made no pretensions of passing as female. Warrior drag queens behaved in ways that expressed this gender incongruency, often acting aggressively toward viewers rather than presenting themselves as glamourous visions to be admired.[84] The performers' masculine attributes, such as facial hair, were not only incorporated but highlighted by the use of white-face cosmetics; this strategy appears throughout Asco's street performances and in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends.*

Asco was engaged with drag from the beginning of its time together. Subsequently their use of drag morphs into the costuming and posing found in the No Movies. Additionally, Valdez participated in a female drag that used glamour. The flouncy costumes of the male founders of Asco, especially in early performances, also occurred in the space of drag. These performers did not attempt to pass as female but instead display feminine attributes in order to provoke a homophobic audience. This outsider-amongst-outsiders status parallels the experience of homosexual Chicanos, and in the case of these young performers, inspires them unapologetically to seize visibility.

Legorreta, in a 2006 interview with Jennifer Flores-Sternad, refused any association with drag performance.[85] As the performer astutely noted, the goal of his work was not to pass as a woman. In traditional drag, the burlesque of feminine qualities may veer in the direction of passing; horror drag aims to do no such thing. Although he does not refer to horror drag, Legorreta's descriptions of his performances synch with the term. Legorreta explains:

> I don't wear female clothing: I never wore high heels, I never wore stockings, I never wore a bra, nothing like that. I always kept a beard because I didn't want to be considered female. So I kept the beard just to look androgynous, or to look male at the same time. . . . But some people would look at me and say, "Oh you're a

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[78] Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning: Questioning of Appropriation and Subversion," in *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 125.
[79] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 62.
[80] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 62.
[81] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 67–68.
[82] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 64, 68.
[83] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 68.
[84] Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," 68.
[85] Jennifer Flores-Sternad, "Cyclona and Early Chicano Performance Art: An Interview with Robert Legorreta," *The GLQ Archive* 12, no. 3 (2006): 478.

> drag queen, you're a transvestite, you're this, you're that." Constantly hearing that almost gives you self-hatred . . . As long as I can get a reaction out of a person, whether it's negative or positive, I know it's causing an effect and a change in society and that's the reason that I do it.[86]

Unlike conventional drag, where the performer seeks to play with the construction of femaleness as a form of titillating amusement, Cyclona's appearance refuses and confuses a gender binary, disturbing viewers rather than entertaining them.

Cyclona was conceived by Gronk, who was inspired by La Sarangia in Frederico Felini's *8 ½* (1962) and her strange dance on the beach in that film.[87] Legorreta subsequently developed Cyclona into an alternate persona and still performs as Cyclona today. Additional associations with other film characters arise after the fact, as Legorreta points out aesthetic similarities between Cyclona and Dr. Frank-n-furter, the lead character of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (stage 1973/ film 1975).[88] As *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* precedes the original stage show of that camp cult classic by four years, Gronk's play offers a route for examining an emerging provocation in drag performance. Through horror drag, Cyclona presents an embodied disidentification by exceeding acceptable identities.

In addition to film, Gronk recalled spending hours at the local library reading books and periodicals that described performance art in New York.[89] In that self-motivated research, he recalled learning about the playwright Stanislaw Wyspainski (1869–1907), likely through a 1969 performance in New York directed by Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999). [90] Wyspainski employed a loosely scripted, highly improvisational method. This approach, coupled with Gronk's voracious appetite for watching foreign films at the Vagabond theater in Westlake, also informed *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS (1971)

Gamboa, Gronk, and Herrón assembled on December 24, 1971 for their first street performance *Stations of the Cross* (fig. 3).[91] The group conceived of the processional along Whittier Boulevard as a response to the cancellation of the annual Christmas *posada*.[92] By selecting this route as their stage, Asco referenced a history of Mexican American struggle both before and during the Chicano Movement. Central to the project is the Chicano Moratorium's call for an end to the Vietnam War and the deadly violence in which that protest erupted. The subsequent increased policing of gatherings on Whittier Boulevard, contemporaneous with *Stations of the Cross*, were the most recent chapter in that struggle. As with *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*, the group created props and costumes using a *rasquache* sensibility. Exploiting their

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[86] Flores-Sternad, "Cyclona," 486.
[87] "Gronk, interview with the author.
[88] Hernandez, *The Fire of Life*, 35.
[89] Gronk, interview with the author.
[90] Jerzy Grotowski: Credits" (Lucille Lortel Foundation, 2019), 23166, Lortel Archives: Internet Off-Broadway Database, http://www.iobdb.com/CreditableEntity/23166
[91] Valdez did not participate in this performance.
[92] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Internal Exiles: The Interventionist Public and Performance Art of Asco," in *Space, Site, and Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 193.

awareness of self-presentation, playing on police-community tensions, and camping the biblically based *posada*, Asco prompted a new reading of community and persecution.

POSADA

Communities throughout Los Angeles celebrate the holidays with parades and gatherings. In the Mexican American neighborhood of East Los Angeles, this takes the form of the *posada*. These processions serve an important secular role in Mexican society, where one may be culturally Catholic though non-practicing. The *posada* typically occurs on Christmas Eve and re-enacts the Christian narrative of the pregnant Virgin Mary and Joseph seeking lodging, highlighting the themes of community and acceptance. Actors playing the role of the couple walk from door-to-door seeking lodging and are denied at each stop. The audience follows them along this path, which ends when the couple is invited in. At that final stop, the performance concludes with a community celebration. The decision of Los Angeles City officials to cancel the event, whether for punitive or precautionary reasons, attacked Chicano culture and visibility.[93] This decision sent a message that has continued to be communicated over the decades to those on Whittier Boulevard: Chicanos are not welcome.

In *Stations of the Cross,* Asco did not perform a *posada*, which takes place during Advent in anticipation of Christ's birth. Instead, their procession, while staged on Christmas Eve, focused on a different part of the Liturgical calendar, that of the Easter Triduum preparing for the crucifixion. Typically part of Easter passion plays performed on Good Friday, this procession contains fourteen stations or events at which participants pause and recite prayers. It is an act of reparation rather than celebration. By performing the passion or stations, instead of the *posada*, Asco's *Stations of the Cross* juxtaposes acceptance and community with persecution and death. Their performance employs the vocabulary of religious procession in a satire that insists on the visibility of Chicano culture. This occurs in the wake of a lawful assembly to protest the disproportionate number of Chicanos being drafted and killed in Vietnam. *Stations of the Cross* acts as remembrance and protest, while silently advocating for freedom of political and religious speech.

QUEERING THE CALVARY

The group met on Christmas Eve at Eastern Avenue and Whittier Boulevard, an intersection dominated by Calvary Cemetery (fig 9).[94] From there they proceeded east, inverting the Moratorium route, which moved west.[95] Along the way, the group paused as Gronk blessed

[93] Dianna Marisol Santillano, "Asco," in *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement*, eds. Rita González, Howard N. Fox, and Chon A. Noriega (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 115.

[94] The dual meaning of cavalry, both as the place where Christ was crucified and the military designation of soldiers on horseback, resonates with the subject of *Stations of the Cross* and its terminus at the Marine Recruiting Station.

[95] Harry Gamboa, "In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms: Asco, a Case Study of Chicano Art in Urban Tones (or Asco Was a Four-Member Word)," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation: 1965–1985*, ed. Griswold del Castillo, et al. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery UCLA, 1991) 123–124. Gamboa does not mention that this is the inverse of the Moratorium route, which may or may not have been a consideration for the project.

various "stations" with popcorn. These included a clothing store, a pawn shop, and theater.[96] A local photographer, Seymour Rosen, documented *Stations of the Cross* by happenstance; that day, Rosen had been searching for Chicano holiday-themed events occurring in the absence of the annual parade.[97] His black and white images captured occasional glances as the group solemnly navigated the holiday crowds. In one photograph by Rosen (fig. 21), the group passes the United Artists' Alameda Theater at the South Woods Avenue intersection.[98] The marquee announces the showing of *Abajo El Telón* starring Cantinflas, which frames the group from above, while the white blur of a passing car in the left foreground creates a lower register of the composition. The three figures carry a large cross that contrasts with the dark entryway of the theater. At the lead is Herrón with the cross resting on his right shoulder. He is followed by Gamboa and Gronk, who lift the back of the cross.[99]

In another photograph by Rosen, the group walks past a clothing store (fig. 22). Two men stand at either side of the sidewalk, one with his hands folded at his waist, the other with one hand on his hip. They look at the group quizzically as a group of children look into the camera. Two women at the left of the photograph walk several steps ahead of the procession, unaware of its occurrence. Herrón stares ahead, moving toward the final station: the local Marine Recruiting Station at the Goodrich Avenue intersection. There Herrón places the cross across the door, blocking entry and thus symbolically guarding against the enlisting of any Chicanos.[100] Gronk, again, blesses the scene with popcorn. They disperse in silence.

The costumes and props contained provocative elements, echoing Gronk's earlier projects, yet trading Cyclona's horror drag for a mix of religious and cultural references. For example, Herrón wore an altar boy's surplice that he painted with the Sacred Heart. He layered this over an ankle-length gown and sandals. Meant to represent "Christ/Death," his cross measured fifteen feet, and his face was painted as a calavera or skull resembling those seen during Day of the Dead celebrations.[101] The artists constructed the cross from cardboard boxes, stacked together and open at each end. Such oversized cardboard props appear throughout Asco's work, including an oversized camera used in the No Movies. Gronk, according to Gamboa, played the role of Pontius Pilate. However, his costume contained no direct reference to the biblical Roman governor. Instead he wore a green bowler hat, which he frequently donned, and carried an "excessively large beige fur purse" along with "a bag of unbuttered popcorn."[102]

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[96] Mario Ontiveros, "Reconfiguring Activism: Inquiries into Obligation, Responsibility, and Social Relations in Post 1960s Art Practices in the United States" (PhD diss., Los Angeles, University of California Los Angeles, 2005), 22.

[97] C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita González, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 50.

[98] The theater was later featured in the Chicano film, *Boulevard Nights* (1979), about Whittier Boulevard.

[99] The biblical narrative features one man, Simon of Cyrene, assisting with the carrying of the cross. Asco did not intend to adhere strictly to that account as their performance was not focused on religious aspects.

[100] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 81. She states that placing the cross at the final station represents a refusal of his burden; however, the themes of sacrifice stand out as the more common interpretation of this gesture.

[101] Gamboa, "In the City of Angels," 124.

[102] Gamboa, "In the City of Angels," 124. The popcorn has a potential double reading here. First,

Gamboa, who walked on the street-side of the procession, wore a long dark gown under a light colored *vimpa* or shawl. He wore an animal skull on his head that was secured by a large bow under his chin, the dark lines of which contrasted with the white paint applied to his face in a manner similar to Herrón. He explained that the skull served to "ward off unsolicited communion."[103]

Stations of the Cross is a visually messy act of insubordination that comments on the legacy of policing Chicano bodies in their own neighborhood through the route of the procession. The newly formed but not yet named group gathered accessible materials, embracing the haphazard appearance and unsanctioned nature of *rasquache*. They then bravely proceeded in public defiance of oppressive power. Gronk describes *rasquache* as "the aesthetics of poverty," calling attention to its class politics in addition its inherent ethnic association.[104] *Rasquache* appears in two forms in *Stations of the Cross*: as a method for creating props and costumes, and as a conceptual approach that reinterprets the *posada*. For example, the ingenuity seen in Asco's use of cardboard boxes to build a modular cross reflects the resourcefulness characteristic of *rasquache*. Also, the decision to re-perform the *posada* in the face of its cancelation speaks to Asco's recognition of the potential of resurrecting that act, instead of creating an altogether separate event. The choice to address the *posada* and moratorium marks the work as *rasquache* because, as Pérez notes, to declare oneself Chicano fundamentally carries with it the quality of *rasquachismo*.[105] Throughout Asco's time together, *rasquache* makes the group's projects possible at the most fundamental level: a decision to make do, rather than not make at all.

In separate interviews, the three performers noted hostility from onlookers. Herrón specifically states that this hostility stemmed from misinterpretations of the project. "I mean, it was acceptable for us to walk down the street and for people to say negative things to us. . . . But the negative things weren't because they were reacting to us being sacrilegious."[106] The performers were already accustomed to outsider status as members of the jetter subculture, and their costumes further marked them as such. This willingness to transcend social norms, including wearing makeup and ruffled clothes, was far more threatening than blasphemy. Gronk had experienced such antagonistic reactions with friends Meza and Legorreta, who were known to dress in drag.[107] As Asco moved down the street in *Stations of the Cross*, their costumes, makeup, props and actions clashed with the quotidian scene around them. It was the visibility, the open presence of non-conformity in a public space, that riled onlookers. When Meyer describes camp as always and only a gay phenomenon, his declaration applies to the camp tactic of drag as well, including horror drag. However, the revulsion inspired by Asco is a weapon available for subversive use by other queer bodies, including those queered by intersectional identities. Asco's nausea camp acts as the weapon of the outcast.

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corn is a food cultivated and developed by the indigenous people of Mesoamerica. Second, popcorn is a snack served as part of an entertainment experience in movie theaters and fairs. See also Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 83.

[103] Gamboa "In the City of Angels," 83.

[104] Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond."

[105] Laura Elisa Pérez, "Decolonizing Theory: Rasquache-Style," in *Roundtable: Rasquache Aesthetics* (Otro Corazón II: Queering Chicanidad in the Arts: A Valentine for Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, UCLA: unpublished, 2017).

[106] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.

[107] Hernandez, *The Fire of Life*, ix.

The appearance of the three Asco members in *Stations of the Cross* borrows from and yet stands apart from drag. This difference includes a clear separation from horror drag, as seen in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends,* although *Stations of the Cross* remains informed by horror drag. Asco's costumes here do not attempt to question gender roles. For example, Herrón's calavera makeup references Chicano culture, rather than suggesting femininity. His robes camp the religious vestments, not female dress. His appearance is focused on ethnic and cultural identity, the official expression of which has been canceled. Additionally, while Gronk carries a purse, the emphasis throughout Asco literature is not on his accessory but the unbuttered popcorn in it. A nod to both the Mesoamerican crop and frivolous movie house snacks, his blessings are historically laden in one culture and empty in the other.[108] Together, the elements in *Stations of the Cross* demonstrate a back and forth between cultures and a desire for visibility. The strangeness of each signifier, along with the acts of the procession, was not intended to communicate clearly, but instead to create confusion. To the initiated, the absurdity gave voice to frustrations with restrictive norms of the Movement, establishing a faction both part of and critical of its failings. Silently parading down the street, Herrón, Gronk, and Gamboa wield these tactics and strategies of nausea camp. Like its predecessor, gay camp, nausea camp is a performance of visibility that "only the extremely naive could mistake . . . as anything else but a public statement of identity."[109]

Similar to camp as defined by Meyer, nausea camp operates through signification on the body and "the environmental surfaces within which that body is situated."[110] In *Stations of the Cross,* the *rasquache* costumes call attention to the body while the venue provides an additional level of visibility. This visibility reaches beyond the immediate presence of the group in public. It is the specific location of Whittier Boulevard, fraught with Mexican American struggle, that becomes an additional character in the piece. Rather than stage a campy Christmas pageant or Passion Play in a theater, Asco chose to create a procession, fully aware of the hostility they might encounter. These considerations suggest that Asco was not only camping the *posada*, but the public space itself, which was heavily policed by authorities and citizens alike.

Consciously or not, Asco developed in a period when the role of the audience was being reconsidered first by minimalism and then conceptual and performance art; the audience was no longer regarded as merely a static viewer. For Asco, their audience functioned on several levels. Apart from *Spray Paint LACMA,* the target audience for Asco's projects was the predominantly Chicano community of East Los Angeles, as it had been in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*. Asco's processions were unannounced, so they surprised the bystanders on Whittier Boulevard. The group performed *Stations of the Cross, Walking Mural,* and *First Supper* on December 24th of their respective years, during the Christmas shopping season.[111] This timing provided Asco with potentially a greater number of spectators than any other time of the year. According to Herrón, many people were hostile to the artists' presence.[112] This coincides with Gronk's recollection that:

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[108] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco," 82.
[109] Moe Meyer, *An Archeology of Posing: Essays on Camp, Drag, and Sexuality* (Chicago: Macater Press, 2010), 74.
[110] Meyer, *An Archeology of Posing,* 85.
[111] Gamboa, "In the City of Angels," 121–127.
[112] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.

> Some of the early reactions were people screaming and yelling at us and wondering what the hell we were doing. And other times it was just people curious as to what we were doing, and we would explain, "This is a procession." Or, "I'm taping somebody to a wall, making a mural but it's not going to use paint. I'm going to use tape and somebody's going to photograph it." So it was explaining early on, I think, the process. . .[113]

Asco's three performances along Whittier suggest a conceptual sophistication that focuses on location, movement (or lack thereof), politics, and visibility. Their performances often took the form of processions through the main arterial road of East Los Angeles, Whittier Boulevard, the site of the Moratorium. It is a site rich with significance to the Chicano movement, the history of the Mexican American neighborhood, and its relationship with civic authority. Each Asco procession carried out on Whittier references this history, mocks aspects of power, and articulates solidarity. The trilogy of *Stations of the Cross, Walking Mural*, and *First Supper (After a major Riot)* also serves as the prequel to No Movies.

For generations Whittier Boulevard served as the gathering place for Mexican American youth, beginning in the 1930s with the zoot-suited pachucos, a historical moment I review in detail in Chapter Three. Public presentation of oneself as Mexican American meant engaging with specific codes of dress and movement. For example, the subversive pachuco formal wear as street fashion made the marginalized population hyper-visible. To essentially over-dress functioned as a *movida* of resistance against the racist stereotype of Mexicans as poor and unclean.[114] In subsequent generations, the pachuco style resonated with the emerging Chicano movement. Additionally, this stretch of Whittier Boulevard acted as the cruising route for lowrider aficionados in the 1950s. Police targeted their elaborate customized cars by enforcing previously ignored laws that required cars to be a certain height from the street.[115] Additionally, police shut down street access to limit gatherings and thus hinder community expression. The heavy policing of Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles continued into the 1970s in the wake of the Chicano Moratorium. By using Whittier Boulevard as the location for their processions, Asco exploited location and legacy to camp the community that shunned them.

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[113] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel.

[114] I use *movida* here as a tactic or move in a game. The term has negative connotations in standard Spanish but in Chicana contexts is often 'repurposed' to reference positive, resourceful actions.

[115] Rita González, Howard N. Fox, and Chon A. Noriega, *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2008), 2212. This renewed enforcement targeting Chicanos led Ron Aguirre to develop hydraulics using surplus airplane parts to lower and raise vehicle ride height in order to avoid police attention.

CHAPTER TWO: OFF/ON THE WALL—MURALS AGAINST MURALISM

In this chapter, I examine public actions that include all four members of Asco. In these projects, Chicano mural art serves as both a source and a foil. I begin with *Walking Mural* (1972), performed on Whittier Boulevard, and *Spray Paint LACMA/Project Pie in (De)face* (1972), which they executed on the museum's exterior wall. Two years later, Whittier Boulevard and another wall serve as the locations for *First Supper (After a Major Riot)* and its pendant, *Instant Mural* (1974).[1]

While these works have been discussed as separate entities in prior Asco literature, here I emphasize their temporal execution and parallels. Asco created the 1972 procession and action, *Walking Mural* and *Spray Paint LACMA*, consecutively on December 24. This double-feature approach also occurs with the street performance and action, *First Supper* and *Instant Mural*, created back-to-back on December 24 in 1974. When we examine the two projects as a set of pendant works, the consistent themes of Asco's camp emerge. The locations are informed by historic events, both recent and decades before. The executions employ *rasquache* resourcefulness, as well as posing and self-presentation informed by drag. Asco's nausea camp, I demonstrate below, can be tracked by these consistent elements that serve their disidentifying critique. Throughout their work, Asco targeted their own community. For example, Asco members both participated in and were judged harshly by peers in the Chicano mural movement, resulting in works that camped murals. The major museum in their city scoffed at the very existence of Chicano artists, so Asco camped back. Asco also recognized parallels between oppression and interference at the local and global levels. Their nausea camp juxtaposes a critique of LA County police harassment in East LA with a critique of US government policy in Latin America. The nuanced politics of these actions and processions evidence the group's evolution of nausea camp critique from the crass versions presented in Chapter One to the more politically subversive forms seen here.

WALKING MURAL (1972)

The afternoon of December 24, 1972, a year to the day after *Stations of the Cross,* Valdez joined Gamboa, Gronk, and Herrón at the intersection of Eastern Avenue and Whittier Boulevard.[2] There, they commenced their second processional performance*, Walking Mural* (1972), down the same corridor as *Stations of the Cross*. As with the previous year's performance, this procession traced the route of the Christmas *posada* and corresponded to the location of the Chicano Moratorium (fig. 9).[3] In addition to the political history of their route, *Walking Mural* brought the quintessential medium of the Chicano movement—the mural—to life. In doing so, Asco used camp tactics to contemplate muralism's role and usefulness.[4]

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[1] I use the term pendant piece (or companion piece) here to describe the relationships between these works. These are not relationships established by Asco or by other scholars.

[2] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, January 20–23, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Robb Hernandez, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta-Cyclona Collection* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2009), 15. Legorreta was invited to participate in the procession but declined.

[3] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism: The Performance Art of Asco," in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000), 243.

[4] David E. James, "Hollywood Extras: One Tradition of 'Avant-Garde' Film in Los Angeles," *October* 90 (Autumn 1999): 19. James calls this a parody of muralism.

Enriching this critique, Valdez re-presented the Virgin of Guadalupe, generating a more complex reappraisal of *chicanismo* and gender. When *Walking Mural* is considered alongside its stationary pendant piece, *Spray Paint LACMA,* the procession's entanglement of race and gender with graffiti and muralism is amplified.

The three performers, Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez, assembled in costumes intended to draw attention. Each artist created their own costume independently, bringing their own interpretation to the project.[5] Gronk's experience with *rasquache* methods and drag informed his Christmas Tree-inspired outfit, which incorporated the decadence of the decorative. Similarly, Valdez brought cheeky glamour to a religious icon, and Herrón created a mobile mural using the construction materials plaster and Masonite (fig. 23). As in past performances, they turned to a *rasquache* approach to assemble garments and props.[6] Gamboa documented the event, taking color photographs from multiple angles as the group moved through shoppers. Additionally, Elisa Flores (b. 1955) shot the group using black and white film (fig. 23 and 24). Her individual and group shots focused on the performers, whereas Gamboa used a wider perspective.

Mid-range tones dominate Flores' photographs, likely from overexposure in the daylight. She shot the three figures as portrait or full-body frames that show the costumes from multiple angles. For example, a simplified skull mask on the back of Valdez's head complements the small foil-lined wings on her back (fig. 24). In one color photograph, the group passes a Firestone tire store (fig. 25). Valdez leads the trio in a black chiffon gown trimmed at the arms in silver ribbon and a feather collar (fig. 26). She carries red roses that accent the heavy red blush on her cheeks. The black lipstick that she wears contrasts with her white-face makeup. Her dark shoulder-length hair frames her face, and a tin crown sits atop her head. Behind the crown and extending down her arms is a mandorla made of black and gold reflective paper.

Gronk walks half a step behind Valdez, wearing pink satin pants with a layered chiffon skirt draped over his shoulders. Round glass Christmas tree ornaments hang off the edges of the fabric. Over his head Gronk wears a shawl decorated with sequins, tulle bows, and feathers. His makeup features a red stripe down the bridge of his nose and extending onto his cheeks, paired with white-face makeup, red lipstick, and eye shadow. Behind Gronk and Valdez, Herrón carries his portable "wall," painted with their three faces in horror drag makeup. Herrón's hands and head extend through the front of the surface, suggesting that he is emerging from it. Painted stripes are echoed by large tinfoil-covered spikes extending from the Masonite board. The group wanted to appear as if they were a mural that had come to life and walked away from the wall. All three proceed in silence in four-inch platform shoes.

CHICANO MURALS

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, mural painting emerged as the medium most intimately associated with the Chicano Movement. The public artworks were accessible to the community and sought to inspire ethnic pride and unity. Chicano murals develop out of Mexican

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[5] Patssi Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond" (Lecture, UC Berkeley, March 6, 2014). Valdez recalls that she had a cold the morning of the procession. Her mother called out from the front of the house and told her that Willie and Gronk were there. She stated that she was surprised when she looked outside and saw their outfits for the first time.

[6] Marci R. McMahon, *Domestic Negotiations: Gender, Nation and Self-Fashioning in US Mexicana and Chicana Literature and Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 144, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjc4t.

muralism, where the artworks served a nationalist agenda. In post-revolution Mexico, the government created a vision of *mexicanidad.* Grounded in the qualities that marked Mexico as distinct from other Latin American countries, this vision emphasized *mestizaje,* or a mix of European and indigenous heritage, to claim legitimacy for the new republic.[7]

Artists such as Diego Rivera (1886–1957), David Alfredo Siqueiros (1896–1974), and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949) promulgated *mexicanidad* through state-sponsored mural programs. For example, Rivera's mural series at the National Palace in Mexico City features laboring indigenous figures in landscapes of towering pyramids echoed by distant mountains (fig. 27). In the foreground, the Mexica (Aztec) goddess Xochiquetzal appears as a tattooed figure crowned with lilies (fig. 28). Other murals depict battles between native people and Spanish men dressed in armor positioned below Zapatista soldiers, paralleling the Conquest with the Mexican Revolution (fig. 29). However, it is important to note that muralism in Mexico predates the modern era, notably in the Maya murals at Bonampak (c. 790) in Chiapas. For Chicano artists, the inclusion of pre-conquest and Revolution-era imagery in 1970s East Los Angeles doubled the previous iteration of identity: it cited the modern Mexican *mestizo* and placed this figure within a U.S. context. The shared indigenous heritage in turn became the common Mexican heritage that unified Chicanos. In order to visually communicate that shared history, Chicano artists included references to the indigenous people of Mesoamerica (Olmec, Toltec, Aztec/Mexica, Maya), historic figures from the Mexican Revolution (Zapata, Hidalgo, Villa), and participants in the contemporary United Farm Workers movement. By employing this shared iconography, Chicano murals operated as public propaganda, uniting and uplifting the community.

It is the muralism of the Chicano movement, specifically, that Asco targeted with nausea camp in processions such as *Walking Mural* and later in *Instant Mural.* In her book *Give Me Life,* Holly Barnet-Sanchez documents the histories and location of public murals in East Los Angeles. She characterizes Asco's relationship with muralism as antagonistic, while later devoting a full chapter to Herrón's murals. This apparent contradiction serves as evidence of Asco's insider/outsider relationship with Chicano art. Gronk created murals outside of his work with Asco, and his partner in those projects, Herrón, continues to create murals today. In contrast, Valdez vehemently distanced her art practice from muralism.[8] This relationship to the medium of Chicano art echoes the complex dynamics at play in *Caca Roaches,* in which Gronk challenged his own Chicano community for their homophobia. It is also symptomatic of Asco's position in a middle space which according to Ross is where camp occurs.[9] In the murals produced by Gronk and Herrón together, specifically *Black and White Mural* (1973, fig. 30), the artists use the mural medium of the Movement while stepping outside of its emerging codes.

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[7] Irene A. Vasquez, "The Longue Durée of Africans in Mexico: The Historiography of Racialization, Acculturation, and Afro-Mexican Subjectivity," *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 183–185. Officially, Mexico has been slow to recognize the role of the African diaspora.

[8] Scarlet Cheng, "An Interview with Judithe Hernández and Patssi Valdez," in *One Path Two Journeys: Judithe Hernández and Patssi Valdez* (Los Angeles: Millard Sheets Art Center at Fairplex, 2017), 75. Valdez works as a painter and asserts that she is not a muralist.

[9] Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 64.

Those codes appear in the murals that surround *Black and White Mural,* which Barnett-Sanchez refers to as "perhaps the most visually complex mural at Estrada Courts." The Congreso de Artistas Chicanos en Aztlán, or CACA, created another notable mural referenced by Barnett-Sanchez: *We are not a minority!* (1978, fig. 31). [10] The murals are adjacent: Gronk and Herrón's on the end of a building on the right, CACA's on the left. Both images face the street, visible to residents of the housing complex and passersby. Both fit the same dimensions of each building's exterior wall. However, the aesthetic contrasts between the two works serve as visual cues to Asco's differences with other Chicano artists.

We are not a minority! features a portrait of Che Guevara, an icon of popular revolution and pan-Latinism in Chicano communities.[11] Che's gesture in the mural references Uncle Sam's pointing from World War II era recruitment posters. It is an image of Cuban and United States culture in the service of Chicano affirmation. Che's image on a plain blue field accompanies the mural's text, painted in a combination of typefaces that are all quickly legible from a distance. In contrast to *Black and White Mural* by Gronk and Herrón*,* which acts as a document of community events, *We are not a minority!* functions as a billboard of community.[12]

Other contemporaneous murals feature the iconography that Asco targets with nausea camp in *Walking Mural*. Alex Maya's *United Farmworkers* (1973 and 1975, fig. 32 and 33) includes the head of the Mexica plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl, in the foreground, upon which stands a warrior. Maya finalized the mural with modifications to the figures in 1975, trading Quetzalcoatl for a stepped pyramid and inserting an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the sun above. The warrior, denoted by an elaborate headdress, assists farmworkers in raising the UFW flag beside rows of corn. Allusions to the UFW operate, like the other elements, to formulate a lineage of the Chicano movement with anachronistic juxtapositions.[13] These references have perhaps encouraged the view that Chicano art started when Luis Valdez (b. 1940) founded El Teatro Campesino in 1965.[14] Such a proposal reveals how art served as an integral part of both struggles, but it also risks conflating the separate Farm Workers and Chicano movements.

Herrón began producing murals in East Los Angeles in 1972 while working with Asco.[15] The following year, Gronk joined him for two projects. The mural *Caras* (1973, fig. 34), in City Terrace, no longer exists. It featured a crowded composition of agonized faces in red, black, and white.[16] The limited palette of *Caras* and the subject of contemporary strife in the community

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[10] Holly Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life: Iconography and Identity in East LA Murals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 80.

[11] The mural has been defaced many times by Cuban Americans from other parts of Los Angeles. While for Chicanos Che's image represents a revolutionary spirit, for the Cuban population in the US it is the image of an oppressor.

[12] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 79–80.

[13] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 32. Antonio Bernal's mural in Del Ray, California on the headquarters of El Teatro Campesino features Mexican revolution leader Emilio Zapata next to Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Although frequently cited in essays about the Chicano Mural movement, this 1968 mural is an antecedent and does not correspond with the Chicano movement.

[14] Max Benavidez, "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility," in *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 17.

[15] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 297.

[16] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 31.

found in it and Herrón's solo project, *The Wall that Cracked Open* (1972, fig 35), foretell the approach to *Black and White Mural.*[17] Located in the Estrada Courts housing project in Boyle Heights, *Black and White Mural* spans an eighteen-by-twenty-three-foot concrete and stucco wall. Part of a large community project, the housing complex features over ninety murals on the windowless exterior walls at the end of each apartment string. Charles "Cat" Felix (1943–1990), who was the lead artist for the Estrada Courts mural project, selected Herrón based on murals he had painted the prior year in City Terrace.[18] After being awarded the project, Herrón invited Gronk to collaborate, as they had been working together with Asco. He recalls:

> I called Gronk and I just said, "Gronk, why don't—[*sic*] They'll give us all this paint. We'll split the paint fifty-fifty and let's just do it in black and white. This way you have all the colors to work on your paintings and I'll have colors to work on my paintings and we'll only use black and white. And that's what we'll be paid." That's like paying ourselves. We keep the colors for our paintings and we'll do the mural in black and white.[19]

The restricted palette set the work apart, and surprisingly, it would be the first to address the Chicano Moratorium.[20] The artists began with a grid and a general plan for images to include in each frame, but this plan shifted as the work progressed. It was a process that Gronk described as built on trust and respect: "It was, in a sense, like playing music in a band in a way. You rely on your other musicians and you feel comfortable and confident that they will hold up their end."[21]

Herrón's earlier work, *The Plumed Serpent* (1972, fig. 36), relied on meso-American iconology. Yet the aesthetics of *Black and White Mural* stand apart from Chicano murals of the same time, which Guisela Latorre argues "redefined the preexisting mural aesthetic that predominated in East LA."[22] The iconography in *Black and White Mural*, according to Gronk, stemmed from his and Herrón's desire to acknowledge their environment. Gronk explained, "I don't do Virgins of Guadalupe, I don't do corn goddesses. I can only do what I'm about, and I'm an urban Chicano living in a city."[23] Instead, Gronk and Herrón's mural documents the Chicano community in a contemporary sense, using its own vocabulary and culture. While artists often use a grid in order to scale and transfer designs to the wall, Herrón and Gronk made the grid explicit in the overall design.[24] They used newspapers and photographs as source material. These depict events in the Chicano Movement in East Los Angeles, including the Blowouts, the Moratorium, and Asco's own *Stations of the Cross* procession.

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[17] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 31.

[18] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 80.

[19] Willie Herrón, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, February 5–March 17, 2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[20] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.

[21] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel.

[22] Guisela Latorre, *Wall of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas, 2008), 218; Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life,* 358n16. Barnet-Sanchez argues that while *Black and White Mural* stood apart, it did not have a lasting change in murals as a whole.

[23] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel.

[24] Mario Ontiveros, "Painting Diagonally: An Archive of Resistance and 'a Sensory for of Strangeness,'" in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya et al. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 270.

Initially, Herrón and Gronk intended to place one scene in each square.[25] However, as they painted, their design changed, allowing images to occupy multiple frames.[26] For example, the top row contains eight separate images, while the second features a street scene during the Moratorium, with police in riot gear, spanning six frames. The shift of perspective creates the effect of a jump cut from panoramic to close-up. The third and fourth registers show a breakdown of the grid in particular areas, where elements cross over the boundaries. The grayscale breaks only in the lower right where, in 1980, Herrón introduced subtle colors to enhance the final three frames.[27] The gridded composition and the limited palette, ostensibly organizing the image, presented multiple focal points. These elements make temporal demands on the viewer, similar to film and fotonovelas. Rather than a large instantly legible graphic, the resulting mural functions as, in Gronk's words, "sort of a newsreel of that particular movement in time."[28] Art historian Mario Ontiveros further compares the mural with film.[29] He argues that each block acts as a film still, foreshadowing Asco's engagement with cinematic formats through the No Movie, the topic of Chapter Three.

CAMPING THE VIRGIN

The popularity of the Virgin of Guadalupe speaks to the image's effectiveness in establishing a shared history of the Chicano people. Indeed, the history of the image resonates with its ability to serve as both a Catholic religious icon and a ubiquitous sign of Mexican identity. Its presence in both ecclesiastical and political realms echoes the same functions of its predecessor, the late twelfth-century Spanish Virgin of Guadalupe (fig. 37).[30] As a physical object, the Spanish Guadalupe is a three-dimensional figure that stands twenty-three inches high, carved of cedar wood. Religious reports attribute its creation to the evangelist, St. Luke.[31] Some ecclesiastical legends state that the statue was hidden in a cave during the Reconquesta to protect it from Muslim fighters and later discovered by a shepherd. The Virgin Mary appeared to him, performed miracles, and requested that a church be built nearby. The image, according to Serge Gruzinsky, held a particularly special place for the conquistadors as the Virgin legitimized their religious, ethnic, and nationalistic endeavors.[32] For this reason, it was the Spanish Virgin of

[25] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.
[26] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.
[27] Ontiveros, "Painting Diagonally: An Archive of Resistance and 'a Sensory for of Strangeness,'" 273.
[28] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel.
[29] Ontiveros, "Painting Diagonally," 270.
[30] Jeanette Favrot Peterson, "The Reproducibility of the Sacred: Simulacra of the Virgin of Guadalupe," in *Exploring New World Imagery*, ed. Donna Pierce (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2005), 43. According to Peterson radiocarbon dating shows that the statue is from the 1200s, but religious sources place it at 587 A.D. See also Favrot Peterson, *Visualizing Guadalupe: From Black Madonna to Queen of the Americas*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.
[31] Favrot Peterson, "The Reproducibility of the Sacred," 48.
[32] Serge Gruzinski, *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492–2019)*, trans. Heather MacLean (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 33.

Guadalupe that was featured on Cortés banner as he landed in Mexico on a mission of both conquest and conversion.[33]

Accounts of apparitions began appearing in Mexico around 1648. The Virgin of Guadalupe became a Mexican phenomenon, featuring a similar "shepherd's cycle" story to aid with the conversion of indigenous people. The updated narrative states that Mary appeared to Juan Diego and, through a series of encounters, asked for a church to be built on a specific site. She instructed him to gather roses in his *tilma*, or cloak. When Juan Diego presented the roses to the bishop, who had asked for a sign of his visions, the now-ubiquitous image miraculously appeared on his garment. This new image (fig. 38) diverged from the Spanish Guadalupe. No longer the work of a saint, according to the legend, the Mexican Guadalupe was painted by the Virgin herself. Additionally, the Virgin's darker skin brings the native population into the European religious iconography. This image suggested that not only were Mexicans chosen by God; their *mestizaje* was reflected in the divine. The icon appeared on banners carried during the Mexican revolution, notably those of Father Miguel Hidalgo (fig. 39) and Emiliano Zapata (fig. 40).

For Chicano artists, this image functions as a cultural icon, appearing in a variety of forms from tattoos to murals. As Jenette Favrot Peterson explains, the popularity of the Virgin of Guadalupe functions inversely to Walter Benjamin's thesis on the loss of an artwork's aura.[34] With each appropriation, across formats and contexts, its aura increases. From the time of Guadalupe's arrival in the New World, the icon was fraught with concepts of identity and power. Its role in the establishment of a Mexican cultural identity in the sixteenth century and during the Revolution prefigured its use as a symbol in the Chicano movement. However, as the icon gained popularity in the United States as a representation of Mexican heritage at the height of the civil rights movement, artists reassessed and re-presented Guadalupe. The first Chicana to tackle the richly layered and culturally loaded figure in order to problematize gender roles was Valdez, in her very first Asco performance.

In *Walking Mural,* her first performance with Asco, Valdez recognizes and tackles the problematic image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She is the first Chicana artist to take up the Virgin as a subject in this way.[35] During an interview on French television, she explained, "The Virgin de Guadalupe is almost cliché as a symbol for Chicanos, so I took her and put her on . . . I'm not religious, but I do find the image of the Virgin fascinating because she is a woman."[36] The role of women in Mexican nationalism corresponded to a virgin/whore binary that places the Catholic and European-based Virgin of Guadalupe in contrast to La Malinche, the indigenous woman who aided Cortés.[37] This binary carries over to the Chicano movement, which borrowed elements of post-revolution Mexican identity. However, artists since Valdez have reclaimed the Virgin, emphasizing her power rather than her submission.

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[33] Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art of Colonial Latin America* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005), 11.

[34] Favrot Peterson, "The Reproducibility of the Sacred," 44.

[35] Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 267. Amalia Mesa-Bains quoted in Pérez.

[36] Tere Romo, *Patssi Valdez: A Precarious Comfort/ Una Comodidad Percaria* (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1999), 14.

[37] Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 269; Gruzinski, *Images at War*. La Malinche had a son with Cortés and is therefore often viewed as the mother of *mestizos*, or those with both European and indigenous ancestry.

In *Walking Mural*, Valdez employs *rasquache* repurposing tactics and transforms the divine into a living being, not a static image. This contemporary Virgin dons a robe of black and silver made from repurposed garments that gave her a glamorous presence. Although the costume is an assemblage from different sources, not all intended for garments, Valdez's Virgin presents as unfussy, cohesive, and lucid while maintaining an attention-getting look.[38] Her *mandorla* and crown of silver foil reflected her environment, instead of emanating light. Her makeup included white-face with rosy cheeks, unlike the icon, who possessed the darker skin of her indigenous roots.[39] Valdez recreated the most recognized Chicano symbol as a real and contemporary figure, one no longer tethered to flat walls or two-dimensional concepts of femininity.

SPRAY PAINT LACMA (1972)

Completed the final week of December 1972, *Spray Paint LACMA* (fig. 11) is perhaps the most iconic work of Asco's oeuvre. Although several photographs by Gamboa document the work, one image of Valdez has come to represent the project and the group. The photograph captures Valdez standing on the bridge of the East entrance to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Her hands are casually resting, overlapping, on the railing of the bridge. She turns her head to her left rather than looking into the camera. Her dark hair falls just past her shoulders onto her red shirt. The black and red of her figure echoes the composition of the tags below: Herrón and Gamboa's names painted in black with Gronk's tag "GRONKIE" set apart below in red.[40]

According to Asco legend, Gamboa inquired about the lack of Chicano art on view in the museum. It is usually noted that he asked a curator, occasionally an employee in the galleries, perhaps a guide or guard. The museum employee told him that Chicanos didn't make art, only graffiti. Gamboa's inquiry, Davalos notes, occurred out of genuine desire for inclusion, not a challenge or basis for the resulting conceptual act.[41] The same evening, after Gamboa shared this story with his creative crew, the group decided to provide LACMA with the museum's first Chicano artwork.[42] Herrón, Gamboa, and Gronk returned to the museum and spray-painted their names on each of the concrete bridges to the museum's entrances. According to Valdez's own account, she waited in the car upon the advice of Herrón, who pointed out that she would be unable to run from the police in her platform shoes.[43] They returned at daybreak to document their work, Valdez now included as the lone figure standing on the East entrance bridge. Valdez

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[38] Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 267. Valdez's interests were aesthetic rather than religious.

[39] Plastic figurines of the Virgin of Guadalupe sold in religious supply stores have much lighter skin and doll-like features, demonstrating the frequent malleability of the icon's appearance. Although Valdez has not commented on this, and white-face appears in other Asco performances, her artificially pale skin would not have been out of character for the Virgin.

[40] Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 76–77. Alvarado states that Valdez red shirt and Gronk's red paint mark solidarity between feminine and queer. However, other images show that the colors did not correspond to any particular member as Herrón and Gamboa also used red paint on other entrances.

[41] Karen Mary Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix: Art and Errata Since the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 203.

[42] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 38.

[43] Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond."

explained that she asked the others to tag her name, but that they simply forgot in all the excitement.[44]

This iconic image of Valdez on the entrance bridge satirizes the marginalization of Latinos by cultural institutions and draws parallels to Duchamp's *Fountain,* also a product of institutional rejection. Operating from a middle space bounded by their cultural literacy and ethnic exclusion, Asco camps the museums using the very vocabulary of art history and the disparaging remarks of a museum employee. Asco's *movida*, or tactical move, embraces the stereotype of Chicanos as graffiti artists, or even muralists who the establishment would relegate to exterior walls instead of interior galleries. The title itself calls attention to the medium, the gritty spray paint of trade labor and street artists. It is a position and a response only possible from Asco's outsider-insider position. For example, Noriega contextualizes Asco's tagging of the museum by noting that there were artists who were controversial yet accepted at LACMA, such as Edward Kienholz (1927–1994) and Ruscha.[45] It was Asco's identity, he argues, that situated them outside the public that LACMA purported to serve.[46] Additionally, I believe that Asco's irascibility, daring, and inventiveness set them apart from other Chicano artists as particularly threatening to the museum's status quo. Consider that the Chicano mural collective, Los Four, maintained the division between barrio wall and museum gallery, and were, ultimately, rewarded with LACMA's first exhibition of Chicano art just two years later. Asco's retrospective, in contrast, would take over three decades to materialize.

In the most circulated image of Valdez, where her bodily presence contrasts with the signatures of her male cohorts, Noriega recognizes the group's gender politics, "hinting that they were subject to the same machismo that is part of both Chicano and larger society."[47] Davalos views this inclusion after the fact as a corrective. She explains that in the final image, "Group authorship trumped the gender norms that played during the night before when three members thought it best not to invite Valdez."[48] Ultimately the image speaks to the nested marginalization of ethnicity, class, sexuality and gender that Asco attempted to confront externally—as well as internally, even if clumsily, after the fact.

In the photograph, Valdez is standing outside an institution that communicated disdain for Chicanos the day prior. The spray-painted names trace the presence of Gamboa, Gronk and Herrón, while her appearance serves as the active wink and nod to ensure the audience reads the act through a nausea camp lens, one marked by both gender and ethnicity. Camp appears here without the horror drag or public procession of previously discussed works. I suggest that instead, nausea camp uses the *rasquache* side of its Janus face.[49] It presents a shift to scrappy defiance from drag provocation. Denied access to the reifying halls of Western art, her figure

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[44] Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond."

[45] Chon A. Noriega, "Conceptual Graffiti and the Public Art Museum: Spray Paint LACMA," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 257.

[46] Noriega, "Conceptual Graffiti," 260.

[47] Noriega, "Conceptual Graffiti," 260.

[48] Davalos, "Knowledge, Aesthetic, Cultural Production in Chicano Re/Mix" (Lecture, Faculty Publication Night, Loyola Marymount University, March 15, 2016). This differs from Valdez's own account where she waited in the car.

[49] For details on Duchamp's readymades and camp see Wes Hill, *Art After the Hipster: Identity Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

joins with the tags of her peers to claim the museum as a whole object, creating what some art historians have called the first Chicano readymade.

Rather than manifesting itself through the aesthetics of drag, *Spray Paint LACMA* operates, as Duchamp's own *Fountain* did, as a challenge to exclusion from exhibition. It only requires paint to sign one's name. It emphasizes the nomination of the artist rather than the qualities of the object. Borrowing and expanding the artist's nominative act, Asco employs a creative parody of the gatekeeper's own statement (that Chicanos only make graffiti) in a way that exemplifies camp's use of the dominant culture's vocabulary. In *Spray Paint LACMA* there exists both the art historical reference noted in critics' superlative statements, as well as a play on the justification for their rejection: "Chicanos don't make art, they make graffiti." *Spray Paint LACMA* harnesses the establishment's disgust to create the first *rasquache* readymade.

FIRST SUPPER (AFTER A MAJOR RIOT) (1974)

In 1974, two years after *Walking Mural*, Asco gathered again to mark the lack of a Christmas parade and the political history of a now-changing Whittier Boulevard. Their performance, titled *First Supper (After a Major Riot)* (fig. 5), reinserted a Chicano presence into a space purged of its traces.[50] This purging came in the form of the county's 1973 redevelopment plan, which included the installation of traffic islands to break up the wide spaces where protests might occur.[51] In *First Supper* Asco used the protest tactic of a sit-in, rather than the procession format they had used in earlier works. Their static, rather than walking, performance occurred on the traffic island located on Arizona Street and Whittier. The group assembled on December 24th, as they had for *Stations of the Cross* and *Walking Mural* in the years prior. This time they were joined by friend and frequent collaborator Sandoval.[52] Together they set up some chairs and a small table, complete with tablecloth, and dined together as traffic passed on either side. *First Supper* contrasted with the redevelopment's goal of change and progress. Instead it resisted movement, staying in one place rather than proceeding down the street. Their location marked the site of the "major riot" during the Chicano Moratorium, where police launched tear gas canisters and attacked protesters.[53] *First Supper* stubbornly asserts the legacy of Chicano history by incorporating an ostensibly benign municipal structure, one intended to control and limit movements, both vehicular and political. This appropriation evidences *rasquache* and camp methods in a manner that develops out of the previous processions yet also constitutes a novel approach.

In Gamboa's most published photograph of this performance, four figures gather around a small table on a traffic island approximately thirty feet wide. The island, on South Arizona Street, is located just before the Whittier Boulevard intersection and is marked by a green and white street sign at the center of the traffic divider. In the background to the right of the street sign, red letters read "LIQUOR" on a vertical shop sign. Two lanes of traffic appear on either side of the group consisting of, left to right, Valdez, Sandoval, Herrón, and Gronk. Valdez sits on a cardboard box, its taped and stamped underside peeking out beneath her dark overcoat. She

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[50] Chavoya, "Internal Exiles: The Interventionist Public and Performance Art of Asco," 196.
[51] Chavoya, "Internal Exiles," 196.
[52] Chon A. Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me: Early Asco 1971-75," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 19 (Autumn/Winter 2008): 114.
[53] David E. James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 182.

appears, as in previous performances, in white-face with dark lips and heavily made up eyes accented by bright blush on her cheeks. Situated in profile, she wears a light-colored top hat trimmed with a white band. Her downward gaze, focused on the banana in her hands, separates her from the actions of her male counterparts.

To Valdez's left Sandoval kneels at the table, his foot darting out behind him. He wears a dark bowler hat and a half-mask that obscures any facial expression as he reaches with his left arm across to Herrón at his left, offering him a drink from a red cup. Herrón's face is also hidden by a mask as he turns towards Sandoval, offering what appears to be an apple. In additional photographs from the event taken by Gamboa, details of Sandoval and Herrón's mask become clearer (fig. 41). Sandoval dons a shirt and tie with a bowler hat and three-quarter mask which leaves his mouth exposed. His mask is flat-white with cartoonish half-open eyes, depicted with blue lids featuring highlights at the center and a stylized upper lip. Combined with Sandoval's garments, the mask takes on a dandy, rather than strictly feminine, appearance. Herrón's masks contrast with this through its aggressive features, including a gaping mouth filled with too many teeth and the accentuated widow's peak hairline. Gronk sits to Herrón's left on the edge of a small wooden chair, his legs crossed as he watches Sandoval. Gronk wears a long rust-toned coat over a cream-colored vest. Like Valdez, Gronk does not wear a mask but white-face paint that contrasts with his facial hair and dark eye makeup. Again, turning to the archive images where Gronk faces Gamboa's camera, details of his eye makeup emerge, showing dark circles around his eyes that extend upwards into horned shadows on his forehead.

Against the front of the table sits a mirror in an ornate white frame. Its slightly tilted angle reflects only the sky, hazy and white. Before the mirror lies a large plastic baby doll on a blue and white blanket. It is paired with a legless and armless mannequin behind Gronk's chair that the artists transformed into a skeleton with paint. The discarded baby doll and dismembered mannequin serve as approximations of bodies that echo Gronk's diptych *The Truth About the Terror in Chile* (1973, fig. 42). The white panel of this painting stands underneath the Whittier Boulevard sign. It depicts a figure with its head, hands, and feet cropped out of the composition. Its torso is bifurcated by a white form that suggests anatomical structures, perhaps ribs or musculature, as it sprawls across the abdomen and chest. Laces crisscross the pelvis and upper thighs. Although the head of the figure is cropped out of the composition, its neck stretches unnaturally to the left. Its pose calls to mind crucifixion, and the modeling of the figure resonates with the similarly crucified figure at the center of Siqueiros' mural, *América Tropical* (1932, fig. 43), located on Olvera Street in Los Angeles.[54]

The Plaza Art Center in Los Angeles invited Siqueiros, one of the legendary "Los Tres Grandes" of Mexican muralism, to create a mural in the 1930s. The mural was titled *America Tropical*, and its subject matter shocked the commissioners. Rather than a utopic vision of pan-Americanism, it depicted the façade of an indigenous temple. In front of the temple is a crucified Mexican, his head tilted and resting on his left shoulder. Above sits an eagle, icon of the United States, at which marksmen nearby take aim. Its ominous mood speaks to the fraught relationship between the US and Mexico, notably manifesting itself in President Franklin Roosevelt's ostensibly corrective 1933 Good Neighbor Policy. Controversy erupted and led to the mural's whitewashing. However, the image seeped through the layers of paint intended to obscure it.

[54] The extended title for the mural is *Tropical America: Oppressed and Destroyed by Imperialism.*

During the Chicano movement, Siqueiros's mural gained new interest as an iconic artwork by a Mexican artist, and in 1988 the Getty Conservation Institute began efforts to preserve it.

Gronk's painting, *The Truth About the Terror in Chile*, also speaks to pan-Latin relationships with the United States, specifically the U.S.-backed coup d'état of 1973 that led to the Pinochet dictatorship. Gronk brings the violence under Pinochet's oppressive regime into conversation with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's surveillance and violence against Chicano's in East LA.[55] The presence of *The Truth About the Terror in Chile* in the scene of *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, through Siqueiros's mural, connects the performance with Mexican muralism's presence in the United States. The Mexican mural movement, as noted earlier, influenced the Chicano murals that Asco camped in *Walking Mural*. In this way, *The Truth About the Terror in Chile*, more than a background prop, functions as an anchor point that connects Asco's earlier processions to their later street occupation, illustrating how the group's political acuity that expanded beyond their neighborhood.

As in previous performances, the group assembled costumes and props that appeared cast-off, imbuing the scene with a slap-dash feel characteristic of their *rasquache* method. Less provocative than absurd, *First Supper* nonetheless expresses a subversive relationship to power as Asco uses the physical impediment as a stage-like platform, enabling the very protest it meant to prevent. In using the vocabulary (or in this case the space and object) of power, *First Supper* is undoubtedly an example of camp methods. The static nature and location of the work granted passersby merely a glimpse of the scene, one key reason why audience reaction to this performance remains absent from existing Asco scholarship. Despite the lack of documented reactions of disgust, nausea camp lurks in the details of their ghoulish masks and makeup, as well as in the broken mannequins standing in for the bodies of the oppressed. Nausea camp also appears in the inappropriateness of formal dining amidst the exhaust fumes and traffic noise during rush hour.[56]

INSTANT MURAL (1974)

Immediately following *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, at the same intersection of Whittier Boulevard and Arizona Street, Asco performed *Instant Mural* (fig. 6). That late afternoon of December 24, 1974, as the sun began to set, Gamboa, Gronk, Herrón, Sandoval, and Valdez crossed the southbound lane of traffic to the unadorned wall of a liquor store. That exterior wall served as the backdrop for *Instant Mural* and is visible in the background of Gamboa's documentation of *First Supper (After A Major Riot),* marked by the liquor store sign. In addition to this physical proximity, I argue that *First Supper* and *Instant Mural* serve as a double-pendant to the group's 1972 back-to-back actions *Walking Mural* and *Spray Paint LACMA.* Considered together, these four works reveal similar yet developing tactics in their critique of Chicano mural practice and ideology. I conclude my discussion of *Instant Mural* here

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[55] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Exchange Desired," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, eds. C. Ondine Chavoya and David Frantz (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2017), 216. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department polices East LA as it is an unincorporated area. Without incorporation, East LA residents lack local government and an independent police force local to the community; the power to incorporate is granted at the county level.

[56] Mario Ontiveros, "Reconfiguring Activism: Inquiries into Obligation, Responsibility, and Social Relations in Post-1960s Art Practices in the United States" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2005), 307.

with a review of Gamboa's photographs to reveal how this work was distributed, subsequently interpreted, and catalyzed Asco's No Movie medium, the topic of the following chapter.[57] My examination of these earlier performances suggests that *Instant Mural* marks a culmination of the methods and objectives Asco had been pursuing, as well as a transition toward new approaches.

The hour-long *Instant Mural* performance began as Gronk attempted to secure Valdez to the wall, crossing her body with long lengths of tape.[58] As I shall discuss momentarily, Gamboa's photographic documentation offers several views of the performance. The most circulated image is of Valdez alone in the initial moments of the performance (fig. 6). Her right arm is raised, elbow bent. Her legs are shoulder-width apart, and her left arm hangs down, slightly away from her body at its side. In close-up photographs of Valdez in this same pose, a visual rhyme emerges between the peels of the banana she is holding up and the drooping lines of tape around her arm (fig. 44).[59] The stark white of the tape draws our eye again to the bitten pulp and flaccid skin, while her face covered in white make-up balances the frame. Next, Gronk moves to her right and affixes Sandoval to the wall, fully obscuring his chest with tape and covering his neck (fig. 45). This wider shot taken from the left of the figures reveals the curling edges of the tape as its weak adhesive barely clings to their clothing and the wall's textured veneer.[60] As Gronk cocooned the two figures, Gamboa documented the act using still photography while Herrón filmed portions of it with a Super-8 camera.[61] Herron appears in one photograph holding the Super-8 camera and tripod in his right hand as he eats a banana (fig. 46). Below the "No Parking" sign at the left of the frame, the back of Gronk's brown coat can be discerned as he stands behind it.

According to Gamboa, passersby asked the two if they needed help escaping from the "visually intimidating, yet physically weak, lengths of tape."[62] A wide shot of Sandoval and Valdez mid-performance demonstrates the proximity of traffic and drive-by observers (fig. 47). In this photo, taken from across Arizona Avenue, the expanse of the wall functions as a visual field for the taped bodies. Street sign poles and utility boxes visually lock them in and frame the performance area. A turquoise Impala and light blue Ford Fairlane idle at the traffic light, coming between the camera and the figures taped to the wall. The cars' similar blue hues

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[57] Romo, *Patssi Valdez: A Precarious Comfort,* 15. Romo frames this specifically as a parody of Chicano murals and notes that from this point on "all art performances were documented and became the basis for the development of the concept of the No-Movie [*sic*]." However, it is important to note that documentation of Asco's performances, while increasingly refined over time, occurred from the beginning.

[58] This is referred to both as duct tape and masking tape alternately throughout Asco literature. Gronk refers to it as duct tape.

[59] The amount and placement of tape in figure 6 differs from figure 44, making it difficult to determine chronological order, and therefore, the appearance/disappearance of the banana.

[60] Today, the wall-facing has been removed, and the cement blocks of the wall are exposed. Given the effort to aesthetically improve Whittier Boulevard, this facing may have been new at the time of the performance.

[61] Marisela Norte, "Gronk," *Bomb*, Winter 2007, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/gronk/. Norte and Gronk note that the act was filmed, and images taken by Gamboa show Herrón holding camera equipment. This footage has yet to be deposited in any of Asco's archival holdings.

[62] Gamboa and Noriega, *Urban Exile*, 80.

complement the light ocher wall. The automobiles halted at the intersection imbue the performance documentation with rigidity and restriction. They also provide physical evidence of arrested motion. This sense of stasis persists even for viewers who know that at the end of the hour-long performance Sandoval and Valdez unceremoniously stepped forward to break the bonds and walk away.

Since Asco performed *Instant Mural* immediately following *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, a comparison of the two works reveals common threads. They operate as a pair.[63] And this pair of performances resonates with past processions and actions, while setting up new avenues of methods and subjects for future Asco projects. The setting for these performances stands as the most discussed and most readily apparent connection. However, I also consider Asco's use of costume, interactions with passersby, and the focus on motion in two works that break with the processional practice of their earlier performances. Following my analysis of the connections between *Instant Mural* and *First Supper*, I return to the earlier pair, *Walking Mural* and *Spray Paint LACMA*. I suggest that these two works from exactly two years before stand as a dual pendant to the 1974 pair, and I consider all four works together to reveal how Asco's tactics, methods, and strategies evolved.

By staging their processions along Whittier Boulevard, Asco consistently incorporated the legacy of the Chicano Moratorium. Place and history operate as Asco's medium for challenging the power of local and state authorities. In his examination of *First Supper,* Chavoya addresses the role of urban space as a raw material, which also applies to *Instant Mural.* [64] Chavoya states regarding *First Supper,* "In this performance Asco adopted the act of occupation in lieu of their previously mobile tactics."[65] They carried over this new tactic to *Instant Mural*, as they committed one hour to creating another, related yet separate, public spectacle. Returning to the nested terms of strategy (overall plan), method (process), and tactic (actions) in my analysis, both pieces reveal that the tactics have changed while the method, or process, remains consistent and firmly rooted in the camp and *rasquache* seen in earlier performances.

In both *First Supper* and *Instant Mural*, these tactical shifts are most apparent in the members' appearance and the role of motion. In the documentation of both works, the performers still wear white makeup with darkened eye sockets. In the case of Valdez, this is again accompanied by the bright rouge and dark lipstick she had favored since *Walking Mural*. The garments, however, lack the over-the-top flamboyance seen in the processions. In *First Supper*, all four members appear in jeans and shirts however accessories such as top hats and masks suggest that the event is more than a casual picnic. Their drag tactics become dormant. Instead, in both *Instant Mural* and *First Supper,* the space Chicano bodies occupy, and the forces that act upon them, come to the forefront.

Asco continues to use the vocabulary of power to critique power, but in contrast to fugitive processions here the group obstinately occupies space and appropriates bodies in order to perform this critique. Notably distinct from prior performances, these two pieces focus on

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[63] Given Asco's future camping of cinema, it is tempting to refer to these works as sequels. However, these performances share similar themes but not narratives. The consistent timing of their performances on December 24th through the early 1970s demonstrates Asco's interest in series, while consistently resisting the diegetic or chronologically sequential aspects of the sequel per motion pictures.

[64] Chavoya, et al. "Internal Exiles," 195–96.

[65] Chavoya, et al. "Internal Exiles," 196.

restriction rather than motion. The traffic island divides directional paths and limits the possibilities of movement, a metaphor for tension between government and community. Similarly the use of tape also suggests the restraint of the individual in service of the community or the Movement.[66] Both offer alternatives for pushing back against these forces, either by obstinate unity literally on top of the instruments of control, or by recognizing one's individual duties of non-compliance with the systems of bondage. The tape, which passersby read as actual bondage, does not in fact limit Valdez's or Sandoval's freedom of movement. Valdez explains the importance of agency communicated through Asco's work: "You know how there's that view of a Chicano? It's like a little limited view. [Hopefully people understand] that you can break free. There are no limits. It's all in your mind."[67]

In addition to camping their own community and its paradoxically limited liberation, these two performances draw parallels with oppression in Latin America. This expanded view uses camp to comment on the local and the global (as well as external and the internal) levels of power as Asco emphasizes the restrictive harm of both state force and self-policing. As noted in the previous section, *First Supper* references the U.S.-backed coup in Chile through the inclusion of Gronk's painting, *The Truth About the Terror in Chile,* thereby aligning the two struggles. In *Instant Mural*, Asco expands that reference to include the U.S. exploitation and oppression of Latinos worldwide, although this link remains underexplored in current scholarship. In the exhibition catalogue for *Phantom Sightings*, Gronk explains the desire to include those suffering "oppression on all fronts. East L.A., Chile, Vietnam, a group of people, a country. . . . It last[s] as long as the person taped could take being taped—then broke free. The same with a chain, you have to break free."[68] And in conversation with long-time friend and poet Marisela Norte, he emphasizes this outcome, stating, "Some people get trapped in their community, or a group, or a country, and are unable to leave it. But the bottom line here is: she breaks free."[69]

In *First Supper* the reference to U.S. policies in Latin America occurs through the presence of Gronk's painting. A more minute element of both performances, the banana, has generally gone unnoticed. The fruit is rich with campy comedic references, from its phallic pulp to its slapstick peel, while also functioning as a symbol of the unequal relationship between Latin American countries and the United States.[70] The exploitative business practices of United Fruit

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[66] Deborah Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 217; Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism," 246. Chavoya refers to this self-policing of the community as the "unseen social order."

[67] Patssi Valdez, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, June 26, 1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[68] Rita González, Howard N. Fox, and Chon A. Noriega, *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 118.

[69] Norte, "Gronk." The problematic assumption that Valdez is the only person taped to the wall is analyzed later in this chapter through an examination of Gamboa's photographs.

[70] Leticia Alvarado, "Malflora Aberrant Femininities," in Chavoya and Frantz, *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, 97; Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," 212. Alvarado is the author who addresses the banana most lucidly, noting "half its flesh missing" in conjunction with Valdez's teeth as revealing her latent agency, stating, "She is no subjugated wall-flower, but a malflora at kinky, public play." However, the parallels between bananas and exploitation of Latinos remains absent from Asco texts. Cullen reveals that Andy

led to the term "banana republic," a vision of Latin American countries as politically unstable and reliant on the export of low-value, perishable goods. In *First Supper* Valdez sits at the table on the traffic island eating a peeled banana.[71] Later, as Gronk tapes her to the wall, Valdez holds a peeled banana in her raised right hand.[72] This minor prop that appears in both works suggests the awareness of shared oppression: the US economic and political interference in Latin America reflects the same imbalances of power as the policing of Chicanos in East Los Angeles. The banana does not simply function as a punchline; it unifies the two performances, the two geographically diverse oppressions.

MURAL PENDANT: MOVING AND STILL

For Asco, *Instant Mural* shows a continuation of an engagement with and camping of Chicano mural practice. In *Walking Mural* from 1972, which I position as a pendant to this piece, Asco's camping serves to critique the essentialism of Chicano identity and art-making. In this way it joins earlier performances, including *Caca Roaches Have No Friends*, to target Asco's own community in demanding a more nuanced and intersectional space within the Movement. The contrasts between *Instant Mural* and *Walking Mural* paradoxically unify the works, specifically in Asco's focus on movement and restriction. Underlying this duality emerges Asco's awareness of documentation, distribution, dimensions (two dimensions versus three), and ephemerality. Changes in Asco's tactics appear when we contrast these two related performances, which cleared the way for further experimentation with media in the form of No Movies.

Regarding both *Walking Mural* and *Instant Mural,* Barnet-Sanchez states that, "satirical or not, the performance invoked the images they were criticizing, so that by calling their pieces 'murals,' they directed their dissatisfaction not so much at the icons themselves as at the uncritical (over)use in [*sic*] murals."[73] Just as *Walking Mural* camped the iconography of Chicano murals, *Instant Mural* camped the facile creation of ostensibly permanent monuments. Where *Walking Mural* sought to break the figures off the walls, *Instant Mural* traps the actors in a web of social expectations, political oppression, and essentialized identity. In both, murals stand for oppressive or limiting stereotypes, as frequently noted, but also suggests how one might resist or even push back against these social restraints. Asco's camp method—with the goal of making Chicano identity more multi-dimensional, I believe—prompts the consideration of *Walking Mural* and *Instant Mural* as bookends of their street performances, while allowing for executional differences.[74] In both, Asco camps the mural in order to explicate how the Chicano civil rights movement remains an ongoing negotiation rather than a *fait accompli.*

Warhol's associates referred to homosexual Cuban exiles as "bananas," suggesting the sexual and ethnic associations in circulation.

[71] The fact that the banana is peeled heightens its aesthetic reference to United Fruit, called *el pulpo* in Spanish, or "the octopus."

[72] In Gamboa's documentation, one frame that shows Herrón standing in front of the wall also shows him eating a banana.

[73] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life,* 224–25.

[74] "Gronk: Not a Negro, Feature for *High Performance* Magazine. Unpublished Interview Transcript," n.d., Box 61c, Folder 19, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8. Gronk states, "We started doing the Instant Murals where we taped people to walls and The Walking

The key contrast between *Walking Mural* and *Instant Mural* occurs through Asco's different approaches to motion in service of their critiques of muralism. Writing about the history of Chicano murals in East Los Angeles, Barnett-Sanchez refers to both of these performances as "antimurals," a term that establishes murals as only ever static, large, and two-dimensional.[75] She notes the animated quality of Asco's performances, stating that they "were dynamic and thus mocked the stasis inherent in painted murals; they actually moved down the street."[76] This processional motion occurred in *Walking Mural*, but *Instant Mural* arrests that same movement. The performances present two approaches to a shared critique. In *Instant Mural,* Gronk entraps Valdez's and Sandoval's bodies as a metaphor for social constraints, from which they then break away. It is a building upon and inverting of the approach previously seen in *Walking Mural*, where the procession marks a physical liberation from a flat surface or flattened ideas of *chicanismo*. In both, Asco's approach requires entering into conversation with painted murals, rather than simply mocking or opposing them.

The physicality of the performers, in their appearance and movement, as well as the audience's reactions demonstrate similar strategies as well as distinct approaches to executing nausea camp across these two works. In the earlier *Walking Mural*, the public spectacle relies not on sound or choreography, but on the physical appearance of Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez. That visual incongruency with their surroundings, triggering the nausea of their camp, lies in their adaptation of drag. While Gronk and Herrón wear flamboyant costumes of tulle skirts, glitter, and makeup, Valdez fashions herself as a dark Guadalupe. Her presence exudes a subversive self-possession rooted in the *pachuco* subculture, which I examine in the following chapter. *Instant Mural* employs public spectacle through visible restriction rather than procession. The public binding serves a similar goal— to critique and create space for the marginalized voices within the Chicano community—yet changes tactics. This change is evidenced in the reactions of passersby. As noted in the discussion of *Walking Mural,* some passersby on the sidewalks of Whittier Boulevard shouted and harassed the performers, while others stared or ignored them. Gamboa's account of *Instant Mural* describes witnesses expressing concern for Sandoval and Herrón's wellbeing.

PENDANT ACTIONS

The final piece for comparison in this set of four works is *Spray Paint LACMA* of 1972. This action took place in one location, at the Los Angeles County Museum. It closely followed the procession of *Walking Mural* in a temporal relationship similar to that of *First Supper* and *Instant Mural* in 1974. In *Instant Mural* the placing of actual bodies, rather than painting images of figures, onto a publicly visible wall in East Los Angeles operates as shorthand for Chicano murals. I submit that this tactic revisits those used by Asco in *Spray Paint LACMA*: appropriation. Regarding the 1972 tagging, Bryan-Wilson explains that "Asco's use of appropriation (the act of claiming authorship of an entire museum) and its explosion of stereotypes . . . helped circulate radically reconfigured ideas about Chicana/o artistic practices

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Murals when they would peel themselves off the walls and walk down the street a couple of blocks with all this junk dropping off." This statement inverts the timeline of the works but draws parallels between the two, nevertheless.

[75] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 224.

[76] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 224.

and representation."[77] *Instant Mural*, like its predecessor, uses appropriation in service of Asco's effort to challenge restrictive stereotypes. Appropriation works in tandem with spectacle, creating a layer of camp that directly targets the community organizations determining what is and what is not Chicano art, what is and is not a mural.

Asco's tagging of LACMA would later be cited as the first Chicano conceptual artwork exhibited at the West Coast's premier encyclopedic art museum.[78] The introductory essay for LACMA's 2008 *Phantom Sightings* exhibition of Chicano art after the Chicano movement refers to *Spray Paint LACMA* as "the world's largest work of Chicano art."[79] However, the first official recognition of Chicano artists occurred in 1974, the same year as *Instant Mural*, when LACMA mounted the exhibition *Los Four: Alamaraz, de la Rocha, Lujan, Romero.* The work of Los Four fit rather than challenged the traditions of Chicano art, usually including graffiti-like elements on the canvases. Herrón explains:

> [Los Four] incorporated graffiti in almost every single one of their pieces. It was very difficult for me at that time to look at it and for me to accept it as [*sic*] the way that I accepted the existing graffiti that was already part of the landscape. Because it was created consciously for the purpose of exhibition.[80]

Against such institutional assimilation of Chicano street practices, the same practices denigrated by the curator two years prior, Asco crystalized their own goals and defiantly embraced their position as outsiders. Gamboa states, "We were Asco. We were the ones that spray painted the museum. Los Four were the ones that got invited to have the show there."[81]

The two groups shared creative networks in East Los Angeles, were each aware of the other, and occasionally connected socially, though not creatively. When de la Rocha departed Los Four in 1974, Hernández joined, garnering more comparisons between the two four-artist collaborative groups in East LA, each with a single female member. However, as Asco members explain, the tactics and goals of the groups occupied different spheres. Contentious relationships existed between the individual members, as well. Luján of Los Four stated that "Carlos [Almaraz] and Gronk—being gay—had issues."[82] Where queer tactics such as drag influenced Asco's approaches, Los Four outwardly maintained the prescribed Chicano normative both in their artwork and in Almaraz's public silence regarding his sexuality. Gronk describes Los Four as having a Marxist agenda, coupled with a desire to buy into the prevailing system. He describes interactions with them and the impact on Asco's place in the local art scene:

> We once went to Los Four to show what we were doing, and we showed them all these slides of our work. . . . And it was a lot different, their sensibility. . . . They couldn't quite figure it. . . . And I think, pretty much across the board, a lot of other

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[77] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "'Be Easy but Look Hard': Conceptual Currents in Queer Chicana/o Art," in Chavoya and Frantz, *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, 195.

[78] Gamboa and Noriega, *Urban Exile*, 125. Art press outlets reiterated this take on Asco's *Spray Paint LACMA* during their retrospective at LACMA in 2011.

[79] González, Fox, and Noriega, *Phantom Sightings*, 14.

[80] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.

[81] Harry Gamboa, Jr., oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, April 1 and 16, 1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[82] Robb Hernandez, "Straight Talk, Queer Haunt: The Paranormal Activity of the Chicano Art Movement," in *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*, eds. Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 187–88.

> Chicano groups perhaps thought the same way as well. We were just a rumor to a lot of people for the longest time, and sort of thought of as drug addicts, perverts. All kinds of names were hurled at us by other Chicano artists. And I think that sort of not being a part of it—the Chicano art scene in general—isolated us from that. But we were not accepted by the mainstream art gallery kind of westside thinking of art either. So we were sort of on our own to develop our own way. We weren't thinking, "We're going to end up in museums and galleries and stuff." Just to do the work was important. I think for Los Four it was like, "Art sells. You can get into museums. I want to be a part of the mainstream of the art arena."[83]

Herrón echoes this sentiment in a 2000 interview, acknowledging his revelation on the occasion of the Los Four opening at LACMA that that he was not interested in mainstream success. Herrón attended the opening with Gamboa, Gronk, and Valdez, who reprised the *rasquache* costumes and makeup they had worn in past processions. Herrón recalls his discomfort:

> I didn't want to go there. I didn't want to be in that circle, in that realm. So, we costumed to the max. We painted our faces. We hung things from our bodies. And we went to that exhibit like we were going to a costume party or like we were going trick-or-treating. And we just went like wanting people to see some part of Chicano art that still didn't exist, that wasn't in that show that we felt had to be in that show. So we attended that exhibit, the opening, but we were moving works of art. That then [*sic*] Asco became integrated into the Los Four opening. We performed without even performing.[84]

Later that year, on the now-customary afternoon December 24 performance, Asco's camping of muralism carried with it a new critique. With the recent exhibition of Los Four, one version of Chicano art had obtained mainstream recognition. In *Instant Mural*, the members enacted their realization that they could walk away from restraints and limitations. I submit that *Instant Mural* marks Asco's own artistic self-liberation. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, following *Instant Mural,* Asco moved boldly into new projects in which they made innovative uses of media and reached audiences beyond East LA.

Instant Mural, perhaps second only to *Spray Paint LACMA,* stands as one of the most reproduced and iconic images in Asco's entire oeuvre. This status likely results from its distribution as correspondence art, discussed further in Chapter Three, rather than in exhibitions in galleries. Initially, Asco circulated the documentation of their performances to a nationwide network of their peers, and they eventually used the same distribution method for No Movies.[85] Gronk began creating correspondence art around 1973, an approach that intensified after he befriended prolific mail artist Dreva. In 1975, Gronk used documentation from *Instant Mural* to create a college featuring Valdez (fig. 48). Her portrait-length image fills the right side of the horizontal frame in a manner reminiscent of cinematic blocking. The peeled banana in her hand appears on the left half of the photograph, entangled in the lines of tape that cross her wrist and

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[83] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel.

[84] Herrón, oral history interview with Rangel.

[85] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Ray Johnson and Asco: Correspondences," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 300–307. Chavoya gives a detailed account of the circulation and reception of Asco's correspondence art.

upper torso. *Instant Mural,* a pivotal moment in Asco's creative execution, also denotes a shift in how Asco thought about and used their own documentation, from staging to distribution and publication.

The close-up of Valdez that appeared in Gronk's mail-art served as the first iconic image of *Instant Mural.* As is common with even the most canonical and well-archived performance art, the number of people who encountered Asco's performances through documentation far exceeded those who witnessed it live. A different image of Gronk in the earlier stages of applying the tape appeared (fig. 49) through the publications and promotions of Asco's retrospective at LACMA in 2011. It is the reverse of the well-circulated version (fig. 6) in which just four pieces of tape cover Valdez. As with the well-circulated version, Valdez stands alone in the center of the frame as Gronk's blurred body, seen from the back in his brown coat, applies the tape. At this point, just four pieces cross her body.

In the exhibition catalogue to Asco's retrospective at LACMA in 2011, a total of three frames from *Instant Mural* are published: the iconic image of Gronk in the act of taping Valdez, the close-up used for Gronk's mail art collage, and a wide-shot two-page spread. The fact that these images were not published until at least the late 1990s means that art historical understanding of this performance remained limited and, at times, in danger of misreadings related to gender. Specifically, since Sandoval appears later in the performance, frames featuring only Valdez and Gronk invite a misreading of *Instant Mural*.[86] Even Norte, Gronk's closest friend, told him in an interview, "You know, I've never seen the image of Herb [Sandoval] taped to the wall, only Patssi [Valdez]."[87] Similarly, when Gronk submitted the work for consideration in the exhibition *Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation* (CARA), another artist protested its inclusion based on this skewed perception. Gronk recalls:

> I gave them a few slides, I believe, and my suggestions for what I wanted to be represented in the show. Now Judy Baca was one of the people in the show. She would not have *Instant Mural* in the exhibition. One of the reasons for her was, perhaps, because I was taping a woman to the wall—Patssi Valdez—and she thought that that was like really not a good thing for an image to be in the exhibition. Although, I had taped a man to the wall as well, which was Herb [Sandoval—Ed.]—and Patssi—because oppression affects both sexes, and that's what the idea was, that oppression doesn't know sexuality. It oppresses *everybody*.[88]

Gronk's message, initially missed by Baca and Norte alike, shows how the group struggled on many fronts to articulate its concerns regarding inequity. The intended message of resistance to all types of oppression risks, but should not be read as, a conflation of homophobia and gender binary oppression.

Perhaps the most prominent use of *Instant Mural* documentation occurs in the hands of its photographer; Gamboa features the color image on the cover of his collected writings, *Urban Exile*, published in 1998 (fig. 50). The photograph shows Valdez with her left hand raised and Gronk's figure on her left side. She is facing right. The left-facing Valdez is the version of

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[86] E. J. Montini, "Avant-Garde Troupe Performs Bizarre Show for Unwitting Crowd," *The Arizona Republic*, November 9, 1983, box 17, folder 9, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8.

[87] Norte, "Gronk."

[88] Gronk, oral history interview with Rangel.

Instant Mural used by the Getty in its promotions for Pacific Standard Time, the initiative that encompassed the LACMA exhibition in 2012.[89] The image of right-facing Valdez, however, appeared in the retrospective exhibition. Comparison with other *Instant Mural* documentation easily reveals that the photograph taken on site features Valdez facing right. This also corresponds to the placement of shadows (right side) at the time of day (late afternoon).[90] The differences between the two are the result of a flipped negative during the printing of the photograph. It is a move that should not be easily dismissed as an error but might be considered a mocking of established art institutions' investment in authenticity.

According to Davalos, who inquired about this flipped image, Gamboa "could no longer recall how he took the shot," so he refused to declare either one authentic.[91] Gamboa's response suggests Asco's inclination towards myth-making over factual clarification, a potentially subversive tactic. It also parallels concepts of ownership and property described by Noriega regarding Chicano film. Specifically, he states, it speaks to a *rasquache* perspective. For example, in the film *I am Joaquin* (1969) by El Teatro Campesino, the copyright is held by the collective.[92] However, that right is augmented by the "C/S" or *con safos* at the end of the film, what Noriega refers to as Chicano copyright: "forbidden to touch or the same will happen to you." [93] It is not a denial of rights per se, but rather a distinct way of regarding the rights to one's own work. The members of Asco reproduced and granted permission for use of these images, while also modifying them into collages for mail-art. Authenticity or originality stems from the maker, not the object.

Throughout Asco's performance era, the group became increasingly aware of, and well-versed in, the power of documentation. Gamboa became acutely aware of how visual media could be manipulated to serve those in power through his experience with the student walkouts. The photographs of Gronk's *Caca-Roches* are time-worn, grainy images, attesting in their appearance to the *rasquache* nature of the performance. Rosen's crisp black and white photographs of *Stations of the Cross* offer a bystander's perspective but raise questions of how Asco might have presented themselves if they had a camera and the role that color might have played in their solemn disruption. With each performance documentation, as Gamboa seizes his role behind the camera, the images provide more color, more clarity, and more suggestions of Asco's agency in the presentation, preservation, and distribution of their own work. This agency, with its subversive bypassing of official art scene venues, is central to the development of the No Movie. *Instant Mural* marks a turning point in this development. The staging of a performance in a single spot is also characteristic of Asco's No Movie. It is to the No Movie that I now turn.

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[89] Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix*, 205. LACMA used the original orientation of the photograph.

[90] As the sun set, the wall would have received indirect light from the left side of the wall, closest to Whittier Boulevard, positioned west of the performance.

[91] Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix*, 205.

[92] Chon A. Noriega, "Between a Weapon and a Formula, Chicano Cinema and Its Contexts," in *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 157.

[93] Noriega, "Between a Weapon and a Formula," 157.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MEANS OF PROMOTION— MOVIES AGAINST MOVIES

Lights positioned outside of the frame create alternating cool and warm toned reflections upon the surface of a rectangular pool (fig. 12). The lip of the pool, illuminated from beneath the water surface, contrasts with the surrounding darkness to delineate a stage-like structure for two figures. At the bottom portion of the image the darkness goes matte, anchoring the composition. A man, played by Guillermo Estrada—known as Billy Star—crouches at the lower left edge of the pool, leaning forward towards a woman in the water. Shown in profile, shadows fall across his back and thigh. Illuminated by a small light in the corner of the pool, his hair and pants appear soaked by the water. He looks intently at the woman, played by Valdez, as his arms reach out to touch her shoulders. In that same moment, she looks away. Interrupted and disconnected, she turns her head, peering over her left shoulder, revealing to the viewer an expression of apprehension and fear. Although they physically touch, their gazes suggest a distance between them and an overall disconnection. The glossy image, heightened by the play of light and surface in the scene, conveys a cinematic aesthetic but lacks a storyline. Asco created this image as a No Movie, a film still as true as any Hollywood might produce, yet outside of the context of a film. In this chapter, through a close examination of No Movie concepts and production, I argue that No Movies traffic in the art of suggestion as a form of camp, conceived and created using *rasquache* tactics.

The photograph's title, *Fountain of Aloof/La Dolce*, puns "the fountain of youth" and alludes to Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960).[1] In the film's famous Trevi Fountain scene, Sylvia, an American actress played by Anita Ekberg, and Marcello, a gossip columnist played by Marcello Rubini, wade into the water. Fellini's drama—firmly rooted in the motion picture canon—reveals and laments the unattainable "good life" of the idealized movie star while noting the role of the paparazzi who help create it. *La Dolce Vita* in itself, camps the idea of celebrity, and its characters, too, partake. In "Notes on Camp," Sontag analyzes Ekberg's character as a thinly-veiled version of the actress herself, stating, "Persons can even be induced to camp without their knowing it. Consider the way Fellini got Anita Ekberg to parody herself in *La Dolce Vita*." [2] A No Movie operates outside of the film industry and its primary medium, escalating the camp effect seen here. Within *Fountain of Aloof,* we witness the camping of celebrity camp, nested within a camp of Hollywood and cultural privilege as a whole. It is a view from outside. Asco's position corresponds to their outsider status as Chicanos, unrepresented in Hollywood and nevertheless keenly aware of the importance of visibility in popular culture. In *Fountain of Aloof* and other No Movies targeting Hollywood, Asco employs nausea camp, leverages its outsider status, and uses the visual vocabulary of the insider to call attention to disparities in representation.

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[1] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Pseudographic Cinema: Asco's No-Movies," *Performance Research* 3, no. 1 (1998): 5, doi:10.1080/13528165.1998.10871583. Although Fellini inspired many new Hollywood directors such as Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, as a foreign filmmaker he operated outside the system and has described his outsider position in various interviews.

[2] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 522. Sontag's use of the word "parody" here again demonstrates the slippage between these terms, even for Sontag here, as she argues that Ekberg unknowingly self-parodied. However, as I demonstrate in the Introduction, the nuances are often based on relationships with power, positioning this scene within the broader camp of the film.

In order to analyze Asco's prolific production of No Movies, I sort the various styles into three main groups. Each grouping functions chronologically and coalesces around production methods and distribution. Early proto-No Movies, introduced in Chapter Two, stemmed from documentation of Asco's street performances and street actions.[3] Key among these, *Instant Mural* exists as a performance, a document, and a collage for mail art. The second group includes images of two completed street actions such as *Spray Paint LACMA/ Project Pie in (De)Face*, examined in the previous chapter. As with street performance documentation, Asco used those resulting images to create collages for mail art projects, expanding the work and audience of these early group ventures. These lay the groundwork for the highly developed images of their pioneering film-still approach. The final group, which I investigate here, is the fully realized No Movie that reflects careful construction of costumes, selection of locations, and composition of scenes. These works, including *Fountain of Aloof* and *A la Mode* (1976), come closest to mimicking Hollywood aesthetics.

NO MOVIES AND HOLLYWOOD

Film stills have been used as promotional devices since the first commercial movies were produced, often employed in tandem with illustrations for movie posters and lobby cards.[4] Shot on set by a dedicated photographer called a unit stillman, film stills are separate from the celluloid image itself, which the industry refers to as a frame enlargement (or to use the terminology of Barthes, a *photogramme*).[5] In this literal, material sense, Asco's film stills replicate the film still practices of Hollywood. Although other scholars have highlighted Asco's use of a still camera in place of a motion picture camera, there is in fact no separation between the film industry and Asco's materials. The distinction rests in the lack of a cinematic referent in No Movies; these projects are disconnected from the movies in ways that commercial film stills, which possess a referent, are not. No Movies, with their nomenclature of refusal, seize the official medium while employing different sources to different ends. Rather than referencing an individual film, No Movies point to Hollywood as a whole.

Fountain of Aloof exemplifies Asco's No Movie practice, which they commenced in 1974. Through No Movies, Asco camps the institutions that disparage Chicanos or erase them from popular culture.[6] The nausea camp in Asco's street processions and actions, discussed in Chapters One and Two, also appears in these film stills. Similarly, the *rasquache* methods Asco used for costumes and cardboard props reappear in the clandestine "shoots" of No Movies. The aesthetics and tactics of Asco and their collaborators, however, make a substantial turn. In order to camp a new target, Hollywood, the image must mimic its visual vocabulary through film star

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[3] C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita González, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya et al. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 57. Chavoya and González describe the relationship between street performances and later No Movies; to clarify the span of No Movie production, I propose the categorization noted here.

[4] Steven Jacobs, "The History and Aesthetics of the Classical Film Still," *History of Photography* 34, no. 4 (2010): 374, doi:10.1080/03087291003673113.

[5] Jacobs, "The History and Aesthetics of the Classical Film Still," 373.

[6] David E. James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 182. Proto-No Movies based on street performances or public actions, such as *Spray Paint LACMA*, occurred prior to this date.

glamour. Their goal thus shifts from the immediate payoff of provocation to a longer, more entrenched camp process.

The term "No Movie" may refer to a single photograph or to a group of images with the same title. Even when grouped, the stills reflect a fragmentary nature that intentionally suggests, yet lacks, a broader cinematic narrative. This remains true even when aesthetic or titular similarities connect images. For example, *Fountain of Aloof* forms a trilogy with No Movies *Waiting for Tickets* (fig. 13) and *Search and No Seizure* (fig. 51), which I discuss later in this chapter.[7] The aesthetic similarities between these No Movies result from their temporal execution. Additionally, the title *Fountain of Aloof* applies to all poses and angles shot for that project, although the images remain unnumbered, offering no clear sequence of events.[8]

Gamboa conceived of the trilogy as a rough sequence based on the fotonovela format.[9] An illustrated narrative publication genre used throughout Mexico, the fotonovela complemented the more overt cinematic influences on No Movies. The traditional fotonovela emerged in the 1940s and originally illustrated scenes from popular cinema to adapt movies into print.[10] Throughout the twentieth century, these booklet melodramas increased in popularity with working-class audiences in Mexico as well as Chicano communities.[11] Fotonovelas share framing devices found in graphic novels, including the use of multiple framed scenes.[12] No Movies relate to this medium conceptually, yet heighten its fragmentary nature by selecting only a minimal number of frames for the suggested narrative.

The primary source for Asco's No Movies lies in the target of their camp: Hollywood. As noted in the Introduction, Gronk grew up as a latchkey kid and spent his after-school hours at the library. He also attended independent and foreign films with great frequency.[13] By the time Asco formed, Gronk had amassed a stunning knowledge of cinema, including the blocking sensibility of Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu, as seen in *Tokyo Story* (1953), and the use of narrative, as seen in Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* (1945). These techniques, along with Gronk's previously mentioned appreciation for Fellini, informed Asco's aesthetic.

As young artists in East Los Angeles with no access to cinema equipment or funding, Asco were unable to use film media to comment upon and challenge their experiences. Instead of seizing the means of production, Asco used still photography to seize the means of promotion. By embracing the photographic medium used to advertise films, they could imitate Hollywood and its means of promulgating American popular culture. Turning to the film still allowed Asco to critique the powerful institutions of the media, especially Hollywood, whose hillside sign

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[7] Willie Herrón, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, March 5, 2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 183. As an examination of theory and the images themselves reveal, No Movies employ camp in concept, execution, and aesthetic.

[8] Although the order in which Gamboa shot these photographs can be determined by examining negatives, the fact that movies are often shot out of narrative sequence means that such information would provide only production order, rather than any suggestions as to narrative.

[9] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 183–84.

[10] Loretta Carrillo and Thomas A. Lyson, "The Fotonovela as a Cultural Bridge for Hispanic Women in the United States," *Journal of Popular Culture* 17, no. 3 (1983): 59.

[11] Carrillo and Lyson, "The Fotonovela," 59.

[12] Carrillo and Lyson, "The Fotonovela," 59.

[13] Gronk, interview with the author, December 3, 2018, Los Angeles.

could be seen from East LA, but whose films failed to recognize this neighborhood's inhabitants.[14]

As with their street performances, which confronted homophobia in their own community by camping muralism, Asco camped Hollywood images to challenge the essentializing of American culture. Each frame may initially read as an advertisement—ostensibly, the surface without the substance. However, because of Asco's deployment of camp, in which they utilize the same means as the oppressing culture—the film still and its cinematic aura— they confront the industry on its unrealistic depictions of race and gender. If there is literally no movie, what do such fabricated propagandistic images reveal but the man behind the curtain? Stripped bare, then, No Movies allow for an examination of the construction of identity. Furthermore, No Movies act as a weapon for redefining American-ness, destroying established stereotypes and, in the same still moment, promoting the possibility of self-reinvention. Although broader than the movie criticism Sontag refers to, No Movies use camp in order to call attention to the stakes of the "ubiquitous, high spirited, and unpretentious medium."[15]

At first glance, a No Movie such as *Fountain of Aloof* appears as many Hollywood films do: glossy images intended to distract from the real world rather than reflect upon or act on it. This aesthetic speaks to Sontag's note number two, in which she states that in camp, "[t]o emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content. It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical."[16] Subsequent camp scholars have argued against this note, stating that camp is inherently political based on its relationship with and against the dominant society. Additionally, Cleto argues that the core of the representational process, to have or to lack representation, is always already political.[17] Asco's No Movies correspond with Cleto's focus on the processes of representation itself. No Movies reveal how subtly the politics of identity and representation hide in plain view throughout American popular culture. In these photographs the literal image, or content, presents an ostensibly benign atmosphere of fantasy, while at the No Movie core rests the masquerade of drag and the cultural critique of camp.

In the No Movies, Asco evoked themes that occurred during the golden age of Hollywood, avant-garde cinema, and the shift to New Hollywood blockbuster movies around 1970. The aesthetics of composition, as noted earlier, resonate with the camera work of avant-garde filmmakers including Ozu. These films had an impact on Hollywood as the emerging *auteur* movement championed the individual creative genius of the director. This was in contrast to the earlier ostensibly collective studio-mode of production. This emphasis on the individual *auteur* initially seems to conflict with Asco's own collective process, but the can-do attitude of young directors, such as Steven Spielberg (b. 1946) and Francis Ford Coppola (b. 1939), resonates with Asco's own *rasquache* take-charge approach that operates against established systems. The turn of New Hollywood towards more violent, realistic scenes—notably in films

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[14] Harry Gamboa, "Erased: Limits and Boarders," artist lecture, May 26, 2011, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C., 1:15:32, https://youtu.be/LB-Qu8nSLW8; James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 181. In his artist's talk, Gamboa discusses the relationship between East Los Angeles and Hollywood.

[15] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 517–518. See note 5.

[16] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 517.

[17] Fabio Cleto, ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 35.

such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)—permitted a visual rawness that fit with Asco's surroundings and enabled them to subtly critique the typecasting of Chicanos as criminals. However, Asco remained open to a range of Hollywood images, allowing them to blend the gritty spirit of New Hollywood with glamorous camp icons harvested from the industry's golden age.

RASQUACHE PRODUCTION

In Gronk's words, the No Movie involves "projecting the real while rejecting the reel."[18] Mimicking the play on words of jetter-speak described in the Introduction, this is a succinct description of a medium that deftly embraces movie industry practices while condemning Hollywood's objectives.[19] Gronk described the making of a No Movie in three parts: "I use the three-point dot system for preparation of a no movie. First: no film. Second: thinking within an 8½ x 10 format. Third: postal distribution. The no movie is a concept that involves the aforementioned system."[20] To understand No Movie production and the types of camp tactics deployed at each level, I employ a modified version of Gronk's three-point dot system to examine materials and techniques. First, I will look at the equipment; second, at the sets and costumes; and finally, at the distribution of No Movies. At each point, I reveal how the No Movies exhibit *rasquache* tactics that serve the overall camping process targeting Hollywood.

The artists themselves have suggested that their lack of access to movie equipment served as practical inspiration for Asco's creation of film stills.[21] However, even photographic cameras remained out of reach for them during their initial years. Early documentations of performances were captured by friends with cameras, such as Elisa Flores's black and white photographs of *Stations of the Cross* described in chapter one. Not until 1973 did a member of the group have even this basic equipment.[22] During his first year of college, Gamboa purchased a camera along with hundreds of rolls of film using funds from his undergraduate Model Cities grant.[23] Gamboa's Minolta 101 was the first camera owned by any of the founding members of Asco.[24] The camera became a catalyst for No Movies, making Gamboa the default stillman.[25] The photographs demonstrate his inherent abilities, though he had no formal photographic training.[26] In 1974, when Gamboa acquired a Super-8 home movie camera, the documentation for actions expanded, yet the No Movie remained a still photography endeavor.[27]

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[18] Harry Gamboa, "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," *Chismearte*, Fall 1976: 31.
[19] Gamboa, "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," 31.
[20] Gamboa, "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," 31.
[21] Harry Gamboa, Jr., interview with the author, October 24, 2017, Los Angeles.
[22] This is not uncommon. Chicano films were limited but emerging during the early and mid-1970s.
[23] Harry Gamboa, Jr., oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, April 1, 1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[24] Gamboa, oral history interview with Rangel.
[25] Eva Wattolik, "Banquets and Heterotopia: Asco's First Supper (After A Major Riot) (1974)," *Public Art Dialogue* 8, no. 1: 47n21. Wattolik notes, per conversation with Gamboa, that he also used a 150mm Vivitar lens.
[26] Gamboa, Jr., oral history interview with Rangel.
[27] Patssi Valdez, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, June 26, 1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Valdez mentions a Super 8 camera, which is visible in photo

Gamboa frequently used 35mm slide film that could be cross-processed, giving him the ability to project as well as print photographs for use in mail art collages.[28] Per Shifra Goldman's early exploration of Asco's process, Gamboa favored 400 ASA speed film.[29] The high speed allowed Gamboa to shoot without the use of auxiliary lighting or long exposure while capturing rich colors and warm light that gave No Movies a hyper-real aesthetic.[30] These effects occur in No Movies such as *Fountain of Aloof* with its inky black fields and warm reflections. Gamboa quickly gained technical acuity as a photographer, as well as experience developing his own film and printing photographs. However, he soon made production choices that resonated with the conceptual focus of Asco's artwork by seeking out a processing lab to carry out development and printing according to his instructions.[31]

In addition to Asco's innovative exploitation of materials to camp Hollywood, their costumes and sets reflect their ingenuity with limited resources. Like the early street performances previously addressed, it is here that Valdez demonstrates her ability to invent a character with borrowed garments and thrift-store materials. Gamboa recalls:

> [Valdez] had a way of just being able to transform herself with just everyday objects and a little touch of cream in whatever paint and become this beautiful icon. And then wipe it off and then start all over again. And there was something about her being able to just transform an environment, a situation, a person and just change it.[32]

Asco's flare with costumes stems from an East Los Angeles tradition of ethnic pride and politics expressed through self-fashioning. During the 1940s, Mexican American and black youth popularized the zoot suit. These brightly colored suits required copious yards of fabric due to their drape tailoring. In his history of the look in Harlem, Stuart Crosgrove refers to the suits as "an emblem of ethnicity and a way of negotiating an identity. The zoot suit was a refusal: a subcultural gesture that refused to concede to the

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documentation from *Instant Mural* of 1974. No Movies created after this, such as *Cruel Profit,* have documentation in the forms of both Super 8 movie and still photography.

[28] The use of slide film is common in magazine editorial photography. This film, usually processed in E-6 chemistry, is instead "cross processed" in C-41, the chemistry for color prints (color negatives). This alternative approach to film development contributes to the rich colors and the cinematic feel of Asco's No Movies.

[29] Shifra M. Goldman, "Brown in Black and White," *Artweek* 13 (June 5, 1982) 14. Quoted in S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas, "Harry Gamboa and ASCO: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971–1987" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1988), 81. A survey of both current and discontinued slide film reveals that 400 speed was not available in the 1970s. Gamboa may have been referencing standard film in his discussion with Goldman. It is also possible that Gamboa shot a slower speed film at the higher setting in-camera to heighten film grain and shadows.

[30] Eastman Kodak Company, "Technical Data, Color Transparency Film, Kodak Ektachrome 400X, E-161," 2005.

[31] Gamboa, oral history interview with Rangel. Finding the chemical odors and darkroom setting undesirable, Gamboa used Sunset Photo Lab, an establishment better known for printing and distributing pornography.

[32] Gamboa, oral history interview with Rangel.

manners of subservience."[33] In June of 1943, the suit became famous during five days of attacks by U.S. servicemen on Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. The sailors ostensibly targeted the victims for their high-yardage suits, supposedly an affront during wartime rationing. However, the racism behind these attacks remains undeniable. In addition to these iconic suits, the youth subculture of *pachucos* emphasized fashion and posing as a form of resistance. Their look included duck-tail haircuts, elaborate chains, and a particular use of language. Women often wore men's suit jackets, elaborate hairstyles, and dramatic makeup. Their legacy informs contemporary cholo fashion explicitly, as well as embedding self-presentation in Chicano culture as a resistance tactic seen in 1970s jetter-style expression at Garfield High and in Asco's street performances.[34]

ON LOCATION

Similar to the substitution of still photography for movie film, No Movie sets display a *rasquache* approach that mimics cinema's use of shooting locations. The No Movies presented thus far in this chapter, like the processions before them, were set in the streets of East LA. Shooting on-location for major motion pictures requires a large crew and legal permits. For Asco, shooting still photographs eliminated these requirements. However, many challenges to working in public spaces remained, especially the ongoing threat from ethnically based policing. Shooting mainly at night, Asco employed what Gamboa refers to as hit-and-run tactics.[35] Asco adapted this tactic from their earlier processions and actions, notably *Spray Paint LACMA*. Like the covert tagging and documentation in that piece, No Movies processes exploit access to public spaces while skirting law enforcement in order to critique issues of access and representation as they relate to Chicanos.[36]

The work of contemporary photographers such as Sherman and Crewdson resonates with Asco's practice of film stills.[37] Crewdson's process in particular serves as a strong counterapproach to that of Asco, especially in regard to sets. For example, during the making of his 2005–2008 series titled *Beneath the Roses*, Crewdson enlisted a crew of over one hundred people including gaffers, grips, and best boys.[38] Local authorities, including police, aided his production by removing street signs, as well as closing and hosing down streets as necessary for

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[33] Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare," in *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses,* ed. Angela McRobbie (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1989), 4.

[34] The jetters were distinct and in contrast to cholos, a subculture whose aesthetics take directly from the pachucos slicked-back hair for men and exaggerated make-up for women.

[35] Ondine C. Chavoya and Erika Suderburg, "Internal Exiles: The Interventionist Public and Performance Art of Asco," in *Space, Site, and Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 202; Patssi Valdez, "Regent's Lecture Series: Asco and Beyond" (UC Berkeley, March 6, 2014).

[36] Gronk, interview with the author.

[37] Martin Hochleitner, "On the Iconography of Light in the Works of Gregory Crewdson," in *Gregory Crewdson 1985-2005* (Ostfildern-Ruit Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005), 157. Hockleitner notes that "Crewdson assigns [his images] to a hybridized genre somewhere between cinema and photography," similar to where Asco scholars position the No Movies.

[38] Christopher Peterson, "Gregory Crewdson $1 Million Photo Shoot," *JPG*, July 2007, https://jpgmag.com/stories/1194.

his compositions.[39] In Crewdson's street scene *Untitled (Brief Encounter)* (2006, fig. 52), a nondescript sedan turns left onto a main street, its tires leaving tracks in the snow.[40] There are no street signs, and the traffic lights are all set to yellow, a suspended state between stop and go that echoes the suggestion of a paused diegetic. The figures hired by Crewdson operate as both actors and models. In the photograph they appear small, barely noticeable against the Edward Hopper-like emptiness around them. Crewdson's eerie vernacular locations include several small towns in Massachusetts and Vermont.[41] He captures his elaborately staged scenes with a bulky large format 8x10 camera, which he does not directly operate.[42] This requires an involved setup on site. Overall, Crewdson's sets parallel the resulting fine art photographs as a costly spectacle, mimicking a major Hollywood production. In contrast, Asco's sets for No Movies exhibit the stealth, agility, and grit characteristic of Chicano *rasquachismo.*

Throughout Asco literature, curators describe the group's use of still photography rather than film as an innovation-by-necessity. The sets for No Movies, which demonstrate a similarly novel and *rasquache*-informed approach, rarely garner such notice. Asco's staging, as with their photographic materials, speaks to Chicano working-class alienation. In contrast to Crewdson's elaborate sets, located across a large geographic area, Asco staged No Movies in easily accessible areas of Los Angeles. They shot a majority of No Movies in the evening, literally under the cover of night, to avoid attracting attention. This includes *Fountain of Aloof*, which used the reflecting pool at the Mark Taper Forum theater, and *Waiting for Tickets* (fig. 13)*,* staged on the stairs nearby, both within the Los Angeles Music Center complex downtown.[43]

Waiting for Tickets functions as a commentary on elite culture. It echoes themes explored in 1972's *Spray Paint LACMA*. Like the earlier piece, the venue for *Waiting for Tickets* facilitates Asco's critique. In the catalogue for Asco's retrospective, David E. James explains the scene:

> [T]he pair embraced each other and rolled as if in a suicide pact down the Music Center's steps. This was a mock "Odessa Steps" sequence, which Asco thought of as a satire, ridiculing the city's cultural elite while, Godot-like, they waited in line for officially sanctioned culture—but also expressing their own despair that they would ever be admitted to the bourgeois cultural institutions.[44]

The Los Angeles Music Center regularly features performances by the Los Angeles Opera, the Philharmonic, and Master Chorale. The patrons and audiences at these events are primarily affluent and Anglo-American.[45] However, on non-performance evenings it would have been open and empty, a perfect opportunity for *rasquache* repurposing of space.

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[39] Gregory Crewdson, "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses" (artist's talk, Cincinnati Art Museum, February 28, 2008).

[40] Crewdson, "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses." The artist describes the process of finding cars for the shoot as "casting" and says he purposely chooses those with a nonspecific look, especially American cars in neutral colors.

[41] Crewdson, "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses."

[42] Peterson, "Gregory Crewdson $1 Million Photo Shoot"; Hochleitner, "On the Iconography of Light in the Works of Gregory Crewdson," 96.

[43] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 183.

[44] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 183–84.

[45] Carolina A. Miranda, "L.A.'s Music Center Was Built as an Aloof City on a Hill. Can a Remade Plaza Change That?" *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 2019. The author notes the lack of

Known through two published photographs, *Waiting for Tickets* shows Star (Guillermo Estrada) and Valdez dressed in neutral colors, collapsed across the terrazzo stairs. Shot across the steps, the image, marked as Plate 086 in the retrospective catalogue (fig. 53), foreshortens the figures, with Star's face tilted towards the camera, eyes shut. Valdez lies on her back, her left wrist adorned with silver bangles, while her platform shoe peeks from behind Star's legs. The desolate space around them enhances the exhaustion evoked by their fallen bodies. In the version marked as plate 093 in the catalogue (fig. 13), Gamboa has moved the camera to the front of the stairs. The glass doors of the theater just beyond them are closed. Although their heads tilt towards the camera, their eyes likewise are shut. Valdez's torso slips off the top stair, her body anchored by Star's legs. Both scenes from this No Movie correspond to the overall narrative described by James yet provide no sequential order to them. A comparison of the two scenes does reveal, however, the variety of choices made by Gamboa in shooting the No Movie's construction. The hit-and-run tactics necessary to create a No Movie in such settings did not preclude experimentation with camera angles and poses.

In a related No Movie shot during the same evening, titled *Search and No Seizure* (fig. 51), Star and Valdez stand on the pavement at the opening of the Bunker Hill Tunnel.[46] Star sits on the ground, one leg folded and the other extended, grasping at Valdez who stands over him. Star wears the same white suit seen in *Waiting for Tickets*, while here Valdez wears a plush coat on top of her sleek black dress. Backlit by the white glow of the reflective tile lining the tunnel, their figures become flattened in contrast to the extreme one-point perspective of the road. The undeniably cinematic composition belies the rushed manner necessary to capture this image while going unnoticed.

No Movies shot during the day include *Malibu, CA* (1975, fig. 54) and *A la mode* (fig. 14). Costumes that were more conservative, rather than elaborate, allowed Asco to use the spaces of the beach and a busy diner without getting into trouble with authorities. For example, in *Malibu, CA,* wearing suit jackets at the beach might have appeared strange but not mischievous. In *A la mode,* which I will examine in further detail later in this chapter, the costumes of the group could blend with those of other diners inside Philippe The Original. The deli, located at Alameda and North Main in Chinatown, was and remains a busy space. Unlike vacant spaces that the group used at night, daytime crowds allowed them to blend in and set up on tables among the regular customers. The accessibility of these locations for daytime shots helped Asco to avoid law enforcement but not the suspicious glances of people around them.[47]

The four artists also used their skills to create intimate indoor sets for several No Movies. In works such as *Capitalismo* (1975, fig. 55), part of the Slasher Series, Gronk appears in a high-contrast close-up shot. His face fills the frame, with the camera slightly above him. In the final

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accessibility and that prior to the redesign in 2019, the plaza was only populated immediately before and after performances.

[46] Bunker Hill shifted from affluent to a seedy neighborhood in the 1940s. After a redevelopment plan that included hi-rise buildings and cultural institutions such as the Mark Tapper Theater, its Victorian homes became frequent sets for noir films. The Seconds Street Tunnel is also frequently used in advertisements and film.

[47] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 182. James identifies the location as the Music Center. Closer comparison of the photos and location reveal the exact spaces to be one of the four reflecting pools and the short tier of stairs nearest the building.

image, the word "Capitalismo" in white block lettering is set along his lower right lip. Other frames from this shoot reveal small white orbs floating in the background. This is the galaxy backdrop seen in other Asco No Movies such as *Slasher No. 9* (1975, fig. 56), which appears blurred here as a result of the short depth of field. In other frames, as Gronk lifts a razor to shave off his eyebrows, more of the set is revealed, including a small wooden chair with turned spindles. By using backdrops and essentially crafting a soundstage in Herrón's garage, the artists could have more control than they did during on-location shoots.[48] Still, whether on-location or on a soundstage, Asco approached No Movies with the same *rasquache* tactics evident in their street processions. The hit-and-run approach allowed them to exploit their surroundings, while their ability to transform materials aided in the construction of sets.

IN THE MAIL

Beginning with the performance-turned-No Movie *Instant Mural*, Asco distributed their film stills through correspondence art networks. The postcard-sized images featured ink stamps, most notably a block lettered one that read ASCO, as seen in the mail art version of *A la mode* (fig. 57). Such stamps emphasized the promotional mail quality of the pieces, furthering their goals as media hoaxes. In addition to being addressed to friends and mail art cohorts, these images were sent to film theaters, the way that real movie promotional materials would be.[49] These practices gave No Movies a distinctly different circulation than traditional artwork, moving outside of typical art systems such as galleries and museums. Correspondence art allowed Asco to circumvent the local organizations that deemed their work non-representative of *chicanismo* and to bypass mainstream art institutions that disenfranchised or tokenized Chicano artists.

Asco disseminated and exhibited No Movies in a variety of formats, though today the large format printed photograph for exhibition is most familiar to audiences. For example, in the mid-1970s, Gamboa projected the 35mm slide film in addition to creating prints. [50] This approach merged the ephemeral image of cinema with the stillness of photography. These projections often occurred at random outdoor locations on the sides of buildings, not in gallery spaces.[51] Asco also printed some No Movies at a postcard scale to incorporate into collages for correspondence art, notably *Instant Mural* and *A la mode*. The malleable characteristics of the No Movie made it a fitting medium for the expression of in-between and often obscured Chicano identities.[52] Given Asco's tenuous relationship with the local arts scene, the medium could be adapted to suit other routes of distribution or publication.

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[48] Chavoya and González, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 65.
[49] Chavoya, "Pseudographic Cinema," 4.
[50] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 182.
[51] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 183–184.
[52] For more on the marginalized yet central position of Chicano culture, see Rita González, Howard N. Fox, and Chon A. Noriega, *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), and Amelia Jones, "'Traitor Prophets': Asco's Art as a Politics of the In-Between," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 107–41.

Gronk and Dreva spoke at length about their respective art practices during their first meeting following Willoughby Sharp's 1972 lecture.[53] Both were involved in correspondence art, or mail art. Broadly speaking, mail art networks facilitated the dissemination of thousands of pieces of art to previously unreached and international audiences. The intention behind reaching new audiences through mail art, however, differed between the two artists and their respective art groups. Although not always explicitly political, mail art connected Gronk to like-minded activist artists. No Movies specifically could circulate within the film promotional networks, a necessary semantic element of camp critique. For Dreva, postal art allowed him to exploit the hype-making possibilities of promotion in a camp-adjacent parody of the music business.[54] Here, I contrast their uses of mail art in order to analyze elements of *rasquache* in Asco's No Movie postal distribution.

Dreva and his creative partner Robert Lambert arrived in Los Angeles in 1972.[55] Already well-connected to both gay and glam rock scenes, they frequented all-ages rock club Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco and the Chicano gay bar Butch Gardens.[56] Dreva's projects included a faux rock band called Les Petite Bonbons, which he led with Lambert.[57] Les Petite Bonbons created elaborate media hoaxes, promoting events through mail art and magazines, although the band never actually performed or recorded music. It existed only through press releases and promo packages. Known by these hoaxes alone, members of Les Petite Bonbons befriended numerous international musical acts, some of whom they joined "on tour."[58] Dreva's irreverent attitude, promotional acumen, and provocative nature resonated with Gronk, and by extension with Asco.

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[53] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 51–52. Dreva and Gronk later met at Butch Gardens, a Chicano gay bar. Dreva explained that he needed his number again, as he had used the slip of paper in a project titled *Wanks for the Memories* and the ink had smeared in the process.

[54] Dreva's group, introduced in detail momentarily, seized but did not aim to unsettle the powers of the music business, thus functioning more as parody than as full-fledged camp.

[55] Jerry Dreva, "Letter to Richard Newton, Associate Editor," February 17, 1980, 2, box 13, folder 3, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8.

[56] Dreva, "Letter to Richard Newton, Associate Editor," 2–3, 5.

[57] Kristen Olds, "'Gay Life Artists': Les Petites Bonbons and Camp Performativity in the 1970s," *Art Journal* 72, no. 2 (2013): 17, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2013.10791028.

[58] Deborah Cullen, "A Part and Apart: Contextualizing Asco," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 211; Sandy Robertson, "Philately Gets You Everywhere," *Sounds*, March 1981, box 14, folder 2, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8. David Bowie was one artist befriended by the Bonbons, and he paid tribute to it with a mail art-inspired cover for the single "Ashes to Ashes." Cullen refers to this as an album; however, it was a UK single from Bowie's upcoming album *Scary Monsters* (1980). Both the UK and US seven-inch releases feature a stamp border on the cover, with one in the lower center reading "Bon Bon." The UK release featured three different covers with Bowie in different poses, all with the Bonbon stamp. Inside packaging included three variations of sheet stamps, nine per sheet, one version of which included the Bonbon stamp. The inner sleeve of the single for British, American, Australian, and most western European markets mimics an artwork by Dreva from 1977.

In Asco's retrospective catalogue, Cullen, Olds, and Chavoya discussed the paths of influence between Dreva and Gronk and their groups. Both artists embraced mail art to mimic official elements of show business, be it Hollywood or the music industry. For Les Petite Bonbons, this took the form of media hoaxes and creating hype around a non-performing band. Mail art helped them take charge of star-making machinery. Dreva himself notes the construction of identity, stating, "I have set out to create myself as a legend, to write my own history, to create my life as a legend and myth."[59] This interest in self-creation is evident in his network. In a 1980 letter to *High Performance* magazine editor Linda Frye Burnham, Dreva discusses his history with correspondence art:

> I have been active in the mail art network for ten years and have participated in hundreds of mail art exhibitions around the world. I correspond with artists in more than two dozen countries and see my continued work in the Eternal Network as an important part of my effort to build bridges and make connections. I have met and worked with many of the leading artists of this movement including Ray Johnson, Anna Banana, General Ideal, Robert Fillioux and the Western Front.[60]

Other recipients of Dreva's work were "friends and archives around the world including Lou Reed, William Burroughs, Patti Smith, Art Metropole Archive . . . Genesis P. Orridge . . . [and] Iggy Pop."[61] These connections, while legitimate, reflect an artistically sublimated obsession with fame and posterity. Dreva understood fame and deftly exploited it, but the uncritical tone of his letters precludes a framing of this practice as camp. He was undeniably politically astute, engaging with Gronk on numerous occasions about Latin American and U.S. politics. His political engagement, however, does not appear in this portion of his art.

Like Dreva, Gronk had been active in postal art circles before their meeting. Since the early 1970s Gronk had corresponded via mail art with artists in South America, including Uruguayan political prisoner Clemente Padín (b. 1939).[62] These contacts and the awareness they generated for Gronk informed his individual art-making, as seen in the painting *The Truth about The Terror in Chile*, discussed in Chapter Two. The inclusion of that painting in Asco's performance *First Supper (after a Major Riot)* suggests parallels between Chicano struggles and those in Latin America. It also demonstrates the impact of correspondence networks on Gronk's art and by extension Asco, specifically highlighting how mail art could function in activism. The connections postal distribution fostered for Asco were rooted in communicating their critique in contrast to Les Petite Bonbons' focus on fame.

Critic Lucy Lippard notes that the practice of mail distribution dematerialized art and fractured the New York City hegemony.[63] This pushback against traditional art methods and

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[59] Dreva, "Letter to Richard Newton," 1.

[60] Jerry Dreva, "Jerry Dreva's Interview Notes to Linda Frye Burnham" (February 1980), 2–3, box 14, folder 2, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8.

[61] Dreva, "Jerry Dreva's Interview Notes to Linda Frye Burnham"

[62] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Exchange Desired," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, eds. C. Ondine Chavoya and David Frantz (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2017), 215.

[63] Lucy Lippard, ed., *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xvii. Lippard discusses speed and shifting of power in the making and distribution of conceptual art, which developed separately but parallels Asco's own hit-and-run tactics.

power structures complements Asco's hit-and-run No Movie production tactics. It also aided Asco in circumventing the institutions that excluded or essentialized Chicano art. In Asco's execution of it, mail art functions as a *rasquache* tactic, and it fosters "an unruly, unauthorized liaison across fields," as described by Pérez.[64] Considering Asco's adoption of this distribution tactic, I submit that *rasquache* enabled Asco to commit other unauthorized acts such as illicit communication. I believe that *rasquache* could be viewed as a threat because it enables the expression of the marginalized and obscured. This threat via correspondence art is evidenced by the imprisonment of Gronk's contact Padín.[65] Charged with mocking the armed forces, Padín used mail art to distribute criticism forbidden in his own country and, in one work now in the collection of the Museum of Modern art, instructions for making a bomb in the guise of a "Happy Bicentennial" birthday card to U.S. recipients.[66]

As evidenced in the production and formal qualities of No Movies, their distribution also employs the vocabulary of the movie industry to promote nonexistent movies featuring Chicanos. In his essay specifically examining these photographs, Chavoya reveals that "No-Movies were distributed to local and national press and media and to film distributors and reached an international audience through mail art circuits."[67] For Asco's No Movies, distribution acts as a triple threat. Their mail art tactic allowed the group to engage with other oppressed peoples and circumvent cultural gatekeepers. This tactic also borrowed from the Les Petite Bonbons media hoax playbook, circulating fake promotional materials within the very networks of the entertainment industry that ignored Chicanos.

SEEING/BEING SEEN: AUDIENCE, GAZE, AND POSE

Although No Movies stand apart from cinematic time-based projects in the manner of Hollywood and even avant-garde film, the audience, the gaze, and the pose all play critical roles in these images. The better part of No Movie scholarship to date has focused on the production of the works and their relationship to Chicano cinema's history. Issues of audience, gaze, and posing remain relatively scant at this time, however these themes are critical to self-identity in Asco's work. The audience and reception of Asco's early street performances reemerges in their No Movies. Meanwhile, analysis of the gaze in film criticism, much of it based on Laura Mulvey's polemical essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), enables novel consideration of Asco's engagement with race and gender in the No Movies.[68] The pose, on the other hand, appears primarily in texts examining still photography. Posing is critical to Asco's images, which resonate with Chicano subcultures such as the 1930s zoot suiters described earlier in this chapter.

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[64] Laura Elisa Pérez, "Decolonizing Theory: Rasquache-Style"," in *Roundtable: Rasquache Aesthetics* (Otro Corazón II: Queering Chicanidad in the Arts: A Valentine for Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, UCLA: unpublished, 2017), 2.

[65] Chavoya, "Exchange Desired," 212.

[66] Michaëla de Lacaze, "The Unhappy Ambiguity of Clemente Padín: Politics and Polysemy in Latin American Mail Art," *Post: Notes on Modern and Contemporary Art Around the Globe,* June 17, 2019, https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/1273-the-unhappy-ambiguity-of-clemente-padin-politics-and-polysemy-in-latin-american-mail-art

[67] Chavoya, "Pseudographic Cinema," 4.

[68] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 837–43.

In his essay, "The Loneliness of Camp," Scott Long argues that camp depends on and is completed by the audience's response. According to Long camp shines a light on the illogical and reveals truth though conversation: "It is dialectical, not deconstructive, so to speak. . . . Behind camp is the expectation that, once the absurd is properly recognized, a sense of the serious will follow."[69] Commenting specifically on No Movies, James shows such a dialectical model to be problematic as he states that along with no celluloid, no cameras, and no exhibition, No Movies have no audience.[70] Gronk, however, explains that Asco made the works for themselves; Asco was their own audience.[71] As observed in the works analyzed thus far, No Movies enact numerous iterations of camp. Understanding how Asco produced camp in No Movies requires a rethinking of what James calls an absent audience, or what I have proposed as a reflexive audience, i.e. Asco themselves. Additionally, the subsequent viewers of No Movies decades later further complicate nausea camp because new viewers often occupy spaces and cultures beyond Asco's initial audiences, yet may potentially enter the works through other similar experiences of disenfranchisement.

Roland Barthes' allegorical schema and three levels of meaning—literal, symbolic, and a suspended reading—reveal how both parody and audience engagement function in film stills. At the first level, the literal or informational level, a non-engaged spectator simply observes the aesthetics of an image or object.[72] Next, the audience engaging at the symbolic level would be able to interpret what is directly communicated but lacks nuanced insight into that message.[73] Finally, there is the third semiotic stage that requires the audience and image to share visual vocabularies to understand both denoted and connoted messages.[74] Barthes refers to this stage as the "obtuse meaning," which exceeds signification and in his words, "has something to do with disguise," pointing to layers of appearance and identity.[75]

As noted, Asco's primary audience includes the artists themselves. Additionally, those within their queer Chicano network could immediately understand references to contemporary Chicano culture, glam rock and its love of gender play, as well as Hollywood's glamour and gore. These audiences engage at the third or semiotic level. These shared backgrounds form the key ingredients to reading camp. As discussed in the Introduction, camp is a visual language enriched by juxtapositions and requires the elite insider-status of these marginalized worlds. Therefore, I argue that different exhibition spaces and audiences could experience No Movie's camp to different degrees based on their familiarity with the group's specific cultural references.

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[69] Scott Long, "The Loneliness of Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 80.

[70] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 182.

[71] Gronk, interview with the author. The use of documentation as mail art would have constituted a secondary audience, however for the purposes of planning and production, the only audience considered was the group itself.

[72] Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Heath, Stephen (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 52.

[73] Barthes, "The Third Meaning," 52–53; Tyler, "Shaping Belief: The Role of Audience in Visual Communication." 21–22.

[74] Barthes, "The Third Meaning," 54–58; Tyler, "Shaping Belief: The Role of Audience in Visual Communication," 27.

[75] Barthes, "The Third Meaning," 54–58.

In his essay on allegory and postmodernism, Craig Owens examines Sherman's iconic works as an example of the "obtuse" meaning once occupied by allegory.[76] He argues that it is at the third level that a reading of an image begins to create the system of representation it parodies.[77] I believe that, in contrast to Sherman's film stills, No Movies break with the point of parody, which is rooted in mimicry, and instead swerve into nausea camp, which references but does not seek to pass as the object of its criticism. For example, in *Waiting for Tickets*, the fact of the collapsed figures on the stairs reference an iconic cinematic scene but does not attempt to pass aesthetically as Eisenstein's film. Similarly, in *the Gores*, introduced at the start of this dissertation, the oversized props and glam rock costumes juxtaposed with the shoe-store location make the audience aware that this image does not come from a real movie. At the symbolic level, the No Movie suggests an archetypal Hollywood image. However, in that same moment, the vernacular space creates confusion and resists complete immersion into motion picture fiction. This incongruency rushes the audience to the third level, where the camp-driven critique appears.[78]

Asco's members and their peers in East Los Angeles employed art and music to create a space of belonging and self-definition. While Asco aligned themselves with the Chicano movement and its culture, they also exceeded it through their affiliations with these other civil rights struggles, including gay liberation and women's rights. Asco's efforts to create, express, and thus validate these differences appears as nausea camp. Disgust, or nausea per Asco, develops from what Sara Ahmed identifies as trauma, experienced yet unresolvable, which then manifests as fetishized reenactment.[79] Ahmed theorizes that trauma creates disgust, and the disgust then triggers the creation of an object. Considering this, I propose that Asco's nausea camp creates a dialectic with an audience that shares in the trauma of alienation. This trauma can lead to disgust towards the alienating cultures. Asco then redeploys that disgust back at its targets in order to disidentify. In the case of Asco, the feelings of alienation and anger at the status quo resonate amongst them and their peers, making the target of the returned disgust and the images that perform the critique immediately legible to their primary audience.[80] No Movies target Hollywood and therefore sublimate disgust into a glamourized mockery of the film industry, nevertheless Chicano alienation remains central to these images.

Today, despite the increased interest in Chicano art and Asco's celebrated position in it, No Movies remain largely outside of mainstream institutions. Although exhibitions of the group and individual members' work continues to grow, Asco remains unrepresented in major museum collections save for the Smithsonian American Art Museum. This absence in collections is not for lack of available artworks by the group. Gamboa, the photographer and archivist of many No

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[76] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2," in *Cindy Sherman*, ed. Johanna Burton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 14–17.

[77] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 15.

[78] No Movies such as *Fountain of Aloof* delve deeper into Hollywood mimicry and therefore suspend their meaning, per Barthes's three stages.

[79] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 96.

[80] Bim Mason, *Provocation in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 25. Mason details the roles of chaos, stasis, and provocation in community definition.

Movies, has reprinted photographs for exhibition.[81] The reprinted works are 16 x 20 inches, as seen in the 2017 exhibition *Harry Gamboa Jr.: The Asco Years* at Marlborough Contemporary gallery in New York.[82] These photographs, archival and geared specifically to the art world rather than the postal service, have yet to enter museum collections, including LACMA where the 2011 Asco retrospective occurred.[83] Still, these works now take part in the authority of these gallery spaces through temporary exhibitions, and the camp within them changes with that even partial validation from the establishment. Gallery audiences may or may not be able to engage with nausea camp as the Asco themselves and peer audiences did. The inability of the viewer to connect with the experiences of Asco dulls the impact of nausea camp, especially where provocation gives way to conceptually driven critiques. New audiences, as part of customary art exhibition practices, rely on didactic labels and catalogue essays to understand unfamiliar works. These methods contrast greatly with the initial ways that No Movies reached their audiences. Such texts, while allowing Asco's artwork to reach a wider demographic, may signify an audience gap that camp cannot span.

In her influential essay, Mulvey uses a psychoanalytic methodology to argue that the gaze is always male, regardless of the viewer's gender.[84] Through various examples she demonstrates that in popular cinema, women exist as objects of desire, not subjects, meant for spectacle rather than advancing the narrative. Mulvey's theory has become the de facto authority on the gaze, one that is tightly tethered to mainstream Hollywood. She notes in the final paragraph that avant-garde cinema possesses the potential to free the camera and audience from restrictive conventions. Yet the majority of responses to Mulvey's text focus on challenges to the male gaze, which as implied by Mulvey's essay is white, cisgender, and heterosexual.[85] If considering works of and by any variation on these categories, including queer Chicano No Movies, the function and impact of the gaze requires reevaluation.

Numerous scholars have taken up the subject of the gaze from fields including ethnic studies, gender studies, and of course, film. The three essays reviewed here provide a useful framework for considering the dynamics of the gaze with respect to ethnicity and gender in Asco's No Movies. bell hooks's essay, "The Oppositional Gaze," presents a black female gaze that responds to the male gaze, functioning as inherently critical and reveling in that criticality.[86] This gaze pushes back against the male gaze described by Mulvey, and like the male gaze, it occurs outside of the frame or screen, looking in. Deborah Whaley proposes a Latina "look" through her examination of three 1990s films.[87] In contrast to the gaze, which is the single-sided activity of the observer as described by Mulvey, the look is the action of the object of the gaze,

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[81] C. Ondine Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective, 1972–1987* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 410–15. The checklist in the catalogue notes that exhibition reprints made in 2011 by Gamboa are 16 x 20 inches, with others from Valdez's collection at 8 x 10 inches and 11 x 14 inches.

[82] April Swanson, conversation with author, Marlborough Contemporary, September 26, 2017.

[83] Email from LACMA Registrar to author, May 16, 2019.

[84] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 837–43.

[85] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 844.

[86] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 116–117.

[87] Whaley's theory is informed by Ann Kaplan's theory of the look that presented new visual relationships apart from the male gaze. See E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Methuen, 1983).

the Other.[88] The look is the Others' agency of presentation, creating a new relationship that "looks back" at the objectifying gaze.[89] This look, performed by a character and manifested through a shot/reverse technique, makes for a "cinematic sexual subjectivity for the characters and a model of agency for the culturally resistant spectator who is doing the looking."[90] I proposed that the gaze, for Asco, given the previously noted reflexive audience, is a Chicano gaze from outside of the frame as well as a Chicano look from inside of it. This gaze expresses criticality, through camp, and it counters the gaze of objectification.

The No Movie *A la mode* (fig. 14) features a self-assured Valdez embracing her role as a glamorous movie star. In the most well-circulated scene from the No Movie, she sits on top of a Formica table in a diner, the condiments and dented napkin holder at her right. She wears black gloves, and her left hand caresses her leg while she braces herself with her right hand on the shoulder of Herrón, who sits behind her. Gronk casually stands in the background as a supporting cast member. Her pose—chin tilted up and looking directly into the camera—evokes self-assuredness and defiance framed by silver screen glamour. In *A la mode,* Valdez's star demeanor and opulent costume contrast with the quotidian diner location, which is instrumental in Asco's hit-and-run tactics.

As noted by James, the pose is critical to the development of the No Movie.[91] In his essay for the retrospective catalogue, he argues that in No Movies Asco members pose, or vogue, in manner that is linked to the past and their future.[92] "Since the Pachuco/as and zoot suiters of the 1940s," James writes, "dressing in highly stylized clothes and striking attitudes of arrogant self-assertion had been a cultural trial of the barrio, one that eventually mutated into voguing."[93] This voguing developed in underground drag competitions in black and Latino communities across the U.S., and it was later popularized by the performer Madonna. Owen's musings on the pose suggest an additional aspect to Valdez's defiant stare. He explains that the pose, in general, operates as protection from the gaze of the photographer, and freezing is a form of resistance.[94] Valdez's pose, however, is borrowed from screen stars. In camping a glamorous star's stance, her resistance to the gaze is layered with a desire for acceptance. Her camp is both her shield from the gaze and her weapon aimed at its indifference.

A comparison of *A la Mode* to headshots and promotional images of old Hollywood actresses reveals the precision with which Valdez evokes star-power. For example, George Hurell's photograph of Joan Crawford for the 1935 film *No More Ladies* captures the actress with her head back and peering down the bridge of her nose (fig. 58). In *A la mode* Valdez thrusts her chin up at the same angle as Crawford. Through this mimicry of conventional Hollywood glamor, the No Movie adopts and rejects Hollywood using both medium and subject: desiring the power of glamor while critiquing its elitism in the same still moment. By re-

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[88] Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, "Interrogating the Look of the Gaze: Theorizing a Latina Cine-Subjectivity." *Women: A Cultural Review* 23, no. 3 (2012): 327.
[89] Whaley, "Interrogating the Look of the Gaze," 328.
[90] Whaley, "Interrogating the Look of the Gaze," 323.
[91] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 186.
[92] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 186.
[93] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," 186.
[94] Craig Owens, "Posing," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 211.

performing the pose of a celebrity already given to camp interpretations (Crawford), Valdez harnesses both the defiance of the original and the subversive camp of drag performances. Her pose does more than invite a glamor-adoring audience; it demands recognition of the functions and relations of power in the film still and movie star image.

The type of camp found in drag performances, especially pre-Stonewall, often looks back to old Hollywood.[95] This, according to Sontag, stems from camp's sentimentality.[96] In note number nine, one of her more extensive, Sontag explains this taste for the golden age of cinema, specifically its actresses.[97] "The androgyne is," she says, "certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility," and the popularity of this figure in camp reveals "a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms."[98] Stars of the silver screen are, according to Sontag, the best examples of this type of personae, notably the "temperament and mannerism [of] Bette Davis."[99] Valdez's character recalls the pose and spirit of such stars, who were, inevitably, unburdened by racial stereotypes.

Amelia Jones compares Valdez's pose to that of Mexican-born Dolores del Río (fig. 59).[100] While both share a Mexican background, I believe that the stereotyping that Del Río endured limits our full reading of the No Movie. In headshots and promotional images, Del Río appears with her head slightly turned or reclining, playing up the seductive "Latina lover" role that studios crafted for her. Instead I offer that a camp icon such as Crawford resonates both aesthetically and conceptually with Valdez's character in *A la mode*.[101] Crawford's personal and professional struggles endeared her to gay audiences, who connected with her outcast position and perseverance. [102] It is a following Del Río's legacy lacks. Of Crawford, film critic Quentin Crisp explains, "even her springy posture . . . resemble[d] the stance of a brave soldier facing death."[103] More importantly, while bold postures were acceptable for white actresses like Crawford and Vivien Leigh (fig. 60), it would have been tacitly prohibited for any Latina actress.[104] This ethnic distinction, though easily overlooked, forms the foundation of Valdez's

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[95] As described in Chapter One, there was a shift to a more aggressive drag post-Stonewall, reflected in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* and the character Cyclona. Earlier camp indulged in titillating heterosexual audiences and showed some flirtation with the idea of passing, whereas post-Stonewall drag focused on provocation of its heterosexual audiences.

[96] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 519.

[97] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 518–519.

[98] Sontag, "Notes on Camp, 519.

[99] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 519.

[100] Amelia Jones, "'Traitor Prophets': Asco's Art as a Politics of the In-Between," in Chavoya et al., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 123.

[101] Jones, "Traitor Prophets," 123. Jones states that Valdez is posed similarly to del Río. However, my review of Del Río's Hollywood headshots did not reveal similar images with her chin raised like Valdez. Usually, actresses kept the chin down to soften the shadows of the nose.

[102] Lawrence J. Quirk and William Schoell, *Joan Crawford: The Essential Biography* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 234–235.

[103] Quentin Crisp, *How to Go to The Movies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 21.

[104] Rita Hayworth—whose well-documented transformation required her to change her name, dye her hair, bleach her skin, and undergo two years of electrolysis on her hairline—poses in a similar fashion for *The Lone Wolf Spy Hunt* (1939), but her glossy lips are parted, shifting the upward chin from defiance to seduction.

camp move: she borrows the visual vocabulary of the dominant culture to critique it. Mimicry of a Latina actress would risk simply reinforcing Hollywood type-casting.

Recalling her own pose as a defiant dare to the camera, Valdez acknowledges deep frustration. She said in an interview, "I was really tired of all the negative stereotyping of Mexicans. We never looked glamorous in the media. I remember thinking where am I in [those Hollywood] pictures, where are my friends."[105] Her annoyance is reasonable: Columbia University's *Latino Media Gap Report* shows a wide discrepancy between the U.S. Latino population and representations of Latinos in television and film (fig. 61). Among the report's key findings:

> A review of the top movies and television programs reveals that there is a narrower range of stories and roles, and fewer Latino lead actors in the entertainment industry today, than there were seventy years ago. . . . Even further, when Latinos are visible, they tend to be portrayed through decades-old stereotypes as criminals, law enforcers, cheap labor, and hypersexualized beings.[106]

The report tracks the roles for Latinos, staring and supporting, in major motion pictures since the 1940s through 2010. The Latino population grew from less than five percent to nearly twenty percent of the U.S. population during that time. However, roles for Latinos remained under five percent throughout that period, with a noticeable flatlining throughout the 1970s and 1980s, preceded by a dip in the late 1960s. The report notes that representation in media was a demand of both the African-American and Latino civil rights movements.[107] The report's bleak statistics on Latino representation quantifies Valdez's experience of invisibility and her perception of Latinos as hypersexualized in Hollywood. For her, racialized female drag—as a Chicana seizing the position only permitted to white actresses—is an act of camp that empowers the disenfranchised by turning the tools of alienation upon the oppressing culture.

Per Sontag, movies, specifically movie criticism, are well-suited to camp "because most people still go to the movies in a high-spirited and unpretentious way."[108] Hollywood films, in particular, enjoy a large and diverse audience that cuts across age, race, class, and even nationality. The images the film industry presents in their products, however, rarely feature such diversity. Be the images glamorous or gritty, Hollywood markets an idea of America featuring predominantly white actors using a standard American English dialect. Through worldwide distribution, these attributes become preferred throughout the United States and around the world. No Movies slip into this promotion of cultural ideas by copying the means by which Hollywood markets its product. In doing so, Asco's No Movies encourage the questioning of

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[105] "The Asco Interviews," Nottingham Contemporary, February 28, 2014, YouTube video, 25:29, https://youtu.be/iyFViWGU061.

[106] Frances Négron-Muntaner et al., "The Latino Media Gap: A Report on The State of Latinos in U.S. Media" (New York: The Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, Columbia University, 2014), 1, http://latinodonorcollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Latino_Media_Gap_Report.pdf.

[107] Négron-Muntaner et al., "The Latino Media Gap," 23. The report does not discuss the decline in roles during the civil rights movements. This may suggest that Hollywood chose to reflect the preferences of white audiences or to avoid addressing racial issues during a period of cultural shift.

[108] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 517. See note 5.

Hollywood's whitewashed vision of America portrayed in films and television. As Gamboa recalled regarding the media and his childhood:

> [I] found myself confronted with the idea that the Spanish language was condemned by a monolingual society where English was being promoted . . . part of the bigger social program was to make sure, through the utilization of television, to homogenize the entire society and anything that deviated from that was improper English and if you did not look like any of those people you were an improper American if you were an American at all.[109]

Through Asco's No Movies the members could demonstrate that deviation from a scripted concept of Americanness denoted a defect in the system rather than a flaw in the unrepresented.

THE NO MOVIE AND THE UNTITLED FILM STILL

Sherman began producing her Untitled Film Stills series in 1978, four years after the first No Movie. The series consisted of seventy images and, unlike No Movies which could appear in various relationships with one another, Sherman's film stills stood as individual works, unconnected by place, costume, or theme. The comparisons made between No Movies and the Untitled Film Stills results from their film still and use of the film still as a method for critiquing representation in Hollywood. Separated by time, geography, and creative networks, the two approaches to the film still no doubt developed independently of each other. The general similarity between Untitled Film Stills and No Movies as photographs mimicking motion pictures does not denote influence.[110] Despite their emergence on different coasts years apart, an examination of Asco's work alongside Sherman's Untitled Film Stills remains useful, as the latter has generated a substantial body of critical texts while the former remains underexplored. The numerous publications on Sherman's work have even led Asco's Gronk to cite her film stills when discussing No Movies.[111] *A la mode* exemplifies Asco's take on Hollywood glamour and plays with typologies that parallel Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #3*. However, my comparative analysis reveals that each employs their own distinct tactics to comment on the ubiquitous models of female roles in cinema or the limited visibility of Chicanas.

In Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #3* (1977, fig. 62), we see a blonde young woman standing in a kitchen wearing an apron. Her body is cropped just below her waist and at the top of her head. One doe-eyed pupil grazes the upper edge of the frame. She is positioned off to the right side of the composition. Her head tilts to the side as her gaze looks off-frame, to her left. She raises her left shoulder, blocking our view of her tucked chin and casting shadows across her cheeks. The left elbow is locked supporting her weight on the counter while her right hand rests on her abdomen. A Morton salt container stands opened near a cooking pot, both out of focus in the foreground. A shelf on the wall anchors the left side of the composition. The film still reads as a moment from a cinematic narrative. Her pose and gaze suggest a Hitchcockian ingénue in the midst of an unfolding story. Sherman's image reveals one of many female archetypes in film while critiquing those typologies.

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[109] "Harry Gamboa Jr.," Future Tongue, July 11, 2015, digital video, 5:53, https://vimeo.com/144836691.

[110] To date, Sherman's record does not make any reference to Asco, although Asco literature frequently draws this connection.

[111] Chavoya, "Pseudographic Cinema: Asco's No-Movies," 9.

Owens states that Sherman uses disguise as parody, or ridicule via mimicry, in a process of reconstructing "woman" to reveal its constructed nature through image.[112] Her parody focuses specifically on the concept of "woman".[113] Her film stills, initially, mirror many aspects of Asco's: parody through mimicry of a Hollywood aesthetic in order to critique. However, subtle yet critical distinctions between Asco's camp and Sherman's parody occur beyond methods of cinematic reference, or lack thereof. Both approaches to film stills attack the stereotypes of a representational system, each on behalf of distinct marginalized demographics. Sherman presents a trope in order to deconstruct Hollywood's objectification of women via parody, depicting a single woman reacting to forces, and a supposed narrative, outside the frame.[114] This reflects Hollywood's objectification of women and their subordinate power, even when the woman is a "star" of a shot or film.[115] Asco, however, addresses not objectification but the absence and denigration of Latinos, specifically Chicanos, in Hollywood. In contrast to Sherman's isolated woman, Asco's No Movies feature multiple figures interacting with each other and often engaging the camera. Their extreme present-ness counteracts the actual lack of Latinos in Hollywood, camping this lack through mimicry and excess.[116] While Sherman and Asco share a common target of critique, the methods change to suit the type of oppression experienced.

I propose that Sherman can parody film stills because women appear in Hollywood, whereas the lack of Chicanos in film roles bars Asco from that tactic. The availability of tactics, based on representation in film, informs markedly different aesthetic approaches. While Sherman's photographs present an uncanny visual relationship to a film by Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980) or Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930), Asco's recognition occurs in the broader arena of cinematic aesthetics despite their references to specific films in title, e.g. *Fountain of Aloof/La Dolce,* or setting, e.g. the Odessa Steps reference in *Waiting for Tickets*.

The No Movie functions as a film still because of a suspended, extracted sense of a larger diegetic, while the over-the-top action and costumes quickly become excessive and suggest the presence of camp.[117] As discussed in the introduction, camp is always gay.[118] Asco's relationship with gay culture are evident in their aesthetic. Sherman's film-stills, similar to No Movies in many ways, are not camp. Parody and camp both attack in a manner that, as Owens states, "neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference."[119] Yet only one, camp, is inexorably tied to homosexual social visibility[120]. Since the forms of oppression and (mis)representation operate differently between gender, sexuality, and race, so too do the manners of critique.

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[112] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 8–19.

[113] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 522. Sontag explains that the intention cannot result in camp, stating, "The films of Hitchcock are a showcase for this problem."

[114] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse,"18.

[115] Judith Williamson, "A Piece of the Action: Images of 'Woman' in the Photography of Cindy Sherman," in Burton, *Cindy Sherman*, 43.

[116] Négron-Muntaner et al., "The Latino Media Gap," 8–15.

[117] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 518 (see notes 7 and 8); Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, 32–33.

[118] Moe Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing: Essay on Camp, Drag, and Sexuality* (Chicago: Macater Press, 2010), 141.

[119] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 21.

[120] Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing: Essay on Camp, Drag, and Sexuality*, 40.

In an interview for the Museum of Modern Art, critic Douglas Crimp recalled that "in 1978 I theorized [Cindy Sherman's photographs] as being 'like' film-stills . . . and they were called film-stills after that point."[121] The use of "like" illustrates the early searching involved in naming an emerging genre of staged photographs that suggest, but do not actually reference, a particular film. Having addressed Sherman's images and the role of identity, here I turn to film stills more broadly to explore the in-betweenness of this media. As previously noted, No Movies predate Sherman's film stills. However, to understand No Movies' relationship with the arenas of cinema and photography, it is helpful to consider how scholars have analyzed Sherman's staged photographs. The position of Sherman's stills echoes Asco's own in-between and difficult-to-categorize position.

In his dissertation, Chicano film scholar Chon Noriega applies the concept of intermedia set forth by Fluxus leader Dick Higgins (1938–1998). According to Higgins, the term was first used in 1812 by poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) "to define works which fall conceptually between media that are already known."[122] However, as Higgins applied it to emerging postmodern art practices, a pattern emerges. The intermedia examples provided by Higgins, such as poetry and dance, consist of different materials and activate distinct senses, such as the visual and auditory. He does not cite artworks that span the gap between associated forms, such as photography and cinema. Such homogeny might fail to meet the intermedia criteria. However, the expanded field model of media relationships can allow exploration of closely related media. As applied by art historian Rosalind Krauss in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," this model maps the conjunctions and disjunctions between sculpture, site construction, marked sites, and axiomatic structures. The two "media" of No Movies—film and photography—are too tightly bound to fit the intermedia pattern because of their shared use of light, camera, and film.[123] Instead, I propose that No Movies be considered via the inter-relational model of the expanded field of photography.

George Baker, borrowing from Krauss's 1979 analysis of sculpture, employs the Klein-Piaget group to graph the relationships between photography and emerging forms that expand its field.[124] At the center of these models, in the Piaget portion of the diagram, Baker uses the binaries of *narrative/not-narrative* and *stasis/not-stasis* (fig. 63).[125] In the outer portion of the model, the Klein structure, the vertical axis contains the oppositions *digital montage* and

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[121] "Douglas Crimp on Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Still #60 (1980)," Museum of Modern Art, NY, 2016, digital video, https://youtu.be/zfRqacSQWRw. Crimp emphasizes the word "like," then explains what he considered film-like in these images.

[122] Dick Higgins and Hannah Higgins, "Intermedia," *Leonardo* 34, no. 1 (2001): 52. Republished from 1966 article in *Something Else Newsletter* no. 1 (Something Else Press, 1966) and Dick Higgins, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1984).

[123] While Asco's street processions relate to performance, the No Movie remains rooted in the object. No Movie viewers come to the work through the object, regardless of its distribution or exhibition.

[124] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 283. Krauss explains that Klein group and the Piaget group overlap, taking two models from two fields of study. I shorten this to Klein-Piaget here.

[125] George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 184.

modernist photography.[126] The genres *still-film* and *film-still* anchor the horizontal axis.[127] Baker provides two versions of his diagram, one with genres and the other with specific artist's names.[128] Representing the film still is, unsurprisingly, Sherman, whose work has come to define the genre despite the fact that Asco created images between modernist photography and digital montage earlier.

Cinema does not appear in Baker's Klein-Piaget group. To place No Movies in the expanded field, I propose a cinema-photography group. I begin with an inversion of terms, from *stasis/not-stasis* to *kinetic/not-kinetic* (fig. 64). Modernist photography maintains its same position. Still-film and film-still also remain in the same quaternary space. Cinema sits between kinetic and narrative complexes, directly across from photography. This model accommodates Sherman's film stills, Crewdson's high-production townscapes, and Asco's No Movies. Opposite these, Robert Wilson's video portraits occupy the still-film position. Wilson's works resemble photographic portraits, yet sustained observation reveals that they are steady shots of barely moving living subjects. Together, I plot these works on a photography-cinema diagram to map the relationship of motion and narrative. Additionally, this diagram offers routes for theorizing No Movies through their association with film stills and still-films created by later artists.

CLOSING

In summary, the film still medium occupies a unique position in Chicano Art as well as in the expanded field of photography. It stands apart from its earlier commercial applications, becoming a distinct art medium in the 1970s. Asco and Sherman used the medium as a tool for critique of the motion picture industry, the former through camp and the later through parody, methods that I argue are both identity-based. Artists such as Crewdson, unburdened by marked identity, create film stills evoking the cinematic sans critique. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the film still medium, like any other medium, can suit many applications.

In the hands of Asco as No Movies, the film still becomes a forum to perform drag and spectacle in a camp process that endeavors to create space for complex Chicano identities. Traditional concepts of Chicano art, such as muralism (covered in Chapter Two), employed a specific iconography. No Movies step outside of that artistic formula while also stepping outside of restrictive concepts of identity—be they racial or visual—in order to deconstruct them. In No Movies, as in the processions I explored in Chapter Two, Asco paradoxically embraces Hollywood in order to camp it as an institution.

No Movies also stand apart from traditional art in that they connect with their audience through a shared trauma of oppression, rather than a shared history. Nausea camp is legible because of a common experience: lack of representation in Hollywood. I note, however, that the decipherability of nausea camp is precarious; this form of camp is illegible to later audiences that do not share Asco's experiences or recognize visual cues. In addition to these nuances of audience, the gaze and pose also demonstrate Asco's keen awareness of race at play in Hollywood images, as seen in Valdez's choices in *A la mode.* The camp at work in Asco's art functions as a conglomerate of many methods of resistance, including drag and *rasquache* processes. These processes stem from the queer and Chicano communities to which Asco members belong. No Movies perform a

[126] Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," 184.
[127] Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," 184.
[128] Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," 183.

camping of their target, Hollywood. Without *rasquachismo* the aesthetics (and even simple existence) of No Movies would not have been possible.

EPILOGUE

Asco continued making No Movies throughout the 1970s, but changes for the group hovered on the horizon, including moves into video and other new media. According to Gamboa, in late 1975 Asco ceased "functioning as a mutually supportive core group of four or five artists," although it is difficult to discern whether these new creative directions were a catalyst or consequence.[1] Herrón explains, "we, at that time, decided that we would go separate ways and start exploring our ideas that seemed to grow out of the Asco experience." [2] While the founders stepped back from the group, additional artists joined Asco, forming what Marci McMahon refers to as "Asco B." This new organization included Gamboa's future wife, Barbara Carrasco, and his younger sister, Diane Gamboa.[3] Artist and writer Sean Carrillo (b. 1960) and poet Marisela Norte were also members during the 1980s and remain active in the preservation and promotion of the group.[4] However, not all past collaborators desire continued affiliation, notably artist Daniel J. Martinez (b. 1957) who stated, "The history of Asco is completely fabricated and they are comfortable with living in a lie."[5] Asco's history is indeed littered with twists and riddles, echoing the myth making and jetter-talk found in their earliest interviews. However, I believe that the legacy of Asco, and nausea camp, is indisputable and unique.

Throughout their time together, Asco members maintained their own art practices, including separate collaborative projects outside of the group. In the late 1970s, Valdez experimented with photography and mixed media. She also began working as a painter, exhibiting her work in a traveling exhibition in 1977.[6] Even with such accolades as a young artist, Valdez dreamed of attending Otis College of Art, where she had taken evening courses in her late teens.[7] She recalled:

> I'm like a nineteen year old girl and I'm at an Otis party. And they're all talking like art talk . . . like all the terminology . . . And I had decided one day—I said, "If

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[1] Harry Gamboa, "In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms: Asco, a Case Study of Chicano Art in Urban Tones (or Asco Was a Four-Member Word)," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Shifra M. Goldman et al. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, 1991), 128.

[2] Willie Herrón, Oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, March 5, 2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[3] Chon A. Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me: Early Asco 1971–75," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 19 (Autumn/Winter 2008): 109–121.

[4] Sean Carrillo's archives at University of California Santa Barbara features flyers and videos of performances with Gronk and other Asco members in the early 1980s. Marisela Norte conducted interviews for independent press surrounding the retrospective Asco exhibition *Elite of the Obscure* in 2011–2012.

[5] Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me: Early Asco 1971–75," 119; Leticia Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," *Atzlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 68.

[6] Tere Romo, *Patssi Valdez: A Precarious Comfort/ Una Comodidad Percaria* (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1999), 19. The exhibition, *Ancient Roots/New Vision*, appeared at the Tucson Museum of Art and traveled to Washington, D.C., Albuquerque, El Paso, Los Angeles, and Syracuse according to its catalogue, which featured Valdez's painting on the cover.

[7] Patssi Valdez, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, June 26, 1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

> this is going to be your life's work and you're going to function in this circle, you better get your butt in school and you'd better learn what these terms mean. Because you're going to need to know this stuff if you want to go where you need to go!" . . . other people maybe could pick up books . . . but I needed to go to school. I just needed it."[8]

Valdez matriculated as a student at Otis beginning in 1980, shifting focus from her efforts with Asco to her education as an independent artist.[9] She moved to New York briefly before graduating in 1985, selling her car to offset her expenses. Her work on the East Coast tended towards smaller-scale collages and mixed media pieces. Upon her return to Los Angeles, Valdez embraced its abundance of space and began working on large paintings.[10] She achieved recognition in 1986 when she appeared in Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine (fig. 65), again taking her audience beyond Los Angeles.[11]

Her paintings of the late 1980s depict intimate domestic interiors with rich colors that envelop, while tilted floors and toppled objects on tables suggest unease. For example, in *The Virgin's Room* (1992, fig. 66), swirling marks fill a small domestic space, which includes a small skull next to an angled chair and a doll underneath a small table set for tea. In a niche on the wall the crowned dark Virgin, a frequent theme in Valdez's paintings, surveys the scene. Visually, these images stand apart both from Asco's aesthetics and Valdez's earlier solo art works. However, her power to transform, noted by Gamboa, creates a through-line to her ability to generate emotion in a space. Not surprisingly, Valdez turned to set design in the 1990s. Two of her most prominent productions include major motion pictures *Mi Familia* (1995), directed by Gregory Nava and starring Jennifer Lopez, and *Luminarias* (2000) by José Luis Valenzuela.[12] In 2004 the Recording Academy selected her as the official artist of the 5th Annual Latin Grammy Awards. In her current paintings, as with her re-presentation of the Guadalupe in *Walking Mural* and her character in *A la mode*, Valdez remains skilled at presenting her own frustrations and insights while remaining engaged with the tenets of the Chicano movement on her own terms.

Herrón continued to create murals during his time with Asco, including "Surgery," from the mural series *Advancements of Man* (1976) on the exterior of Farmacia Villa Real in Boyle Heights (fig. 67). It is just one example of Herrón's individual work that echoes the sentiments discussed in Chapter Two regarding Asco's resistance against Chicano mural tropes. For example, there are no corn goddesses or Virgins of Guadalupe in these murals.[13] Instead, *Advancements of Man* shows doctors in surgical masks surrounding an operating table, which appears in an extreme foreshortened view. Herrón's use of figures and space recalls the murals of

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[8] Valdez, interview with Rangel.

[9] Valdez, interview with Rangel; Romo, *Patssi Valdez*, 20. Romo states that Valdez enrolled at the age of 29 in 1981; however, in her interview with Rangel, Valdez stated that she attended from 1980 to 1985.

[10] Valdez, interview with Rangel.

[11] "Patssi Valdez," *Interview*, January 1986, 22.

[12] Marci R. McMahon, "Self Fashioning through Glamour and Punk in East Los Angeles: Patssi Valdez in Asco's Instant Mural and A La Mode," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 28.

[13] Gronk, oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, January 20–23, 1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is Gronk's description of typical Chicano iconography, previously noted in Chapter Two.

Siqueiros, such as *El pueblo a la universided, la universidad al pueblo* (1952–1956, fig. 68). This aesthetic parallel connects Herrón's murals to Mexican predecessors through technique, rather than iconography.

Explicitly celebrating the resistance to restrictive mural themes, in 2011 Herrón used documentation from *Walking Mural* to create a new black and white mural titled *ASCO: East of No West* in 2011 (fig. 69), the same year as Asco's retrospective exhibition.[14] This mural shows Valdez, Herrón, and Gronk in a group portrait during their first procession. Additionally, the palette recalls his *Black and White Mural* with Gronk, and like that project, the mural returns to the recent history of the neighborhood and draws its imagery from photography. Overall, *ASCO: East of No West* documents the group in a procession that challenged a specific type of Chicano mural. It also makes the procession into the very genre it camped, highlighting Herrón's distinct role in that challenge as a muralist working against convention.

After his time with Asco, Herrón aided in the conservation of many murals through the Los Angeles County Department of Cultural Affairs.[15] He also took classes in drawing at Otis College of Design and attended East Los Angeles Junior College.[16] However, throughout the 1980s, music would be his primary creative outlet; in 1979 founded the Chicano rock bank Los Illegals.[17] He draws parallels between the work that Asco did, breaking through restrictions on Chicano Art, and his own work in music, which helped establish Chicano rock as a distinct and legitimate genre.[18] His own visual art practice merged with Los Illegals, as he recounts:

> [T]aking a lot of those Asco ideas and including and allowing those ideas to be the foundation of Los Illegals seemed like a real easy transition for me. But it was a new venture for the public to view, the public to hear where then I incorporated my artwork, always projecting over the front of our faces, always backdrops, my murals in the back drops all the time.[19]

One year later, with Joe Suquette, Herrón began running the prominent punk venue The Vex, located in the rental space of East LA art center Self-Help Graphics. [20] The venue featured bands such as The Brat, Los Lobos, and X in an endeavor to bring punk music fans together, overcoming class and ethnic boundaries.[21]

As with the other founding members of Asco, for Gronk the mid-1970s meant entering college while still producing art with the group. In 1975 he earned his BFA from East Los Angeles College, and he then attended California State University, Los Angeles for his MFA in

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[14] Holly Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life: Iconography and Identity in East LA Murals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 334.

[15] Barnet-Sanchez, *Give Me Life*, 335.

[16] McMahon, "Self Fashioning," 44n2.

[17] Willie Herrón, Oral history interview with Jeffrey Rangel, March 5, 2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[18] Herrón, interview with Rangel.

[19] Herrón, interview with Rangel.

[20] Josh Kun, "Vex Populi," *Los Angeles Magazine*, March 2003: 68; Norigea, Romo, and Tompkins, *LA Xicano*, 88. Herrón is frequently cited as founder of the Vex in Asco literature, while other sources name only Joe Suquette. Suquette worked with Herron and booked bands in Los Angeles starting in the mid-1970s. Suquette took over the Vex after a 1980 Black Flag show forced Self Help Graphics to stop hosting the club.

[21] Kun, "Vex Populi," 68.

1978.[22] In 1983, the NEA awarded him a fellowship which allowed him to focus on painting and exhibiting his work frequently.[23] During this era, he developed the character Tormenta (fig. 70). The name harkens back to the character Cyclona in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*, who Legorreta took on as his own persona. Tormenta's form is created from simple triangles and rectangles in black and white. Always viewed from behind, she wears opera-length gloves and long black dress that reveals an inverted triangle of skin on her back. Gronk describes her as "very Mexican, very melodramatic but also very Hollywood . . . I think of it as turning your back on things, on the art world."[24] Like Valdez, Gronk began creating sets, but he created them for opera. His aesthetic continued to be informed by international film and B movies. Additionally, he imbued his large-scale paintings with an awareness of the viewer. His first foray into set design occurred at Traction Gallery in Los Angeles for Michael Intrier's *The Ugly Sung Opera*, featuring music by Nervous Gender. By the 2000s, Gronk had begun working with the opera director Peter Sellars for productions in Europe, including *The Indian Queen* (2013, fig. 71), about the Spanish conquest.

As previously noted, Gamboa's college experience included funding that allowed him to purchase the camera used in Asco's No Movies. In addition to fotonovelas, since the 1980s and after Asco, he worked in video and performance, while maintaining his photography practice. These videos include *Baby Kake* (1984, fig. 72) in which an overwhelmed mother interacts with her adult infant in a high-chair and Marie Antoinette offers childrearing advice prior to the arrival of the child's father. Staring Gamboa's wife, Carrasco, the short video conveys absurdity, frustration, and a dark humor that echoes elements of earlier Asco works. He has taught courses throughout the University of California system as well as at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in the Photography and Media program, and he continues to teach as a lecturer at Cal State Northridge.[25] He founded the performance troupe Virtual Vérité in 2005. In 1991 he began the project *Chicano Male Unbonded* (fig. 73), which examines the pervasive stereotypical associations between Chicano masculinity and criminality. Made up of over one hundred nighttime portraits, this series includes images of Chicano authors, scholars, artists, and scientists who have influenced Gamboa.

While Gronk and Gamboa were attending college, they continued working together. [26] Gronk explains this period:

> [I]t was like Harry and I sort of orchestrating Asco, and utilizing someone like Marisela Norte, Sean Carrillo, Daniel Villareal, Armando Norte, Consuelo Flores, and getting a lot of different people to come in and interact with us and to present new pieces like staged kind of plays. Harry started to write plays. In '85 he wrote a play called *Jetter's Jinx*, and

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[22] Max Benavidez, *Gronk*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2007), 106.

[23] Gronk, interview with author, December 3, 2018, Los Angeles.

[24] "Notes for Gronk: Not a Negro! Feature for *High Performance*," 1985, Box 61c, Folder 19, *High Performance* magazine records, 1953-2005, Getty Research Library, Accession no. 2006.M.8. http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2006m8.

[25] Gamboa has taught at University of California campuses at Riverside, Irvine, Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Los Angeles.

[26] Gronk earned his BFA from East LA College in 1975 and his MFA from California State University in 1978. Gamboa attended California State University, Los Angeles. In 1983 Gronk received an individual artist NEA grant.

> it was done at the L.A. Theatre Center. It was the same year I was at MOCA. I was also directing the play and starring in it, and then having a show at MOCA at the same time.[27]

Asco literature often cites *Jetter's Jinx* (fig. 74) as the final Asco project. Gamboa wrote the play in the midst of the AIDS crisis. It features just two characters, Jetter and Nopal, a play on the words "no pal." It tells the story of Jetter who is waiting for friends to arrive to his birthday party. Over the course of the play, it becomes apparent that no one is attending because everyone has died. The word AIDS is never mentioned, only suggested in the line, "I will let you in on this secret: We are in the age of contagions."[28] Gronk explains, "Jetter became the name of this aging jetter who still wanted to continue to party even though your lifestyle really has to change or else you're going to die."[29] Subtitled "a conceptual drama," the play maintains the sarcasm and wordplay found in earlier Asco material, but it trades camp critique for a powerful commentary laced with dark humor.

The move into stage productions is a fitting culmination of Asco's creative approaches. The proto-Asco *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* was performed in an outdoor theater for an unwitting audience. From there, Asco moved into the streets with processions and actions, then to No Movies shot with hit-and-run tactics. With *Jetter's Jinx* and other plays, Gamboa and Gronk shifted from camp provocation and *rasquache* costumes to more traditional stagecraft. Considering the change, Gronk states:

> It was just very exciting to work in a situation with all these people involved in it. . . . And then the evolution from that into like, "Oh, now it's inside of an environment where people are actually having to sit down and watch, and there's a thing about memorizing a text, and it's all the cues and stuff"—where early on it was in the streets and whatever the environment was to alter a situation or the environment outside of an indoor kind of setting.[30]

The changes in Asco's work follow from a key moment that marked the official disbanding of Asco in 1987. Both Gronk and Gamboa cite this performance as the final straw. According to Gamboa, the group executed the piece *Ismania* on March 28, 1987 in a manner that did not correspond with his intentions for the work.[31] Gronk concurs, saying, "We did a performance at LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) and it wasn't quite up to Harry's expectation of what [the piece] should be."[32] Two days later, Gamboa sent a memo to the other three founding members of Asco, officially disbanding the group.[33] Gronk and Gamboa did not speak for several years after that, and although the members continue to keep in touch, at times

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[27] Gronk, interview with Rangel.

[28] Harry Gamboa, "Jetter's Jinx Script," 1985, box 1, folder 21, Harry Gamboa Jr. Papers, Special Collections M0753, Stanford University Libraries. Department of Special Collections and University Archives.

[29] Gronk, interview with Rangel.

[30] Gronk, interview with Rangel.

[31] Gamboa, interview with author, October 24, 2017, Los Angeles.

[32] Daniel Hernandez, "The Art Outlaws of East L.A.," *LA Weekly*, June 6, 2007; Alvarado, "Asco's Asco and the Queer Affective Resonance of Abjection," 67; Gronk, interview with author.

[33] Harry Gamboa, "Memo to Asco Regarding Breakup," March 31, 1987, box 4, folder 7, Harry Gamboa Jr. Papers, Special Collections M0753, Stanford University Libraries. Department of Special Collections and University Archives.

these relationships have been strained.[34] Herrón explains the close of Asco with perspective and appreciation of their time together:

> I think it was very positive for all of us to go separate ways because to this day, we separately had our high dive and when we dove off the high [board], we did a beautiful three quarter, one and a half summersault flip and spin and landed beautifully. And no one can take that away from us because we did it. But we're no longer on the ladder, getting ready to jump off the platform, because we all did and we all made a beautiful gesture on the way and we landed beautifully.[35]

The disbanding of Asco, however, simply marks yet another beginning. From there, the legacy of Asco emerged as a significant turn in Chicano art. Queer themes in Chicano art become increasingly common, through artists were still subject to homophobic reactions from some audiences. The elements of nausea camp—queer camp, drag, *rasquache*, and *domesticana*—continue to circulate as methods of disidentification for Chicano, queer, and feminist artists. The first step of this dispersal lies in exhibition.

ASCO LEGACY IN EXHIBITION

The art world of the 1980s remained predominantly focused on New York, oblivious to the work of artists of color or from marginalized populations. The group exhibition *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (1990), which included works by Asco, began to change that. Organized by the Wight Art Gallery at UCLA, the exhibition traveled to ten different venues across the United States. The catalogue boasted essays by Gamboa, Ybarra-Frausto, and Mesa-Bains, who provided the theories and narratives necessary for Chicano art to reach a broader audience. In the words of Gaspar de Alba, who wrote a book-length examination of the exhibition, "The 'white' house of the museum was now also a Raza house: *bienvenidos/as*."[36] In 2008, at LACMA, curators Rita Gonzalez and Howard Fox presented *Phantom Sightings*, which positioned Asco as a critical moment in the development of Chicano art. Overall, despite Asco's initial outsider status, the group has become central to understanding how subsequent generations of Chicano artists have applied conceptual art and performance practices, as well as understanding the broadening of queer *chicanismo*.

The Asco retrospective in 2011 raised the stakes for a body of work created by, to use Gamboa's description, four competitive individuals. The second iteration of the Getty's *Pacific Standard Time* in 2017 featured three Asco-related exhibitions. Previously noted and intersecting with this project, *Axis Mundo* examined queer Chicano networks of artists in Los Angeles and featured a number of works by Asco. At the Autry Center, *Chicano Male Unbonded* focused on Gamboa's ten-year photography project. Additionally, the group exhibition in *Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960–1985* at UCLA's Hammer Museum included three works by Valdez. In the catalogue, Carla Stellweg cites the film *Hot Pink* (1980, fig. 75) for its engagement with queer themes.[37] Recognizable to those familiar with Asco's work, the photograph *Limitations Beyond My Control* (1975, fig. 76) is based the photography by Gamboa for *Search and No*

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[34] Gronk, interview with Rangel.

[35] Herrón, interview with Rangel.

[36] Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xv.

[37] Carla Stellweg, "No Son Todas Las Que Están Ni Están Todas Las Que Son," in *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* (New York: Prestel, 2017), 295.

Seizure, here printed on poster paper and likely selenium-toned for the rich bronze effect.[38] Even decades after the breakup of Asco, the group's four co-founders remain intertwined.

The increase in exhibitions, both group and solo, is not reflected in the number of works by the Asco in museum collections. For example, LACMA holds later works by the individual members of Asco in its permanent collection, yet the museum's holdings do not include any works created by Asco as a group.[39] Database searches at several major museum collections across the country revealed similar gaps. Only the Smithsonian's American Art Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art list work by Asco in their permanent collections; Williams College Art Museum has continued to build their holdings of Asco's work since 2011.[40] The impact of such non-representation is manifold. First, the preservation of the artworks rests on several university library archives. These facilities, designed for documents, generally lack the temperature-controlled conditions necessary for long-term storage of photographic artwork. Furthermore, outside of a museum setting, the artworks cannot be exhibited or fully considered within their greater art historical context. As exhibitions since the 1990s have demonstrated, Asco's work is considered a flashpoint in Chicano art, one that, through camp, opened up the very meaning of the self-nomination of Chicano. The blind spot in art history and its institutions obscures Asco and many Chicano artists, limiting knowledge of their contributions for all audiences.

INFLUENCERS: CHICANO ART

In the catalogue essay for *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, curator Chon Noriega affirms Asco's impact: "Since the 1990s, Asco has influenced or provided a point of reference for a new generation of artists and artist groups whose work explores similar issues within public space."[41] Noriega cites artists Arturo Ernesto Romo and Ruben Ochoa as well as collaborative groups Slanguage, Invisible History, and the Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History.[42] These Chicano artists emphasize the conceptual aspects that set their work apart from traditional practices such as muralism, which today remains didactic. There is no doubt that Chicano art would be far less dynamic without the influence of Asco, both in the realms of conceptual and performance-based art. Here, however, I consider the impact of their

[38] Gamboa is the photographer of this image, as with the No Movies in general. However, the question of authorship has been raised and can be extrapolated to all Asco's projects. The exhibition catalogue and the wall labels placed Valdez in the artist position for her role as the performer; Gamboa is listed as the photographer.

[39] Email from LACMA Registrar to author, May 16, 2019.

[40] The Smithsonian American Art Museum holds three images of *Stations of the Cross*, *Decoy Gang War Victim,* and *A la mode.* It also contains photographs of Asco's performance of *Titanic* from 1980, not discussed in this dissertation. The Archives of American Art contains a group portrait photograph by Gamboa of *Walking Mural* and the No Movie *No Phantoms*, executed at LA's Music Center where they created *Waiting for Tickets.* The Whitney Museum of American Art lists eight photographs in the permanent collection with accession dates of 2014 and purchase credit lines with funds from the Photography Committee.

[41] Noriega, "The Orphans of Modernism," in *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement*, eds. Rita González, Howard N. Fox, and Chon A. Noriega (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 24.

[42] Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History is the work of Sandra de la Loza.

aesthetic, nausea camp. As evident throughout this dissertation, nausea camp is a conglomerate phenomenon of queer camp, drag, *rasquache*, and *domesticana*. Nausea camp remains a product of its moment and its developers alone. Still, I propose that these tactics continue to be used in tandem with other artists' practices. While such artists may not correspond to the identities of Asco's founding members, provocation, disgust, and scrappy resourcefulness continue to be used today as creative weapons of resistance.

Artist Alejandro Diaz (b. 1963) hails from San Antonio, where the cultures of South Texas and Mexico inform his work. In the early 2000s, Diaz began creating signs, or "Mexican wallpaper," using discarded corrugated cardboard and a black marker.[43] Diaz incorporated the signs into public interventions throughout New York City, where he resides. In *Enchiladas at the Plaza* (2003, fig. 77), Diaz stands on the sidewalk in front of the five-star Plaza Hotel while wearing a *traje de charro* and a fake mustache. The sign in his hands reads, "Available for speaking role in a major motion picture," in handwritten letters. Behind him, to his right, other cardboard signs are stacked in display on an iron light post. These read, "Make Tacos Not War," "Tacos 50¢," "Bean & Cheese 50¢," and "Mexican Wallpaper." On either side of him, people ignore his presence; meanwhile, in the background, black sedans and taxis wait for hotel guests. Diaz has also performed these actions in front of the famous Tiffany & Co. flagship store, highlighting the class and race disparity along Manhattan's Fifth Avenue.

Diaz's action calls to mind Valdez's commentary on the motion picture industry in *A la mode*. By making himself into a caricature of a Mexican palatable to mainstream audiences, he preemptively typecasts himself to gain entry to the spaces of the elite. Additionally, as an article in *Texas Monthly* noted with the headline, "The Rascuache Work of Alejandro Diaz," his use of low-cost materials continues the Chicano tradition of *rasquachismo* while imbuing it with a "campy" feel, according to the author.[44] While not engaging with the disgust element of nausea camp, Diaz's work notably turns away from the seriousness of other Chicano artists' interventions. A subversive humor is evident through each of his street interventions, just as *Spray Paint LACMA* used easily accessible materials to mock expectations of Chicanos. In these performances, Diaz's tactics and methods for critiquing race and class resonate with Asco's actions decades prior.

Mario Ybarra Jr. (b. 1972), co-founder of the art group Slanguage, consistently notes the importance of Chicano history for his artwork. Ybarra is now a senior lecturer in the Public Practice program at Otis College of Art and Design, and his earlier projects include an homage to Asco's *Instant Mural*. LACMA assistant curator Michele Urton described the work as, "untitled abstract duct tape paintings on the sides of buildings using stickers of lowrider cars as his medium."[45] However, a more subtle engagement with Asco's politics can be found in the series *Go Tell It* (2001). In *Go Tell It #1* (fig. 78), Ybarra stands in various places, such as a suburban house and a seaside cliff. He poses with a megaphone in his hand and a fist raised, performing the stance of a protest leader. His clothes provide further information. He dons articles commonly associated with contemporary cholo fashion: a fully-buttoned Dickie's brand shirt,

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[43] Alejandro Diaz, "Artist statement," http://davidsheltongallery.com/artists/detail/alejandro_diaz

[44] Michael Agresta, "Diaz on Display: The Rasquache Work of Alejandro Diaz," *Texas Monthly*, November 2017, https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/alejandro-diaz-on-display/.

[45] Michele Urton, "Mario Ybarra Jr.," in González, Fox, and Noriega, *Phantom Sightings*, 208. Images of this are not reproduced in the catalogue and do not appear to have been published elsewhere.

shorts that fall below the knee, and white socks. The shorts, which are likely cut-off army pants, feature a Vietnam War-era tiger stripe camouflage. Ybarra stands, not as a protester of the 1970s, but as a contemporary Chicano. His megaphone and the silent, empty nature of the image suggest a frustrated dialectic with the Movement and its legacy. In 2004, these photographs were mounted on billboards throughout Los Angeles as part of the *Public Speaking* series organized by ClockShop (fig. 79).[46] *Go Tell It* functions as a contemporary interrogation of the Chicano Movement from someone who identifies strongly with it, similar to Asco's processions that critiqued the movement from within. Additionally, by participating in *Public Speaking*, Ybarra's images reach a wider audience through non-traditional means—simultaneously, though perhaps not intentionally, playing on the mural-like characteristics of billboards as public art.

Asco and its members were a significant part of queer and Chicano art networks in 1970s Los Angeles, yet explicit examples of the group's influence remain difficult to trace in the work of contemporary queer Chicano artists. One artist closely aligned with Chicano art and exploring queer subjects is Alex Donis (b. 1964).[47] Donis is of Guatemalan descent and spent his childhood in East Los Angeles where in 1988 he began creating prints at Self-Help Graphics.[48] Quickly garnering attention for his work, he earned a solo exhibition at Galería de la Raza in San Francisco in 1997. The works included featured same-sex public figures kissing, and they were met with vandalism shortly after the exhibition opened.[49] One artwork from the series depicts Che Guevara and Cesar Chavez engaged in an open-mouth kiss (fig. 80). A UAW eagle, so prominent in Chicano murals of the 1970s, appears on Chavez's red jacket. Chavez's hand caresses Guevara's army fatigues as the Cuban revolutionary icon touches his shoulder. Displayed as a lightbox, it was destroyed by vandals at the gallery, but its reported dimensions suggest the figures would have been near life size.

Donis's exhibition, *My Cathedral*, included not only political figures, but also pop stars such as Madonna and religious leaders including the Pope, Ghandi, Mother Theresa, and Krishna. The themes of *My Cathedral* encompass "gender identity, queer sexuality, cultural fantasy, and the nature of social structures."[50] The range of subjects and themes offer an opportunity to see the limits of camp. Camp requires specific targets, because it requires the language of that target to be sublimated into the critique. Since Donis did not use the media or vocabulary of his targets in order to critique them, camp cannot be said to be technically present. In *My Cathedral* satire, humor, and burlesque ignited dialogue in productive ways that continue to resonate decades later; however, camp simply could not appear here given Donis's range of subjects.

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[46] "Public Speaking: Go Tell It," Clockshop, accessed May 22, 2018, https://clockshop.org/project/public-speaking-aa/go-tell-it/.

[47] Donis has been included in group exhibitions such as *Chicano Expressions* (1995), *East of the River* (2000), *Leaving Aztlan* (2005), is featured in the three volume *Chicano/Chicano Art in the United States,* and his archives are in the holdings of the Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA.

[48] Gary D. Keller et al., *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art: Artists, Works, Culture, and Education*, vol. 1 (Tempe: Bilingual Press, 2002), 174.

[49] Keller et al., *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art*, 1:174.

[50] Alex Donis, "Artwork: My Cathedral," accessed April 20, 2019, http://www.alexdonis.com/ART-cathedral/ART-cathedral-TEXT.html.

Southern California native and current Mexico City artist Félix Frédéric d'Eon created *Gay Lotería* in 2016. Based on the Mexican children's game that is similar to Bingo, the cards contain depictions of people or objects with the name written below. In d'Eon's version, some traditional characters retain their names but have new images, such as La Luna, now no longer alone in the picture, but joined by two women in the foreground in each other's arms (fig. 81). Other cards are completely new, such as El Closet, which depicts a wooden armoire and uses the English name with a Spanish article (fig. 82). While d'Eon's cards could provoke, as Donis's lightboxes did, their small scale and playful nature has instead attracted numerous features in both Latinx and LGBTQ magazines. In these articles d'Eon explains his mission of and frustration with inclusivity remarking: "I know that there are some queer artists doing really great work, but at large, art made with a specifically queer intent has been made by white artists for a gay, White audience."[51] Art made by queer Chicano artists addressing queer Chicano topics remains a narrow field, and the presence of provocative camp is further limited within that scope. And while not exhibiting the provocative characteristics of nausea camp, d'Eon's cards do function as camp. In their traditional state, *lotería* cards operate as educational language tools for the children playing the card game. d'Eon's cards use the vocabulary—in this case literally—of a culture in order to critique it. While just one example, his project demonstrates that contemporary Chicano artists continue to use camp, although its conglomerates in nausea camp—provocation, drag, and *rasquache* methods— rarely appear in concert with it, if they occur at all.

NAUSEA CAMP AFTERMATH

Herrón's involvement with the East Los Angeles music scene, as previously noted, included his role in managing the venue the Vex and playing in the band Los Illegals beginning in the late 1970s. Additionally, Asco's members were involved in the Los Angeles glitter rock scene in the early to mid-1970s, with a particularly strong connection through Gronk's friend Dreva. During Asco's development, this shift from glam rock performers such as David Bowie to punk rock bands including X, also corresponds with a popularization of horror drag. It is for this reason that we see the intentionally provocative style move from drag performances to rock performances, with Asco as one, if not the only, Chicano art iteration of horror drag. Since this element played such a key role in creating nausea camp, we must turn to the intersections of camp and punk to trace this portion of its afterlife.

The parallels between horror punk and horror drag are primarily aesthetic. Early horror punk bands such as the Misfits did not purport to have activist agendas. Recently, however, the performance artist Kembra Pfahler (b. 1961) has brought together shock tactics and activism in a manner that echoes the earliest Asco performances.[52] Pfahler, a California native, studied with Lorraine O'Grady (b. 1934) at the School of Visual Arts in New York. She first garnered widespread attention through her performance in Richard Kern's seven-minute film *Sewing Circle* (1992, fig. 83). In that short film, Pfahler reclines with her legs spread while wearing thigh-high black lace stockings and a t-shirt that reads "Young Republicans." Artist Lisa

[51] Coral Catalano, "Expanding Queer Latinx Art, One Card at a Time," *Outfront Magazine*, October 24, 2016, https://www.outfrontmagazine.com/trending/expanding-queer-latinx-art-one-card-time/.

[52] The Getty ULAN database lists Pfahler's year of birth as 1961, while the Museum of Modern Art, New York uses 1967.

Resurrection sews together Pfahler's labia while a woman identified only as Carrie holds Pfahler's hand. Created at a peak in the still-ongoing battle for women's reproductive rights, the extreme act and the text on her shirt signal the issues at play.

Pfahler formed a performance art band, The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, in 1990. In each performance she appears on stage with teased-up jet black hair and shaved eyebrows, completely nude, and covered in body paint (fig. 84). In the 2008 Whitney Biennial catalogue, the group is described as "a theatrical rock group that links a hideous monster aesthetic to a dark, hysterical feminine archetype . . . Pfhaler's stage persona has been described as a dominant 'lady devil' who relishes destroying notions of female beauty rooted in purity and innocence."[53] In the 2007 photograph *Kembra at Home*, she gazes up from a seated position, wearing thigh-high boots with white laces (fig. 85). A giant bow tops her towering hair, and her skin is yellow, accented by sweeps of pitch black across and over her eyes. Her t-shirt reads "WOMANIZER," employed as a shift in meaning to reflect the standard use of the suffix, which makes or enhances what is denoted by the noun/adjective. Rather than a male who exploits women, Pfahler's womanizer stages a process of woman-empowerment.[54]

From the early years of her career Pfahler has called herself as an "availabilist," her own philosophy that resonates with *rasquachismo*. Describing it recently, she recalled a conversation with her instructor, the artist Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945):

> I didn't care for Joseph Kosuth. . . . He once screamed at me: "Kembra, what are you?" At first, I turned away, because his words really hurt me. Then I looked him in the eye and said: "I'm an availabilist. I make the best use of what's available." Sometimes, anger can point you in a direction, and that's what happened to me that day. I invented availabilism because he enraged me.[55]

In her recounting, an imbalance of power between the senior male artist and the young female art student drives her declaration. While Pfahler has yet to describe availabilism to the extent that Ybarra-Frausto outlined *rasquache,* both methods use resourcefulness as an act of defiance.

Provocation used for political purposes in contemporary art occurs outside of horror drag and nausea camp. However, Pfahler stands as one of the most recent and prominent examples of a politicized horror aesthetic. Her performances use shock and camp while exploiting accessible resources (availabilism/*rasquache*). In contrast to Asco's Chicano activism, Pfahler disidentifies in a tradition of feminist performance artists that includes her mentor O'Grady, violently rejecting biological essentialism of femininity. Appearing on stage nude, perhaps save for thigh-high boots and a hair bow, Pfahler gives the audience what they ostensibly desire: a version of female identity that is hypersexualized and at times infantilized. Her body paint, high hairline, and makeup combine with her nudity in an uncanny manner that results in a disturbing performance. Although focused on gender and not engaging with its intersections with race, Pfahler's work demonstrates a continuation of many nausea camp elements.

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[53] Trinie Dalton, "Kembra Pfahler/The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black," in *2008 Biennial Exhibition*, eds. Henriette Huldisch and Shamim M. Momin (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008), 196.

[54] E. V. Day, conversation with author, March 4, 2010, New York. Day has collaborated with Pfahler on several projects.

[55] Amy Sherlock, "What's Behind the Voluptuous Horror of Kembra Pfahler?," *Frieze*, June 26, 2019, https://frieze.com/article/whats-behind-voluptuous-horror-kembra-pfahler.

Asco's performances and No Movies revealed new possibilities for Chicano artists to conceptually engage with and question the Chicano movement and its art. However, camp, drag, and *rasquache*, employed as tools of provocative critique, have yet to reappear in the combination found in Asco projects. Chicano artist Diaz uses *rasquache* in street interventions that address race and class that provoke through humor rather than the nausea camp found in Asco's street performances. Similarly, Ybarra, Jr. stages photographs that speak back to a target—the Chicano movement—regarding a futile connection between generations that, by its very muted nature, limits a dialectical camp process. Queer Latinx artist Donis embraced provocation in his series *My Cathedral* yet did not use a camp approach based on appropriation of the normative vocabularies, while d'Eon's seized a visual and linguistic vocabulary in a camp move but did not create the spectacle of disgust required for nausea camp. It is through the dispersal of a horror drag aesthetic by rock music, the shock performances of feminism, and the defiant resourcefulness of Pfahler's availabilism that nausea camp, though separated from *chicanismo,* persists. Asco's complete nausea camp occurred at a moment in history when the Chicano civil rights movement and the gay civil rights movement emerged. Nausea camp also occurred in a place where these movements intersected—amid East Los Angeles activist youth culture. Asco's nausea camp remains unique to the group. However, by recognizing nausea camp art historians and critics may forge new associations between aesthetics of resistance found in feminist, queer, and Chicano art.

In this dissertation, I have posited a definition of the camp phenomenon based on its function in relation to power. My definition stems from the application of camp theories in essays by Booth, Cleto, Meyer, Sontag, and Ross. I also reviewed Harris' musings on drag. These scholars aided my naming and framing of the term "nausea camp" as a specific iteration of queer-Chicano resistance used by Asco. Throughout this dissertation, I have explained how Asco's nausea camp stems from a distinct coalescence of gay and Chicano rights movements at the end of the 1960s. This conglomerate aesthetic is informed by the ethnic, gender, and sexual identities of its members. From the first performance where all four founding members were present so, too, was nausea camp. Although Asco's dominant origin story remains rooted in Chicano activism, the queer counter-narrative starting with *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* highlights tactics such as public demonstration and drag, as well as methods like *rasquache* and camp. The formation of nausea camp, I assert, would have been impossible without this dual narrative.

Asco's processions, as I have shown, exist as interconnected commentary on the Chicano movement and oppression from within and outside of one's own community. I establish *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* as a proto-Asco performance where nausea camp occurs with all of its elements: camp, drag, provocation, and *rasquache* methods. In *Stations of the Cross,* I describe how these elements move from the stage to the street. Both works, I reveal, use camp as a weapon to target homophobia and hypocrisy in their own community. As I turn to processions that use camp to target the Chicano mural movement, I consider four performances by Asco as having a dual pendant structure: *Walking Mural* with *Spray Paint LACMA,* and *First Supper* with *Instant Mural*. Throughout my analysis of these projects, I note the role that *rasquache* and camp have in Asco's process of disidentification. Finally, I discuss Asco's No Movies, which target Hollywood and critique the lack of Chicano representation in major motion pictures. Throughout these performances, both moving and still, Valdez interlaced her own Chicana resistance, later termed *domesticana*, as she reimaged religious icons and silver screen divas. Her participation in Asco, often noted as feminist, remains an articulate example of intersectional performance. In

fact, the intersectional nature of Asco's camp, which embraces both Chicano and queer tactics to make space for complex identities, depends greatly on the individual founders and the moment at which it emerged. Asco's legacy lies not in the perpetuation of their specific aesthetic but rather in the cultural critique crafted through nausea camp.

Figure 1: Asco, *The Gores,* 1974, No Movie, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 2: Gronk, *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends,* 1969, performance documentation, color photograph. Gift of Art in the Public Interest and 18th Street Arts Center, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, (2006.M.8)

Figure 3: Asco, *Stations of the Cross,* 1971, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Seymour Rosen for SPACES–Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments.

Figure 4: Asco, *Walking Mural,* 1972, performance documentation, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 5: Asco, *First Supper (After a Major Riot),* 1974, performance documentation, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 6: Asco, *Instant Mural,* 1974, performance documentation, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

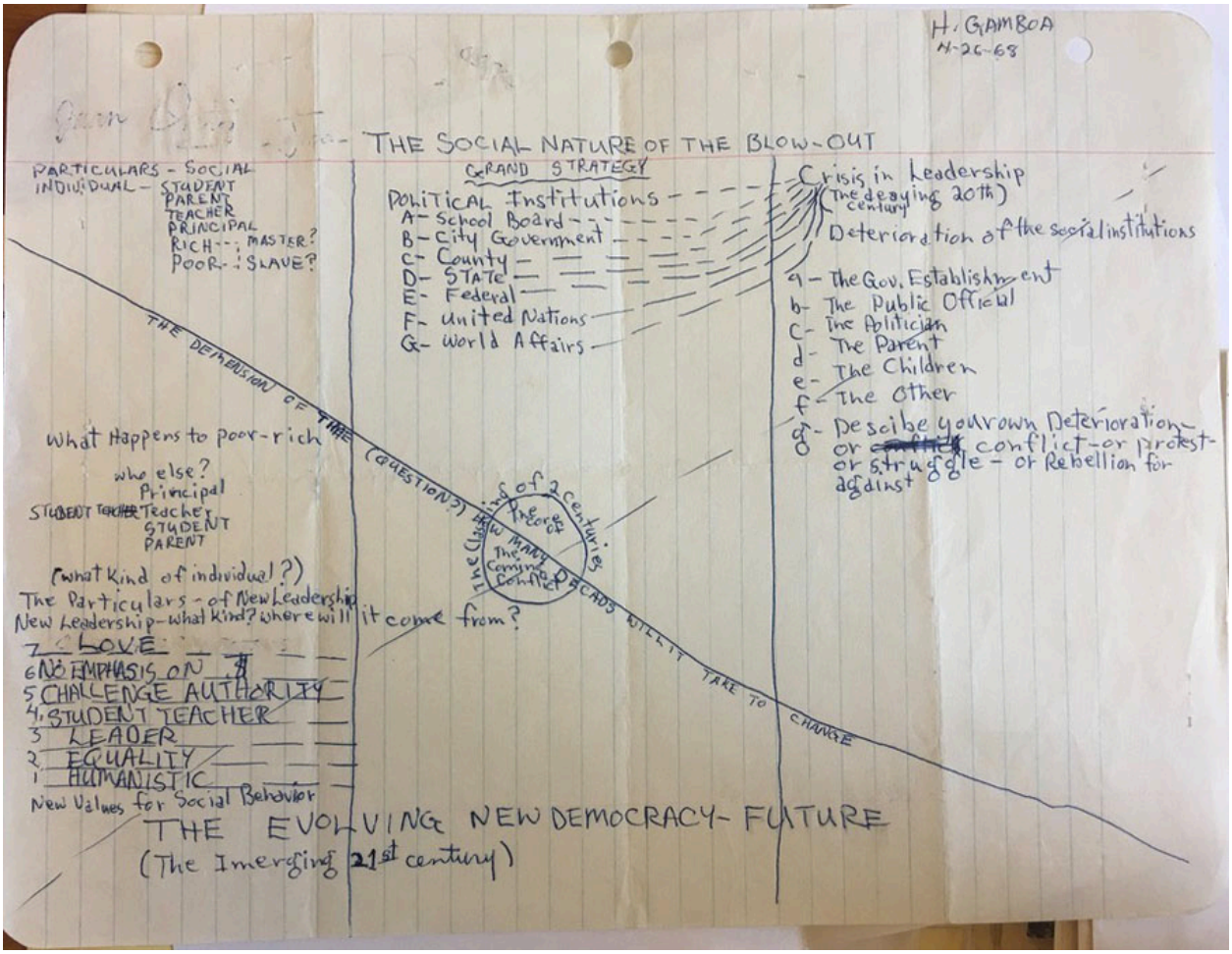


Figure 7: Harry Gamboa, Jr., "The Social Nature of the Blow-Out," 4/26/1968, box 2 of 15, folder 26, Harry Gamboa Jr. Papers, Special Collections M0753, Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections and University Archives.

Figure 8: National Chicano Moratorium Committee, Flyer for Chicano Moratorium, dual language and double sided, photocopy, 1970. Devra Weber Papers, 61(box 3, folder 8) Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) University of California, Los Angeles.

Figure 9: Map of East Los Angles showing the planned route of the Chicano Moratorium (red) and the routes for *Walking Mural* and *Stations of the Cross*. Sites of *First Supper (After A Major Riot)* and *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (Belvedere Park) are also noted. The peach blocks mark the buildings of Whittier Boulevard's shopping cooridor.

Figure 10: Asco, *Asshole Mural,*1975, No Movie, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 11: Asco, *Spray Paint LACMA/Project Pie in (De)Face, East Bridge,* 1972, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 12: Asco, *Fountain of Aloof/La Dolce,* 1975, No Movie, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 13: Asco, *Waiting for Tickets*, 1975, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 14: Asco, *Á La Mode*, 1976, No Movie, black and white photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 75: Los Four, *Por El Pueblo*, 1977, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles. Photograph by Judithe Hernández.

Figure 16: Judithe Hernández, *Homenaje a Las Mujeres de Aztlán*, 1977, paint on masonry, 18 x 26 feet (estimated). Lancaster Avenue, Ramona Gardens housing project, Boyle Heights. Photograph by Tim Drescher.

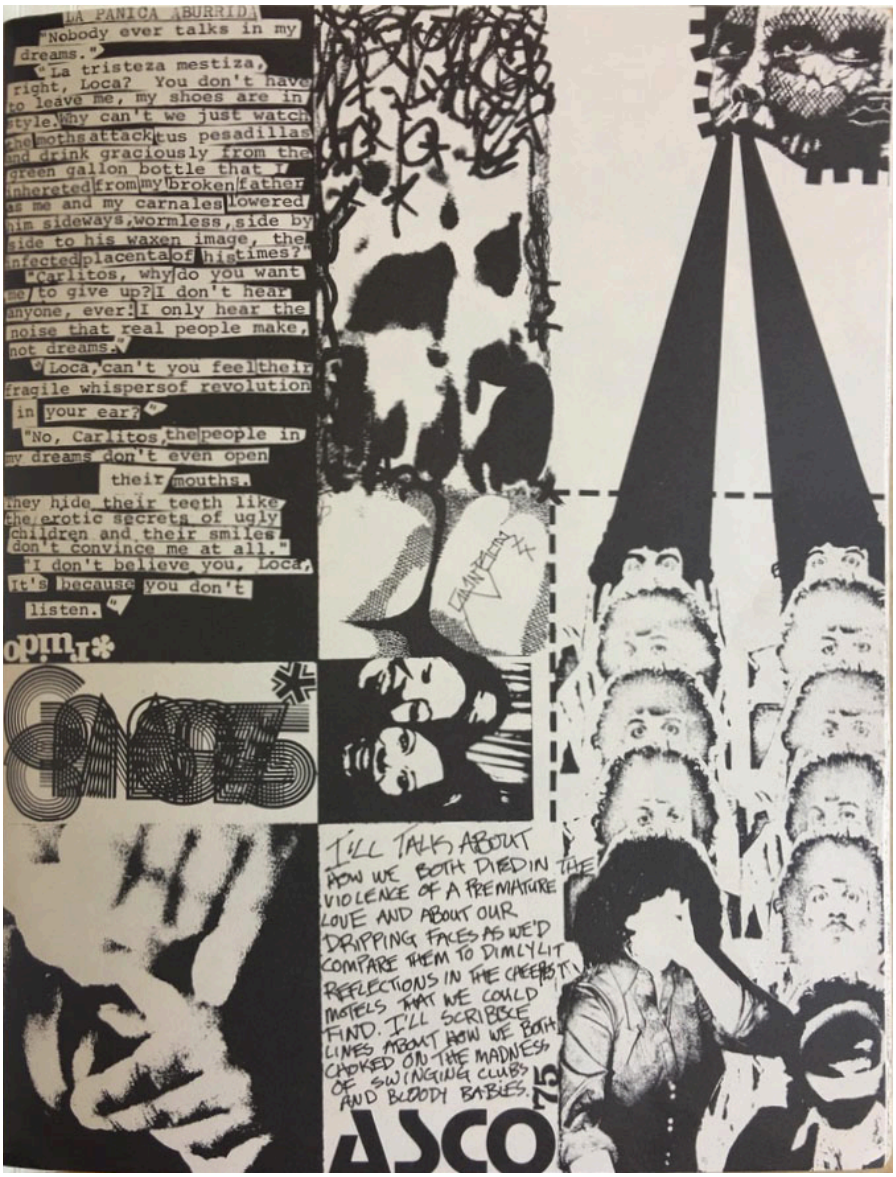


Figure 17: Asco, *Regneración* 2, no. 4, 1974–75, Harry Gamboa Jr. Papers, Special Collections M0753, Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections and University Archives.

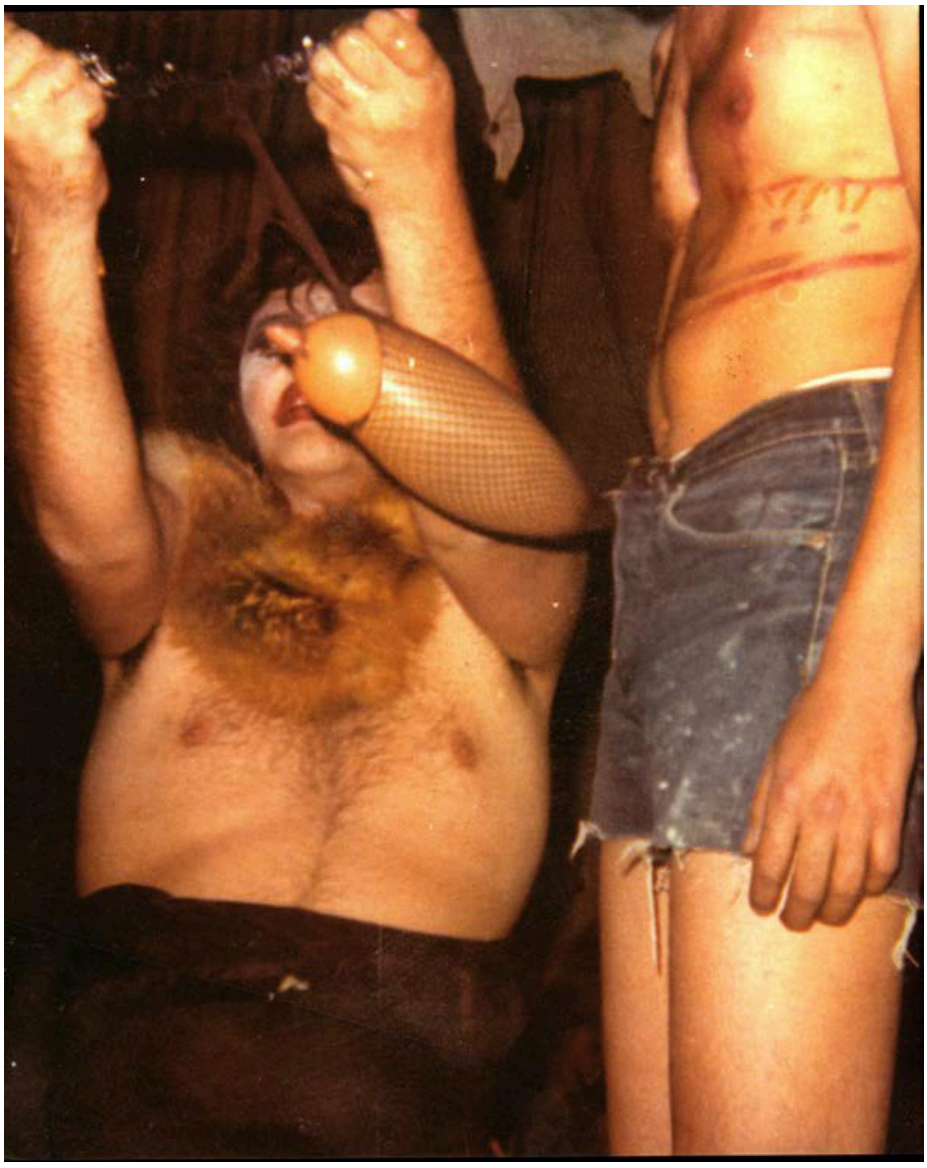


Figure 18: Gronk, *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends—Cock Scene I,* 1969, performance documentation, color photograph by Gronk.

Figure 19: Gronk, *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends—Cock Scene II,* 1969, performance documentation, color photograph by Gronk.

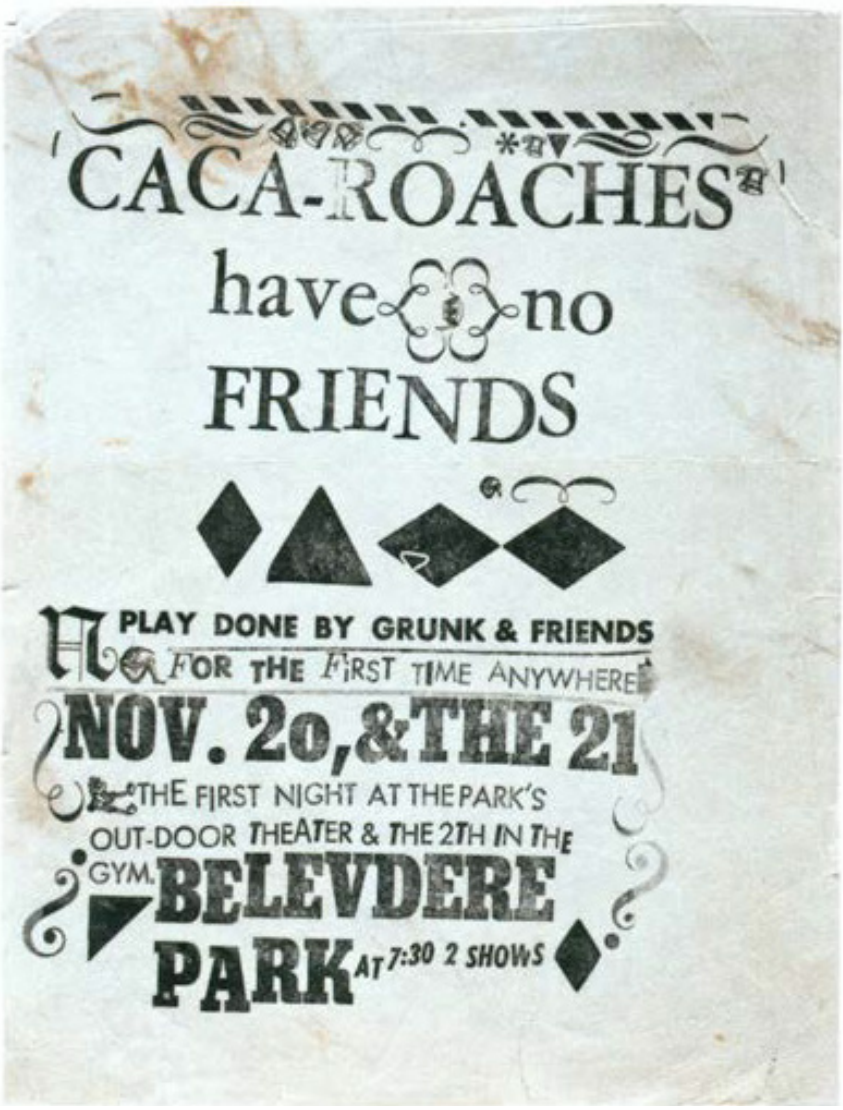


Figure 20: Gronk and Cyclona, *Caca- Roaches Have No Friends* flyer, 1969, photocopy on paper. Collection of Joey Terrill.

Figure 21: Asco, *Stations of the Cross,* 1971, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Seymour Rosen for SPACES–Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments.

Figure 22: Asco, *Stations of the Cross,* 1971, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Seymour Rosen for SPACES–Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments.

Figure 23: Asco, *Walking Mural*, 1972, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Elsa Flores Almaraz.

Figure 24: Asco, *Walking Mural*, detail of Valdez, 1972, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Elsa Flores Almaraz.

Figure 25: Asco, *Walking Mural,* 1972, performance documentation, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 26: Asco, *Walking Mural* (detail), 1972, performance documentation, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 27: Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico*, north wall, 1929–1935. National Palace, Mexico City.

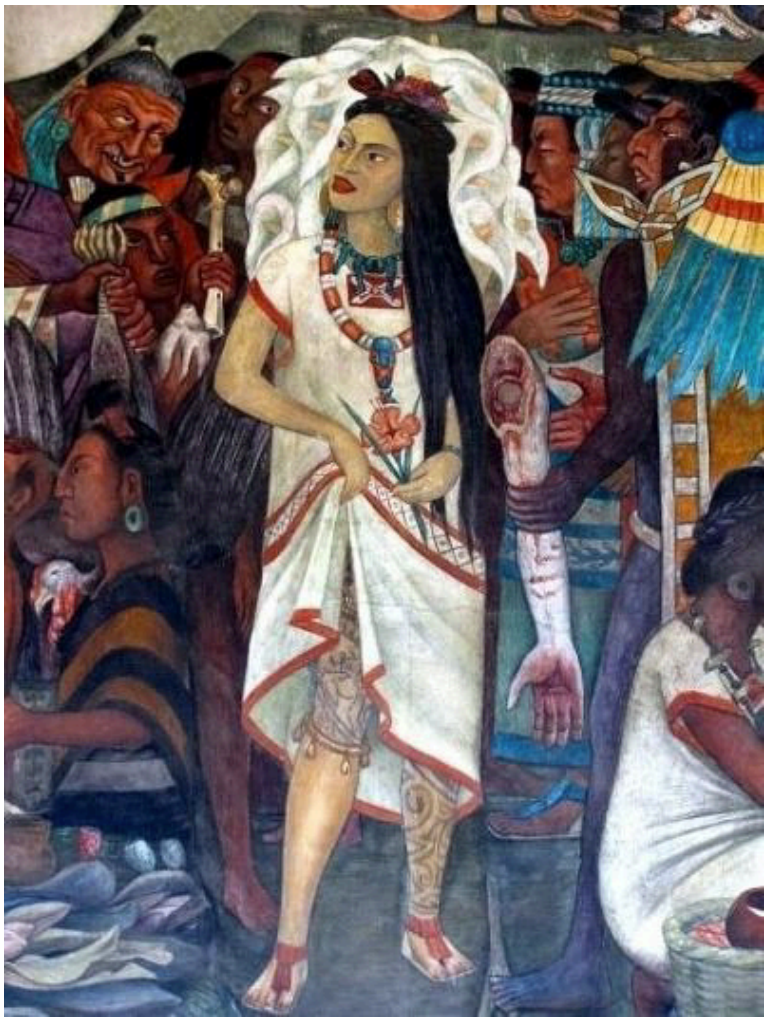


Figure 28: Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico*, detail showing Xochiquetzal, 1929–1935. National Palace, Mexico City.

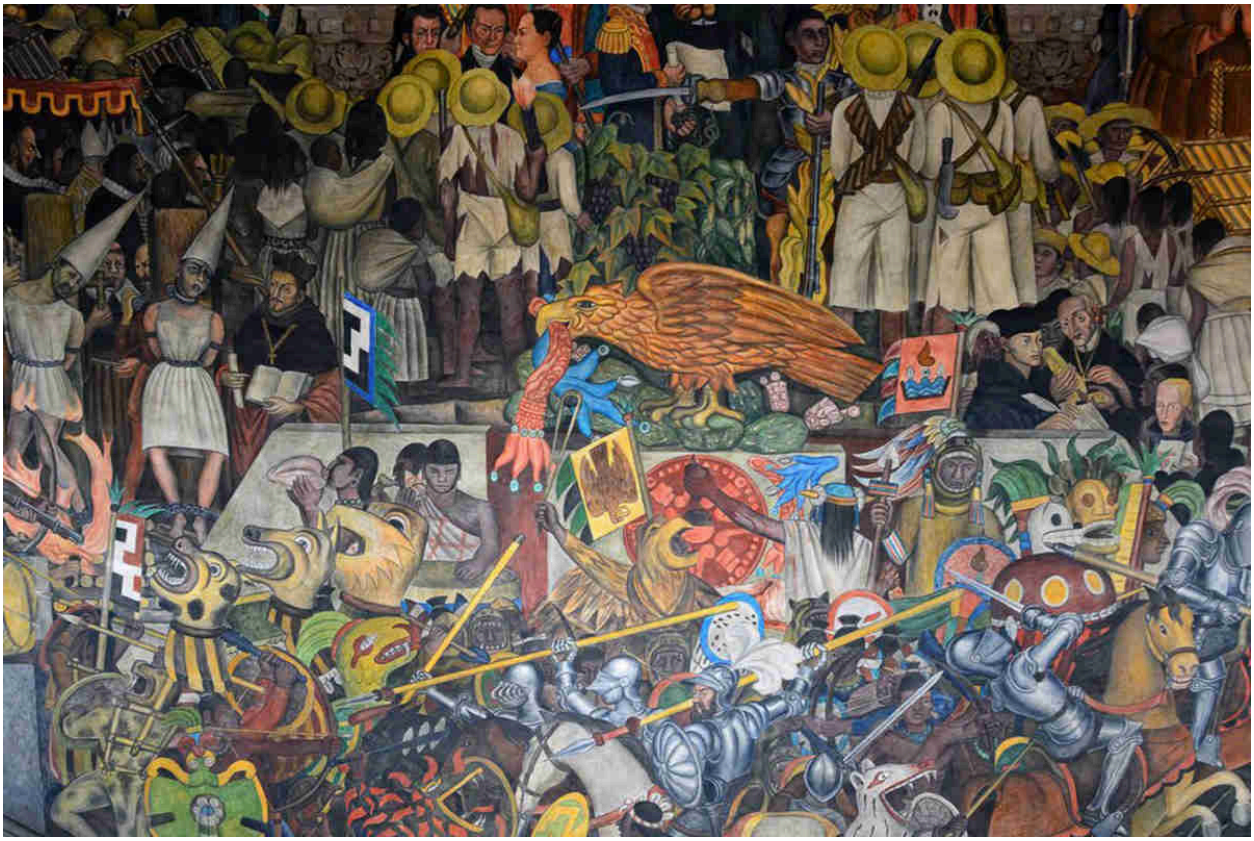


Figure 29: Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico*, detail showing Conquest/Revolution, 1929–1935. National Palace, Mexico City.

Figure 30: Willie F. Herrón, III and Gronk, *Black and White Mural/Matorium Mural*, 1973/78, paint on stucco,18 x 23 feet (estimated), at Estrada Courts in Boyle Heights. Photograph by Tim Drescher.

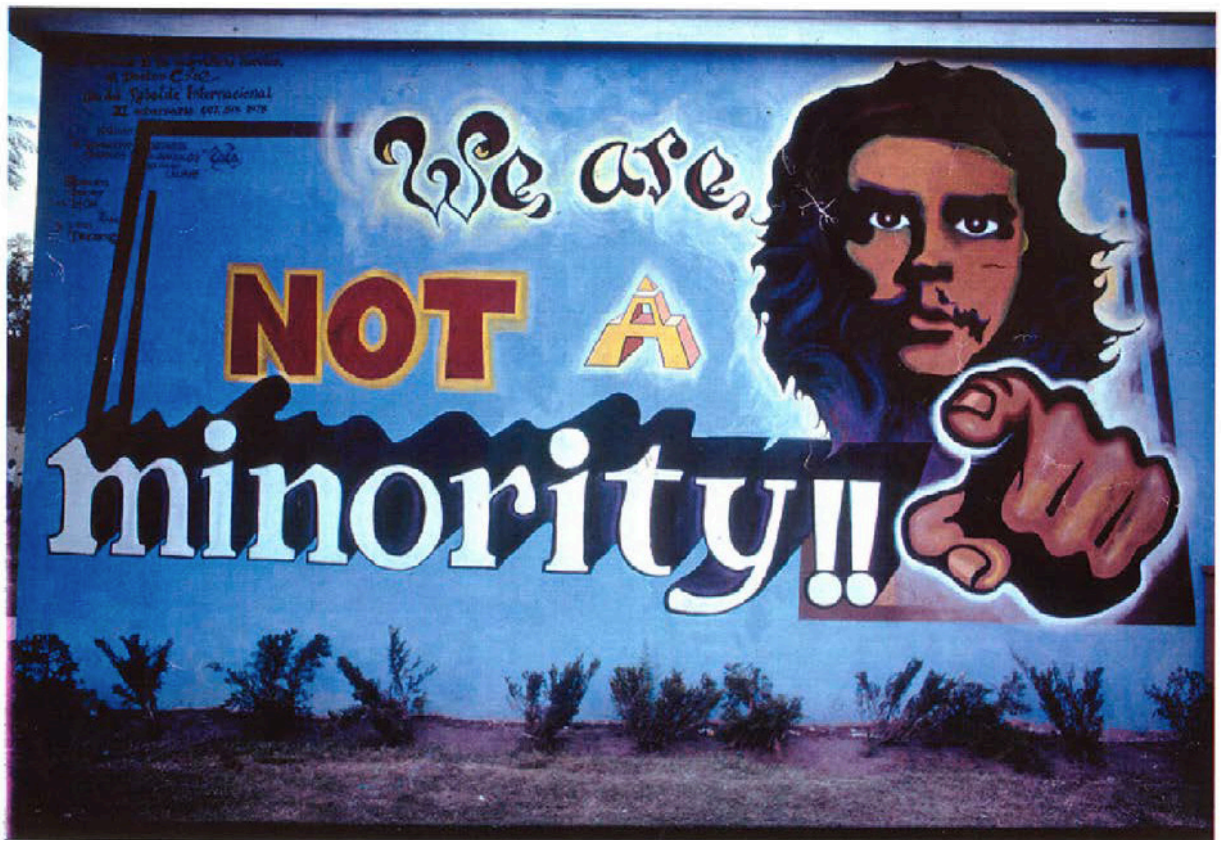


Figure 31: The Congreso de Artistas Chicanos en Aztlán (CACA)/Congreso de Artistas Cosmicos de las Americas de San Diego (Mario Torero, Rocky, El Lion, Zade), *We Are Not A Minority*, 1978, acrylic on stucco, 32 x 24 feet. Estrada Courts housing project Boyle Heights. Restored by Mario Torero, Carmen Kalo, and Ernesto de la Loza in 1995. Photograph Cinewest Archive, University of California, San Diego.

Figure 32: Alex Maya, *United Farmworkers*, early version, 1973, paint on stucco, 18 x 23 feet (estimated). Estrada Courts housing project, Boyle Heights. Photograph by Eva Cockcroft.

Figure 33: Alex Maya, *United Farmworkers*, final version, ca. 1975. Estrada Courts housing project, Boyle Heights. Photograph by Eva Cockcroft.

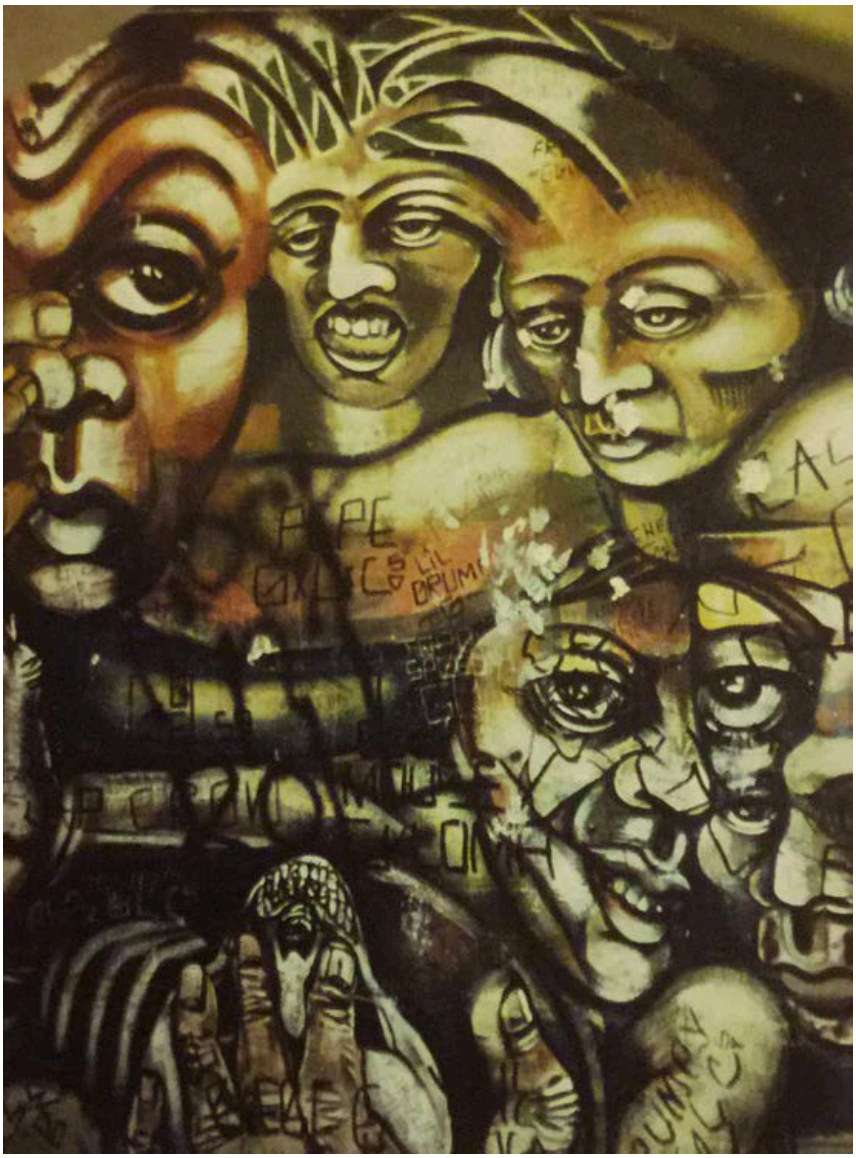


Figure 34: Willie F. Herrón III and Gronk, with City Terrace youth, *Caras*, detail, 1973, paint on cement block, City Terrace Park. Photograph by Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino. Painted out late 1980s.

Figure 35: Willie F. Herrón, III, *The Wall That Cracked Open,* 1972, paint on stucco, 15 x 9 feet, alley near Carmelita Street in City Terrace. Phtograph by Eva Cockcroft. Painted out 1999; restored by the artist.

Figure 36: Willie F. Herrón, III, *The Plumed Serpent,* 1972, paint on stucco, 20 x 12 feet (estimated), alley behind Mercado Hidalgo. Photograph by Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino.

Figure 37: Virgin of Guadalupe, late 12th century, cedarwood figure with textile vestments, Extremadura, Spain.

Figure 38: Virgin of Guadalupe, tilma image, 1555/1556, Mexico.

Figure 39: Banner of Father Miguel Hidalgo featuring an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, 1910.

Figure 40: Zapatistas entering zocolo of Mexico City with banner depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe, 1914. Photograph: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH).

Figure 41: Asco, *First Supper (After A Major Riot)*, 1974, detail with bananas, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 42: Gronk, *The Truth about The Terror in Chile,* one half of diptych, 1973, oil on canvas. Collection of Humberto Sandoval.

Figure 43: David Siqueiros, *América Tropical*, 1932, 80 x 18 feet. Originally titled "Tropical America: Opressed and Destroyed by Imperialism." Roberto Berdecio, artist's assistant, shown. Photo: Getty Research Institute.

Figure 44: Asco, *Instant Mural*, detail of Valdez with banana, 1978, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 45: Asco, *Instant Mural,* 1974, documentation of performance, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 46: Asco, *Instant Mural,* 1974, documentation of performance, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 47: Asco, *Instant Mural,* 1974, documentation of performance, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

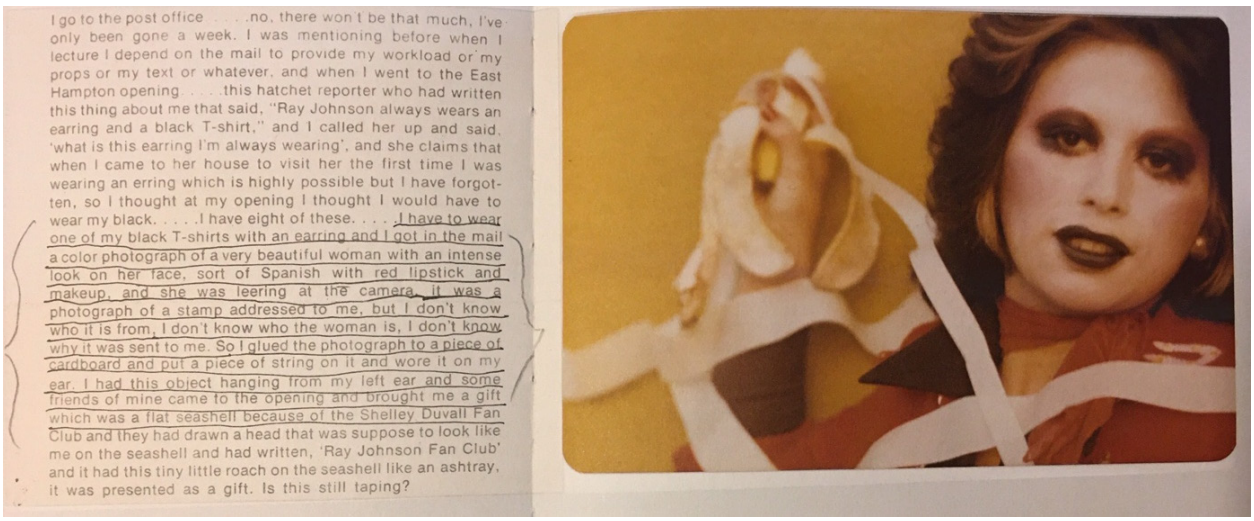


Figure 48: Gronk, *Instant Mural* mail art collage, c. 1978, color photograph and paper collage on board, including photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 49: Asco, *Instant Mural,* 1974, documentation of performance, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

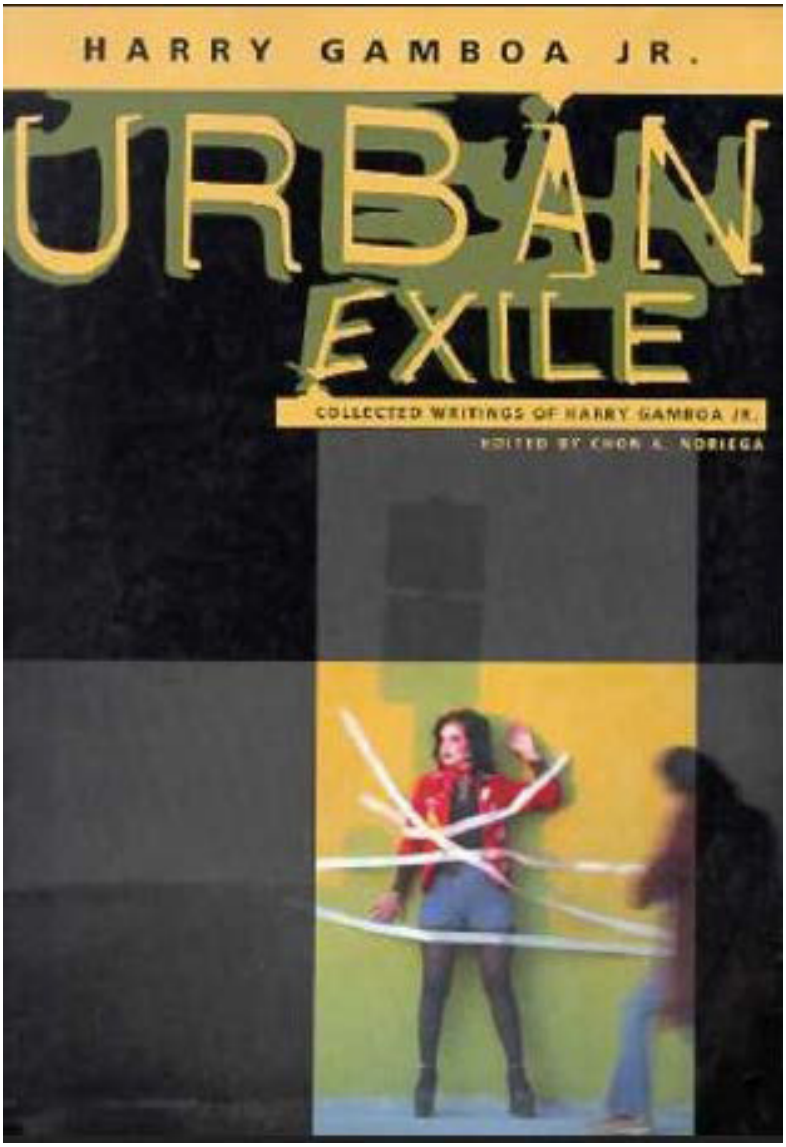


Figure 50: Cover of Harry Gamboa, Jr.'s *Urban Exile* featuring Asco, *Instant Mural,* 1974.

Figure 51: Asco, *Search and No Seizure,*1976, No Movie, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 52: Gregory Crewdson, Untitled from *Beneath the Roses*, 2004, digital chromogenic print.

Figure 53: Asco, *Waiting for Tickets,* 1975, No Movie, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 54: Asco, *Malibu, CA*, 1975, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 55: Asco, *Capitalismo,* from Slasher series, 1975, black and white photographs by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 56: Asco, *Slasher No. 9,* 1975, color photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 57: Asco, *Á la mode*, 1976, No Movie and mail art, black and white photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 58: George Hurrell, Joan Crawford for *No More Ladies*, 1935, gelatin silver print. Getty Images.

Figure 59: Laszlo Willinger, Delores del Rio, 1940, gelatin silver print. Hulton Archive, Getty Images.

Figure 60: Laszlo Willinger, Vivian Leigh for *Waterloo Bridge* (MGM), 1940, gelatin silver print. Hulton Archive, Getty Images.

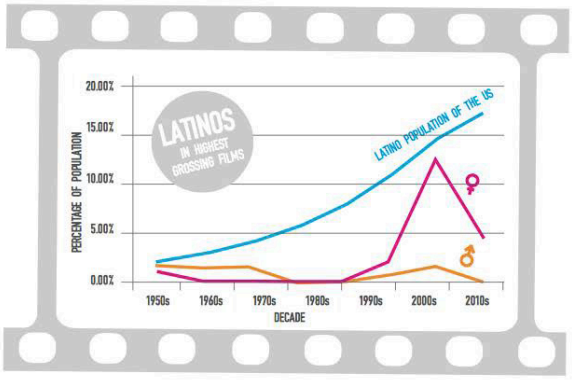


Figure 4: Percentage of Latino/a Lead Actor Appearances in Ten Highest-Grossing Films by Gender
(Sources: IMDb and US Census 1950–2013)

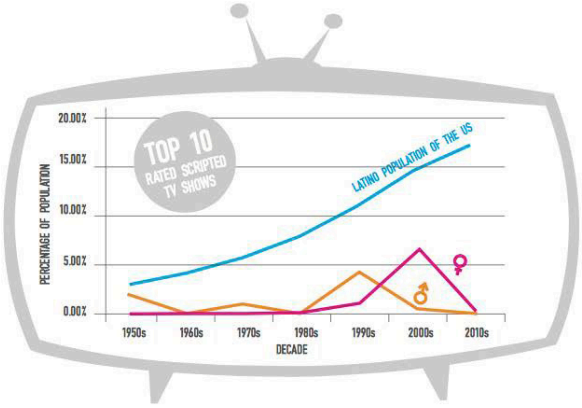


Figure 5: Percentage of Latino Actor Lead Appearances in Ten Highest-Rated Scripted TV Shows by Gender
(Sources: IMDb and US Census, 1950–2013)

Figure 61: Frances Négron-Muntaner et al., "The Latino Media Gap: A Report on The State of Latinos in U.S. Media," New York: The Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, Columbia University, 2014.

Figure 62: Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #3, 1977, gelatin silver print.

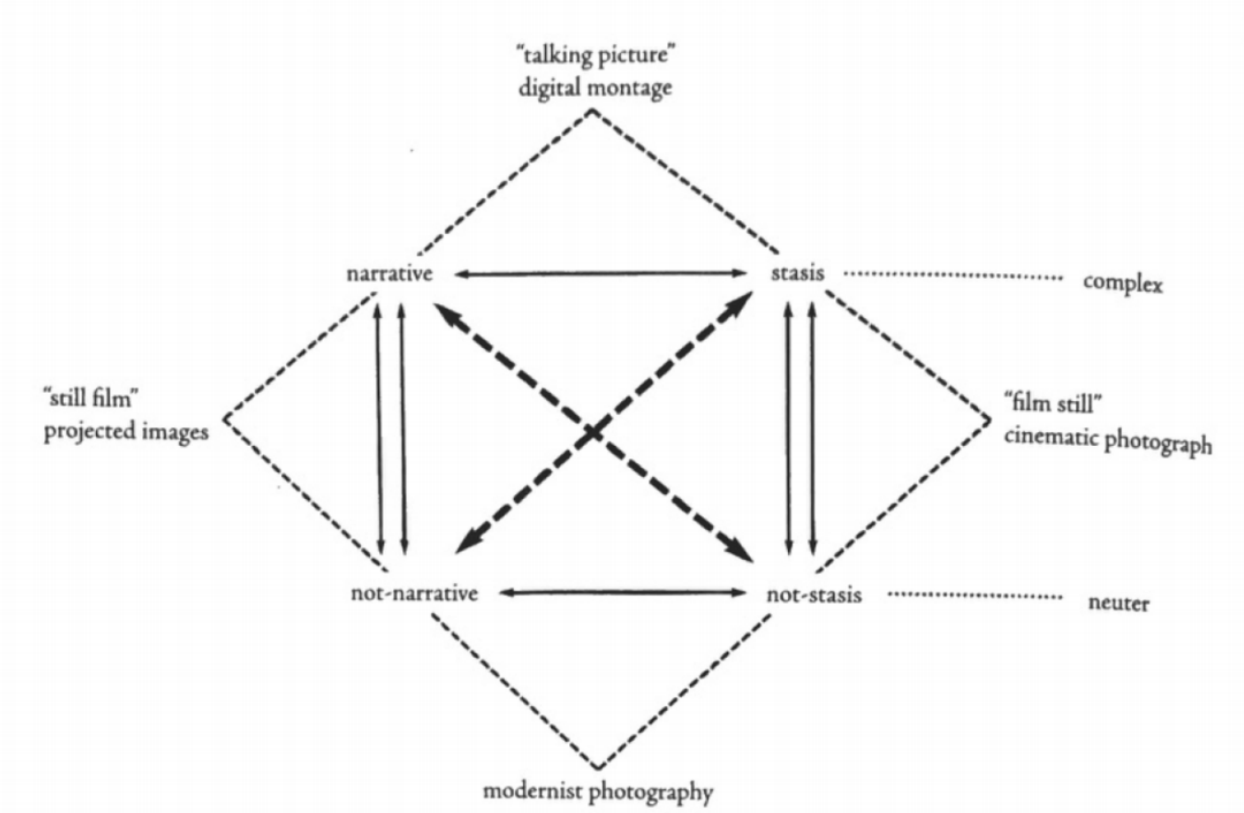


Figure 63: George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field."

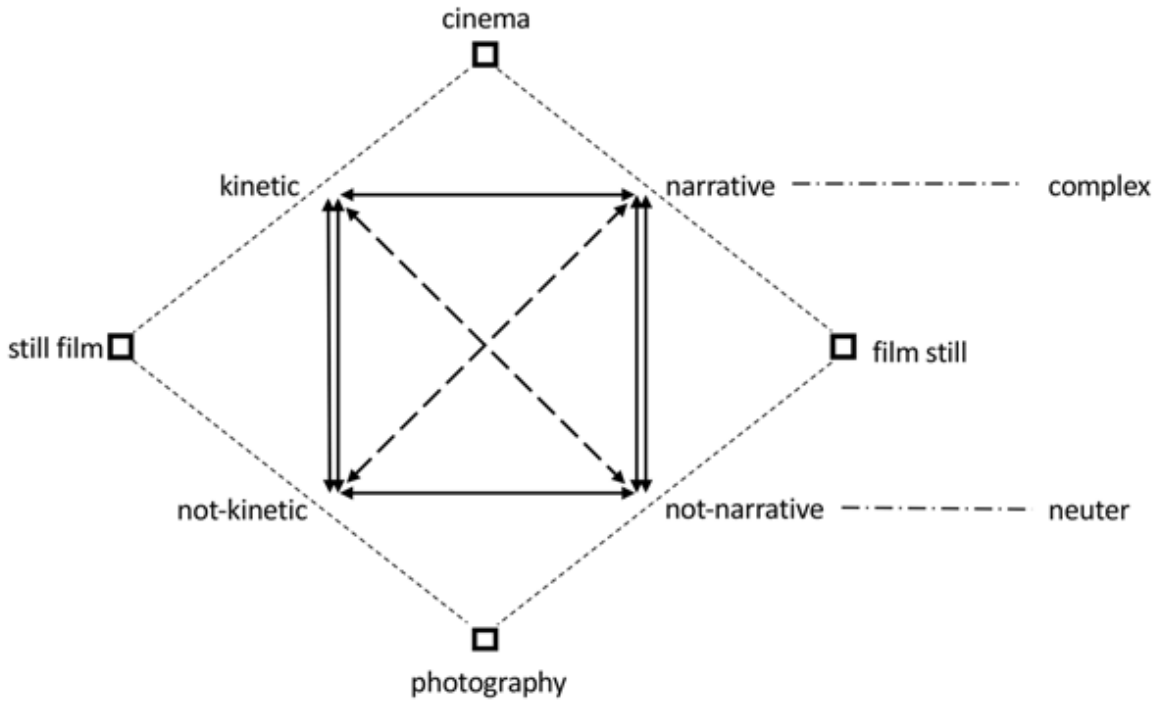
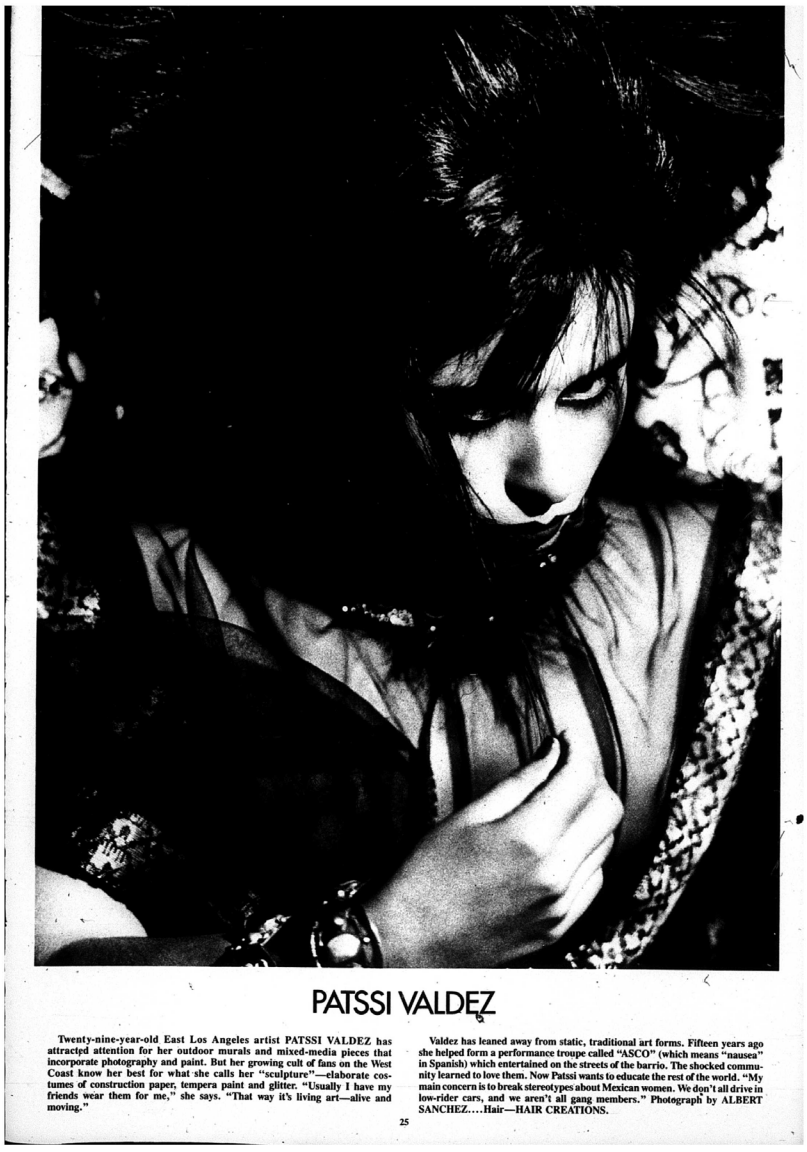


Figure 64: My proposed expanded field of photography.



PATSSI VALDEZ

Twenty-nine-year-old East Los Angeles artist PATSSI VALDEZ has attracted attention for her outdoor murals and mixed-media pieces that incorporate photography and paint. But her growing cult of fans on the West Coast know her best for what she calls her "sculpture"—elaborate costumes of construction paper, tempera paint and glitter. "Usually I have my friends wear them for me," she says. "That way it's living art—alive and moving."

Valdez has leaned away from static, traditional art forms. Fifteen years ago she helped form a performance troupe called "ASCO" (which means "nausea" in Spanish) which entertained on the streets of the barrio. The shocked community learned to love them. Now Patssi wants to educate the rest of the world. "My main concern is to break stereotypes about Mexican women. We don't all drive in low-rider cars, and we aren't all gang members." Photograph by ALBERT SANCHEZ....Hair—HAIR CREATIONS.

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Figure 65: Patssi Valdez feature in Andy Warhol's *Interview* Magazine, January 1986.

Figure 66: Patssi Valdez, *The Virgin's Room*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48 inches. Collection of Gary and Tracy Mezzatesta.

Figure 67: Willie Herrón, III and Alfonso Trejo, Jr., *Advancements of Man*, "Surgery," 1976, paint on stucco. Farmacia Villa Real, 2331 East Avenida Cesar Chavez at Soto Street, Boyle Heights. Photograph by Tim Drescher. Repainted by Herrón 1995; Painted out in 2007.

Figure 68: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *El pueblo a la universidad, la universidad al pueblo*, 1952–56, relief mosaic, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

Figure 69: Willie Herrón, III, *ASCO: East of No West*, 2011, irridescent acryllis on concrete, 17 x 13 feet, alley between *The Wall That Cracked Open* and *The Plumed Serpent* in City Terrace. Photograph by Gil Ortiz.

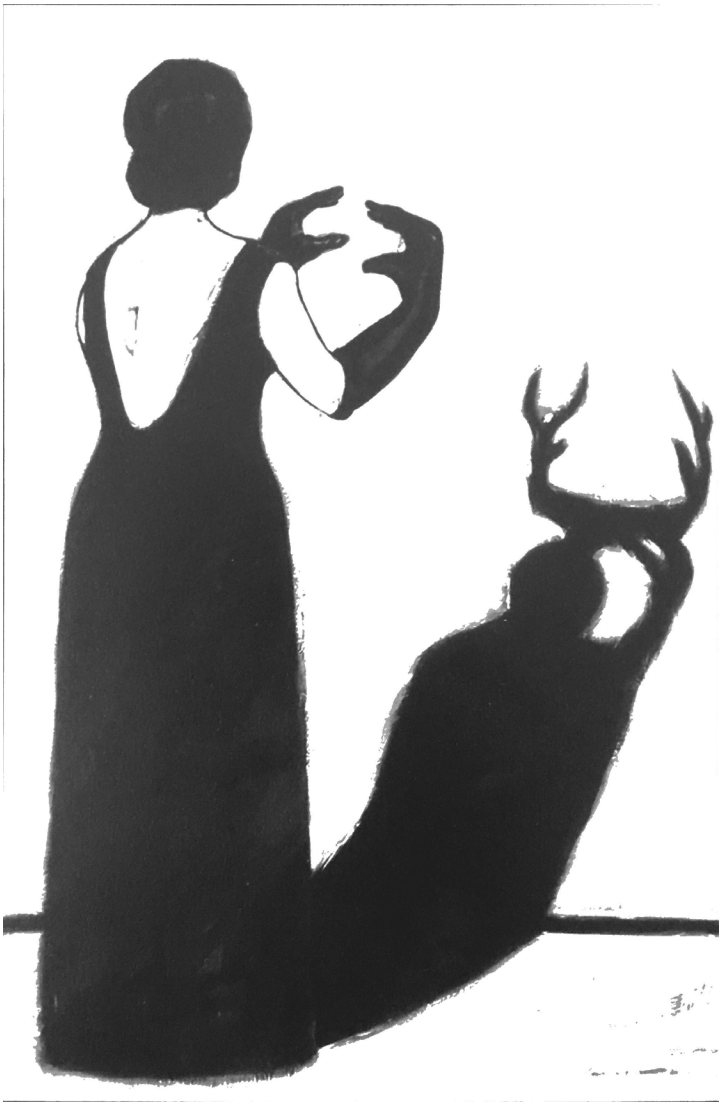

Figure 70: Gronk, *Puta's Cave* (Tormenta), 1988, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48 inches. Photograph by William Nettles.

Figure 71: Gronk, set for *The Indian Queen*, 2013.

Figure 72: Harry Gamboa, Jr., frames from *Baby Kake,* staring Barbara Carrasco, Gronk, Humberto Sandoval, and Ruben Zamora.

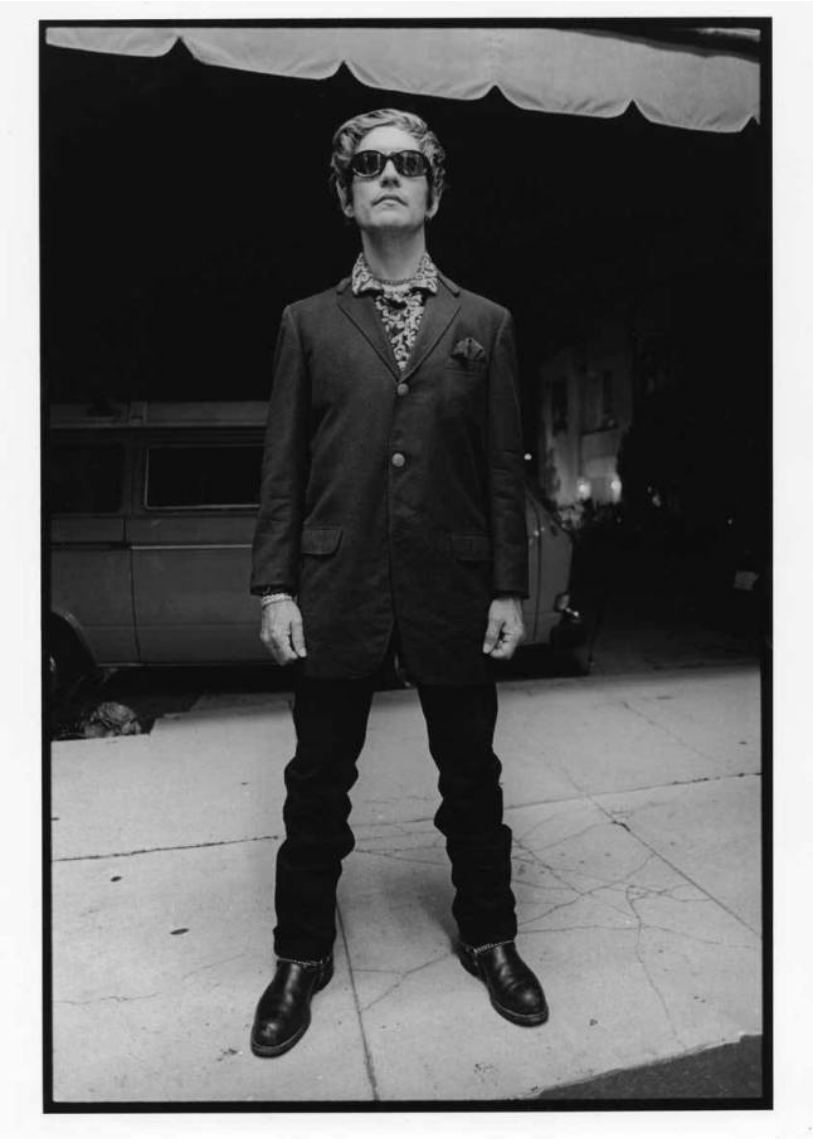

Figure 73: Harry Gamboa, Jr., Willie Herrón, III, Artist/ Musician, from the *Chicano Male Unbonded* series, 2000, black and white photograph.

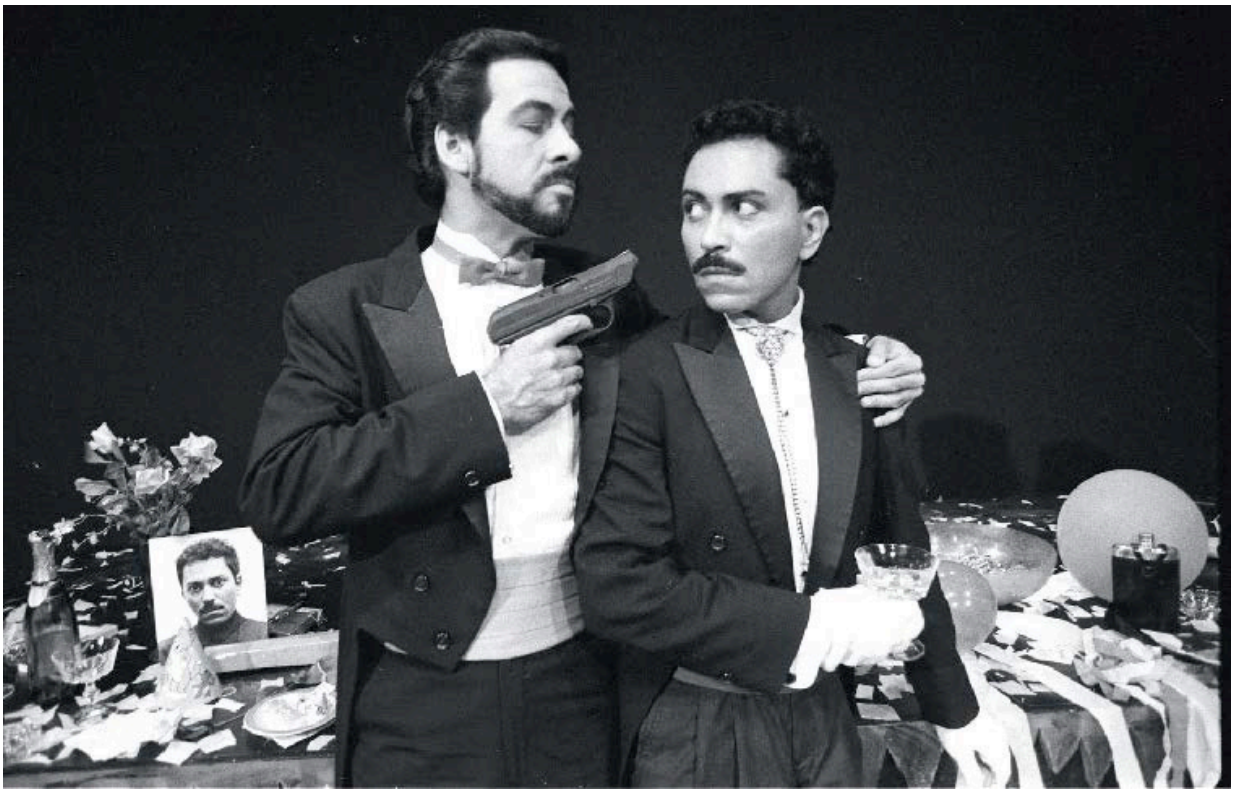

Figure 74: Asco, *Jetter's Jinx*, 1985, black and white photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 75: Patssi Valdez, frame enlargements from *Hot Pink*, c. 1974, 35mm film, color, sound, 5:45.

Figure 76: Patssi Valdez, *Limitations Beyond My Control,* 1975, black and white photograph printed on poster paper, 24 x 36 inches. Photograph by Harry Gamboa, Jr.

Figure 77: Alejandro Diaz, *Enchiladas at the Plaza*, 2003, photo documentation of urban intervention, New York.

Figure 78: Mario Ybarra Jr., *Go Tell It #1*, 2001, color photograph.

Figure 79: Mario Ybarra, Jr., *Go Tell It,* 2004, billboard for Clockshop.

Figure 80: Alex Donis, *Che Guevara and Cesar Chavez*, 1997, oil and enamel on plexi light-box, 36 x 24 inches. Destroyed by vandals 1997.

Figure 81: Félix Frédéric d'Eon, *Luna* from *Gay Lotería*, 2016, archival ink on paper, 26.5 x 16 inches.

Figure 82: Félix Frédéric d'Eon, *Gay Lotería cards*, 2016, archival ink on heavyweight paper.

Figure 83: Kembra Pfahler and Lisa Resurrection, *Sewing Circle*, 1992, directed by Richard Kern, 8 minute film.

Figure 84: Kembra Pfahler performing with her rock band,
The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black.

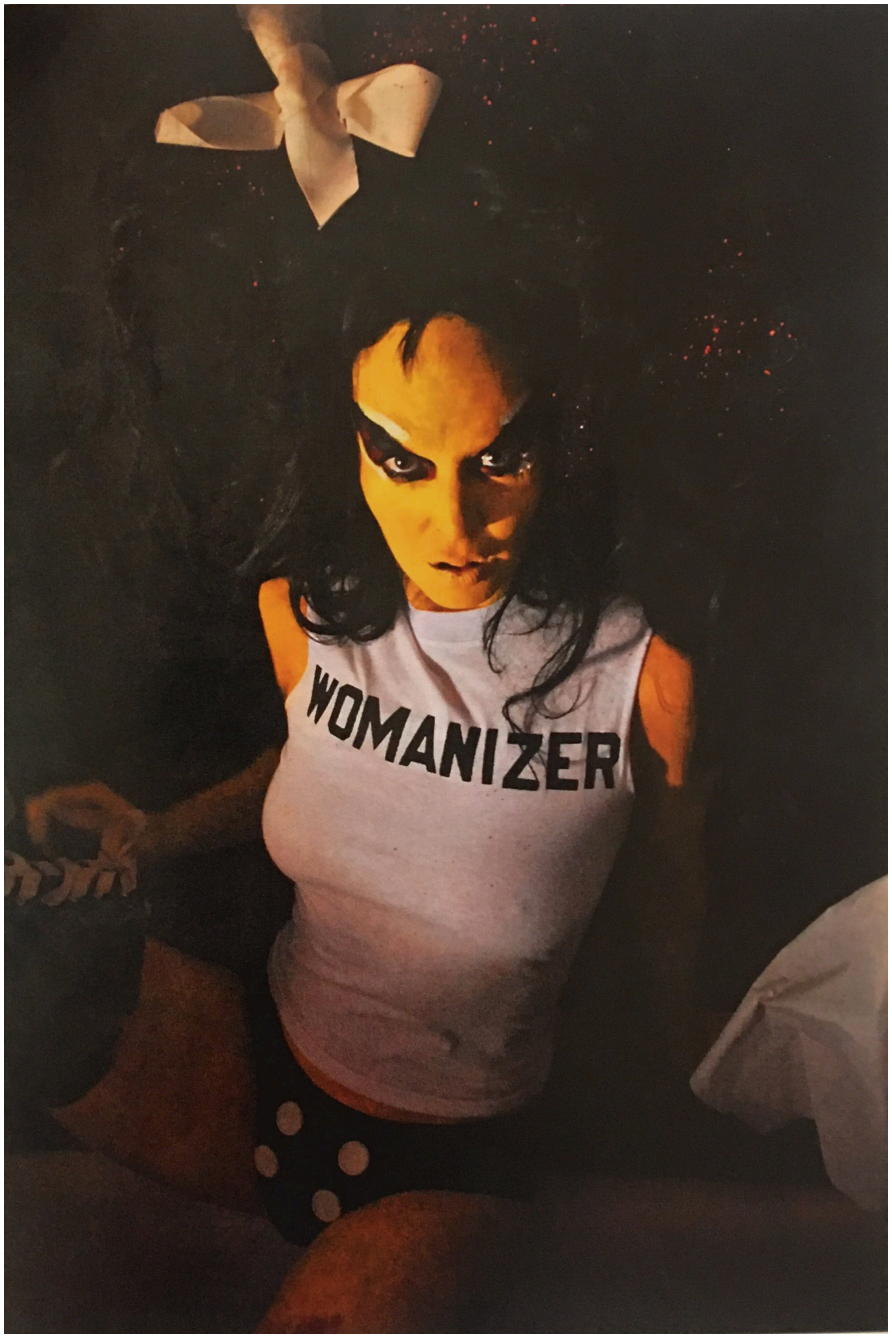

Figure 85: Kembra Phaler, *Kembra at Home*, 2007, chromogenic print.

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