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Nos(Otros), Los Textual Poch@s:

Understanding Notions of Chicanx/Latinx Identities through the Digital Art of Rio Yañez

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in

Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

María Daniela Z. Jiménez

2016



## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Nos(Otros), Los Textual Poch@s:

Understanding Notions of Chicana/Latina Identities through the Digital Art of Rio Yañez

by

María Daniela Z. Jiménez

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor María C. Pons, Co-Chair

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This thesis presents the concept of textual poch@ through Bay Area-based artist, Rio Yañez's artwork. The textual poch@ is an individual who experiences marginalization and/or has to justify themselves for deviating from their society's dominant narratives and cultural tastes. Their deviation results in their own interpretation and reconfiguration of their culture (usually associated with aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, physical abilities) through a rasquache framework – in terms of making do with what they have to create something new. Through visual and textual analyses, I focus on two of Yañez's digital art collections, Morrissey-inspired artwork and Japanese-influence portraiture series, as my case studies. In doing so, I demonstrate how these two collections push against essentialism and unfix Chicana/Latina identity as it is tied to dominant Chicana/Latina cultural practices and tastes.

The thesis of María Daniela Z. Jiménez is approved.

Genevieve G. Carpio

María C. Pons, Committee Co-Chair

Charlene Villaseñor Black, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

## DEDICATION

For my paternal grandmother, María Abdon Arriaga Camacho, who at 97 years old is the toughest person I know. For my maternal grandfather, Daniel Zavala Guerrero, who taught me so much during our 10-year overlap on this Earth.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	List of Figures	vi
II.	Introduction	1
III.	Chapter One – “No It’s Not Like Any Other Love”: Morrissey Fandom in the Artwork of Rio Yañez	27
IV.	Chapter Two – “He said, ‘Hola, cómo está?’ He said, ‘Konnichiwa’”	55
V.	Conclusion – Textual Poch@s: Aquí Estamos y No Nos Vamos	86
VI.	Works Cited	89

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. <i>Virgen de Guadalupe</i>	33
2. Kevin Cummins, <i>Paradoxical Singer</i>	33
3. Rio Yañez, <i>I Have Forgiven Guadalupe</i>	33
4. Rio Yañez, <i>Tragic Moz</i>	38
5. “Zig-Zag Original White”	46
6. <i>The Chronic</i>	46
7. Rio Yañez, <i>Chicano Blood, Irish Heart</i>	46
8. Charles M. Schulz, “Snoopy’s Dog House”	50
9. Joe Cool, <i>Doggystyle</i>	50
10. Rio Yañez, <i>Mexicans Love Morrissey (Doggystyle)</i>	50
11. Rio Yañez, <i>Don Barba</i>	64
12. Rio Yañez, <i>Littl3 One</i>	65
13. <i>Hearty Beat</i>	66
14. Rio Yañez, <i>Mona</i>	66
15. Rio Yañez, <i>Babu the Gangster</i>	66
16. MissNay, “My Selfie Life Demonstrated by Drake. LMAO.”	68
17. Rio Yañez, <i>Chola Por Vida</i>	78
18. Rio Yañez, <i>Chicana Love</i>	81
19. “Chola”	81
20. “Cinco de Chola”	81
21. Rio Yañez, <i>Lady Lowrider</i>	84



## Introduction

Jim Mendiola's 1996 film, *Pretty Vacant* begins with the protagonist, La Molly, sharing a brief autobiography:

I was born 21 years ago on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1973...the same day Raza Unida met for their first – and only – national convention, and across the Atlantic, David Bowie released “Ziggy Stardust”: both movements didn't last, a radical Chicano political party and Bowie's particular strain of androgynous rock, but both had their influences on me, to this day” (Mendiola).

*Pretty Vacant* is a 32-minute black and white film centered on a 21-year-old queer Chicana from San Antonio, Texas, named La Molly.<sup>1</sup> She works at the local Hogwild record store, is the drummer for the all-female band, Aztlán-a-go-go, makes her own movies using a Super 8, and single-handedly writes, edits, and publishes a zine called *Ex-Voto*. The production of *Ex-Voto* is the first instance in which the viewer is alerted to Molly's awareness of the need to document diverse Chicana representations because, as she states, “I published because no one was addressing my interests or needs. Simple as that” (Mendiola). The lack of visibility and media content for and about Chicanas like her – who have an interest in different aspects of popular culture that are not bound to just Mexican traditions (as evidenced in her strong inclination for punk and U.K. culture) — is what drives La Molly's desire to document herself as a way for her to (hopefully) connect with other Chicanas who encounter similar issues of identity and culture.

La Molly's memory and documentation work are also tied to her desire to take her place in rock'n'roll history. Her fifth issue of *Ex-Voto* is set to focus on her favorite band: the Sex

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using the terms Chicana and Latina throughout my thesis as a way to disrupt the gender binary associated with Chicano, Latino, Chicana/o, Latina/o. The instances where I *do* use Chicano or Latino, the terms will be in quotation marks to emphasize that I am using the terms in the same way the author(s) or

Pistols. On January 8, 1978, the Sex Pistols had a show at Randy's Rodeo, a local venue, in San Antonio. During a previous visit to Randy's, La Molly finds a piece of paper hidden behind the stage. The piece of paper turns out to be the Sex Pistols' playlist. "Get this, I discovered the Sex Pistols' playlist. And even more amazing, scribbled at the bottom, 'El Kranke'. It said 'El Kranke'! One of Steve's conjunto songs! Shit, man. The Pistols were gonna end that show that night with some conjunto" (Mendiola).<sup>2</sup> She further claims that her "theory has some precedence" given that other punk bands, like The Clash, were essentially white men who successfully appropriated the culture of the Other – such as reggae from the Caribbean diaspora in London. In the words of La Molly, "Talk about your revisionist history, Greil Marcus is gonna flip!" (Mendiola).<sup>3</sup>

I begin with this particular reference to La Molly and *Pretty Vacant* as a way to situate the differences people of color sometimes experience within their own racial and ethnic group, especially in terms of cultural taste, how such tastes influence cultural productions, and their performance of ethnic and racial identity. Stuart Hall's "New Ethnicities" challenges, critiques, and interrogates the idea of essentialism as it applies to communities of color; in particular, the Black community within the United Kingdom. Hall concedes that there was a time in which Black essentialism served as "a critique of the way [B]lacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible 'other' of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses" and thus, required that the Black community present a united front that showcased the commonalities among its members (441). But, he also explains that as "the struggle [for representation] moves forward

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<sup>2</sup> La Molly is referring to the famous accordion player, Esteban/Steve Jordan. He is originally from Texas and his skill earns him the nickname, "the Jimi Hendrix of the accordion."

<sup>3</sup> Greil Marcus is a music journalist and cultural critic known for his book, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, which situates the Sex Pistols and punk within a larger framework tied to Dada art and other counterculture movements.

and assumes new forms, it does to some degree *displace*, reorganize and reposition the different cultural strategies in relation to one another” (Hall 442). What is being displaced is the “end of the essential [B]lack subject” because the issue is “the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category ‘[B]lack’” (Hall 443). Using La Molly and Hall as starting points and inspiration, I, too, am interested in what it would mean to disrupt the essentialism behind the ideas of Chicanx/Latinx in terms of cultural practices and taste. In particular, I want to disrupt Chicanx/Latinx essentialism by drawing from Chicanx art and fandom studies scholarship and using Chicanx/Latinx digital art as my case study. In the following thesis, through visual and textual analyses, I explore the digital artwork of Bay Area-based Chicanx artist, Rio Yañez and build upon my concept of the textual poch@ as a way to push against Chicanx/Latinx essentialism and nationalism and unfix identity as it is tied to cultural practices and tastes.<sup>4</sup>

### ***The Sun/Son and Air/Heir of Chicanx Art***

Rio Yañez was born on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1980, in the San Francisco Bay Area to Chicanx artists Yolanda M. López and Rene Yañez.<sup>5</sup> He grew up as an only child in the Bay Area and under guidance from his parents, along with his burgeoning interest in popular culture like comic books, he began his own artistic explorations. As an adult, he completed his art education at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, CA. Since his university training, Yañez has continued to create art and has curated, hosted, and developed multiple events and shows that

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<sup>4</sup> The textual poch@ concept will be discussed later in this introduction.

<sup>5</sup> This brief biography is unofficial in the sense that not that many interviews with Yañez can be found on the Internet. On his personal blog, he only focuses on the role art and pop culture has played in his life. Since I was unable to interview him, I am piecing together a biography based on what I know from years of following him on social media platforms.

explore art, technologies, cultural traditions, and the role of the Internet in curatorial display and aesthetic. He has a heavy presence on social media through his personal blog, Facebook and Instagram accounts, and is savvy in his strategic use such platforms to communicate with others, open up possibilities for collaboration, and draw from the Internet as a muse.

For this thesis, I focus on two of Yañez's ongoing artistic projects: his Morrissey-inspired artwork and his Japanese-influenced portraiture collection. The artwork in both collections best exemplifies Yañez's engagement with non-Chicanx/Latinx pop culture and his clever use of social media aesthetics. The images and cultural references in the pieces featured throughout this thesis fuse Rio Yañez's love of fandom, Chicanx/Latinx culture, mainstream pop culture, and thus provide a rich digital archive from which to examine the reconceptualization and display of Chicanx art, fandom aesthetics, and new interpretations of cultural iconography and technology. Additionally, the realm of the digital (as it exists on the Internet) provides a unique space that pushes Chicanx/Latinx essentialism by unfixing identity and challenging the performativity of Chicanx/Latinx nationalism. When the Internet was billed as a digital tool for mass use, scholars like Lisa Nakamura point out that the "technological visionaries imagined the online world as a utopian space where everything – even transcending racism — was possible" (xi). However, "the Internet is a place where race happens; even in the absence of users of color, images of race and racialism proliferate in cyberspace" (Nakamura xii). What does it mean, then, for a Chicanx/Latinx artist like Rio Yañez to largely draw from the digital world and social media in order to create and share his artwork that draws from, and disrupts, Chicanx/Latinx culture? What roles do the incorporation of fandom play into his digital art? How does his digital art speak to, and build on, understanding of Chicanxs/Latinxs and Chicanx art? It is my hope that

this thesis and its contents provides readers with enough context and detail to help them understand the importance of Rio Yañez's work and the textual poch@ practices that inform it.<sup>6</sup>

My analyses will focus on a total of eleven art pieces (four in the first chapter, seven in the second chapter) that have been divided into two chapters according to the fandom theme conveyed by the artwork. The exact details of how the images were selected are presented within the chapter's analyses. The first chapter, “ ‘No, It's Not Like Any Other Love’: Morrissey Fandom in the Artwork of Rio Yañez” explores the muse role that the English singer, Morrissey, has played in Yañez's artwork. I particularly look at pieces that depict Morrissey as a saint, Morrissey as an opportunity for fandom critique, and Morrissey as a challenge to the hypermasculinity present in U.S. hip hop culture. The second chapter, “He said, ‘Hola, cómo está?’ He said ‘Konnichiwa’” examines the role Japanese culture and technology have played in Yañez's artwork. In particular, I focus on Rio Yañez's use of social media and Japanese youth's fascination with California cholx culture as his inspiration to experiment with portraiture, self-representation on social media, and the racial ambiguity that is enabled by technology.

In the following two sections, I provide a brief overview of how the rasquache aesthetic has been discussed in the field of Chicax art and the variation of the term “Chicax” as it is used in Chicax art scholarship. Then, I proceed to discuss the theoretical framework that informs my concept of the textual poch@.

### ***Rasquache and the Vernacular in Chicax Art***

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<sup>6</sup> I am not completely sure as to whether or not Yañez self-identifies as a poch@ so I would like to point out that my use of textual poch@ is imposed since I believe the term relates to the work Yañez does.

The key concept that established the foundation of Chicana art as an academic subfield is rasquache as aesthetic. The theorization of rasquache is often associated with the academic work on Chicana art by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Shifra Goldman who both explored the aesthetic's influence on Chicana artists. However, prior to Ybarra-Frausto and Goldman's work, anthropologists Suzanne Seriff and José Limón laid the groundwork for the rasquache conversation through their short essay, "Bits and Pieces: The Mexican American Folk Aesthetic," featured in the *Art Among Us/Arte Entre Nosotros: Mexican American Folk Art of San Antonio* exhibition catalogue. In this writing, Seriff and Limón write about mexicanismo as "the expression of identity and belonging used by Mexicans whether in their native country or in the United States" (40). Outside of the United States, mexicanismo "becomes a marker of allegiance to a cultural 'homeland' that is distinct from the dominant culture in which Mexican Americans live...this allegiance manifests itself in an aesthetic style that pervades all the traditional Mexican American arts: music, dance, games, stories, jokes, food ..." (Seriff and Limón 40). The mexicanismo aesthetic is characterized by "the way in which 'bits and pieces' are creatively put together to form a coherent and meaningful whole ... from the resources available at the moment of creation. Assembling bits and pieces is the stylistic basis of the Mexican American folk aesthetic" (Seriff and Limón 40). Additionally, these bits and pieces are a form of code, a communication that sends specific messages meant to be read by the people within the community (read: Mexican Americans). Seriff and Limón's recognition of the bits and pieces aesthetic as it ties to the identity of mexicanismo reflects Ybarra-Frausto and Goldman's theorization of rasquache as an aesthetic that ties to the identity of Chicanas through the incorporation of elements that are readily available to Chicanas.

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's canonical essay "*Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility*" has been foundational to the development of rasquache as an aesthetic and framework for scholarship on Chicanx cultural works including art, literature, and film. Ybarra-Frausto defines rasquache as an aesthetic effort and sensibility that relies on the creator's ability to be resourceful and make do with what they have in order to achieve the end goal (whether the end goal is a piece of art or an improvisation for survival such as a rasquache approach to shelter). In this short piece, Ybarra-Frausto is quick to point out, "To be rasquache is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness seeking to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down ... Rasquachismo is neither an idea nor style but more of an attitude or taste" (5). Rasquachismo is a tactic for survival, "an attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability yet mindful of stance and style" (Ybarra-Frausto 5). According to Ybarra-Frausto, rasquachismo is a concept that originated in Mexico among the working-class but since then, "it has evolved as a bicultural sensibility among Mexican Americans" (5) since many of the Mexicans who migrate to the United States retain their working-class status and must be alert and make do with what they have in order to survive in this country. This observation mirrors the statements made by Seriff and Limón in the sense that rasquachismo and mexicanidad are tied to a transcultural identity that is meant to keep the people who carry out such aesthetic practices connected to their community and/or homeland. It is the attitude behind rasquachismo that gives the person enacting it the freedom and space to explore variations of taste, style, and aesthetic because, essentially, anything can become part of what the person ends up creating. Additionally, because the resources available (materials, tools) to the rasquache individual are limited, many times what is created out of rasquache is ephemeral.

The idea of rasquache is a useful component for understanding Chicane approaches to art since it may be the case that Chicane may not have access to fine art supplies or institutionalized art training. Yet, the material limitations do not prevent Chicane from creating art. Or if the person is given the opportunity to become a professionally trained artist, oftentimes their rasquache upbringing will still inform their approaches and subject matter featured in their art. As Ybarra-Frausto explains, “*Rasquachismo* is a sensibility that is not elevated and serious but playful and elemental. It finds delight and refinement in what many consider banal and projects an alternative aesthetic – a sort of good taste of bad taste” (8).

Shifra Goldman builds on Ybarra-Frausto’s work on rasquache in her short essay, “Assembling the capirota.” She writes, “*Rasquachismo* as a *concept* can be found in many popular cultures: it is the ineffable, the fugitive, the indefinable quality that working class black people, for example, refer to as ‘soul,’ as ‘funk,’ or as the ‘blues’” (Goldman 11). She elaborates on the idea of rasquachismo by providing examples of working class Chicane/Latine making do with what they have such as “exuberant accumulative home ornamentation carried out with brightly patterned linoleum floors, oilcloth table coverings, Sears wallpapers, and plastic-protected or blanket-covered living room furniture” (Goldman 11). She explains how this rasquache sensibility has also always been present in Chicane art – which initially caused a few issues because viewers and critics did not understand the aesthetic and its radical potential. For example, Goldman discusses how the Chicane art group known as Los Four shocked art critics with their 1974 Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) exhibit, *Los Four: Almaraz, de la Rocha, Lujan, Romero*, because the artists included “*papel picado* (cut paper), farmworker union banners, tortillas, the hood of a lowrider car, and hundreds of accumulated daily-life



objects on an altar-pyramid surmounted with feathers” (13).<sup>7</sup> The exhibit was dismissed as folk art without critics and visitors acknowledging the rasquache aesthetic and the radical potential of the vernacular.

Thus for Goldman, rasquachismo manifests itself in two ways: “one as that of a life style, an ‘irrepressible’ ... ‘visceral response to lived reality’ by an ‘underclass’” and as a mediation between “high” culture and popular culture (13). In presenting these two manifestations, Goldman is highlighting how rasquachismo is not limited to Chicanxs/Latinxs but is also prevalent among working class and non-Chicanx/Latinx communities. She describes how rasquachismo is present in cultural practices like gospel singing, vodun (voodoo) ceremonies, and Yiddish vaudeville theater because all of these practices fuse the “high” and the popular in their customs (Goldman 12). Through the aforementioned examples, Goldman is pushing for readers to acknowledge the multiple ways rasquachismo, or “making do with what you have,” can be relevant and understood. Her approach to expanding *who* practices rasquachismo and pointing out *where* such applications happen, helps others further understand this Chicanx/Latinx sensibility and its larger impact on other cultures.<sup>8</sup>

Goldman also presents a crucial component of rasquache methods that I explore in my thesis: the role of technology in the production of [Chicanx] art. She discusses how Chicanx artists are quick to use mass produced technology such as “manipulated photography, Xeroxing and rubber stamps, as well as cast paper, fiberglass, and polyurethane for sculptural forms” along with every day items like colored pencils and ballpoint pens (Goldman 13, 14). The combination

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of the exhibit, Los Four, a Los-Angeles based Chicanx art collective, included Carlos Almaraz, Roberto de la Rocha, Gilbert Luján, and Frank Romero. Los Four were active from 1970s to the 1980s and later included Judith Hernández from 1974-1984.

<sup>8</sup> One group, the Japanese youth subculture, practices elements of rasquachismo through their interest in Chicanx cholx culture. This particular example will be analyzed in the second chapter of the thesis.

of technology with the vernacular once again emphasizes the rasquache sensibility Chicana artists employ and how the mixture of materials and technology serves as a commentary on “high” and mass-produced art. In a similar way, the Internet and software tools like Adobe Photoshop, can prove useful to how rasquache is practiced by Chicana artists, like Yañez, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a topic further explored later in this thesis.

Both Ybarra-Frausto’s and Goldman’s engagement with rasquache as a practice and aesthetic paved the way for other Chicana art scholars, such as Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, to expand their analysis of the vernacular by examining the many ways it manifests in [Chicana] art. In “Space, Power, and Youth Culture: Mexican-American Graffiti and Chicano Murals in East Los Angeles, 1972-1978,” Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino sets out to “clarify the contributions of so-called graffiti as seen throughout East Los Angeles in terms that [are] understandable within its own developmental and functional contexts and not dependent on legitimizing structures of dominant Anglo society for its value” (57). Through his analysis of graffiti and its influence on mural-making, Sanchez-Tranquilino aims to highlight the value of graffiti that is often overlooked due to the criminalization of youth who partake in graffiti practice. He specifically utilizes semiotic analysis in his case study of the Estrada Courts mural program to bridge the ties between graffiti (what he refers to as barrio calligraphy) and mural art in an effort to demonstrate how something as rasquache and vernacular as graffiti can lead to an art form and political act rather than urban vandalism.

Sanchez-Tranquilino explains that graffiti, or barrio calligraphy, is a “visual system developed by Mexican American graffiti writers themselves to keep a public check on the abuse of power in the streets” primarily by serving as inscriptions that “follo[w] an established system for conveying information” (59). Using cans of spray paint as their medium and the walls of their

neighborhood as their canvas, the youth claim identity through the only means available to them: by spray painting their street nicknames and related insignia as a way to create hypervisibility around their existence and presence in urban spaces. By using identifying symbols (their nicknames and lettering style), the youth employ barrio calligraphy in the Estrada Courts (and any other Mexican/Latinx barrio) as a way to claim space, authority, and territorial protection of their homes. The youth the article focuses on are the young men from the Varrio Nueva Estrada gang (VNE), who express interest in mural-making after other artists create murals in their neighborhoods – which VNE saw as an encroachment on their territory. Under the guidance of former gang member Charles “Cat” Felix, VNE youth designed their own mural that spoke to their experiences as barrio warriors while also creatively formulating insignias that served the same purpose as graffiti. For example, the VNE youth decide to incorporate pre-Columbian images of warriors to represent the battles they have to fight in their neighborhoods and in society. The youth’s practice of graffiti as a visual system and its influence on their approach to mural-making is an example of rasquache sensibility because it brings together the vernacular (spray paint) with the “high” (muralism as a more established form of art). At the same time, barrio calligraphy is not meant to be decipherable by all who see it but rather a select few (such as people in their community). It is this understanding of graffiti as rasquache code that lends itself to a semiotic analysis. Through the use of semiotics, Sanchez-Tranquilino is able to legitimize the rasquache practice of graffiti as something other than vandalism while also situating the youth of the Mexican/Latino barrios as cultural readers/semioticians in their own right. This perspective helps push against the misconceptions associated with graffiti and the youth who practice it. Additionally, the connection he helps make between graffiti and mural-

making further exemplifies the role that rasquache sensibility and aesthetics play in contemporary artistic practices.

Rasquache's role in contemporary artistic practices is not limited to youth and murals nor is it continuously dismissed in the same way as the *Los Four* exhibit was in 1974. As Chicana art has continued to stake claim in academic spaces, more scholars and institutions have devoted their attention to continue the exploration of the vernacular present in the work of Chicana artists. One such scholar is Karen Mary Davalos and her monograph on Chicana artist, Yolanda M. López. The monograph, part of the University of California, Los Angeles' Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC)'s "A Ver: Revisioning Art History" book series<sup>9</sup> is the first volume to focus on a *Chicana* artist.<sup>10</sup> Karen Mary Davalos undertakes the task of providing readers with information on the personal, educational, and political background of Yolanda M. López in order to help situate her work and its significance.

Davalos begins the monograph by noting the rasquachismo present in López's family through their resilience and artistic creativity, particularly highlighting the matrilineal strength that was formative to López's own artistic confidence and feminist approach. Later on, readers learn about how her family encouraged López to take art courses and how she became a politicized Chicana when she was involved with the Third World Liberation Front in the Bay Area. One of the aspects that is most refreshing about Yolanda M. López, as it is brought to light through Davalos's narrative, is López's own admittance that she became a conscious feminist of

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<sup>9</sup> The "A Ver" series is the CSRC's effort to explore and situate the work of Chicana/o, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and other U.S. Latina/o artists in order to bring attention to such artists and expand the topics and types of art that get discussed in the field of art history.

<sup>10</sup> I chose to focus on the *Yolanda M. López* monograph of the "A Ver" series because not only is she the mother of the artist my thesis focuses on (Río Yañez) but, she is also one of the first well-known Chicana artists who effectively remixes Chicana/Latina culture and iconography in her work while simultaneously providing social critique.

color later in life (the beliefs were there early on but further exposure to women of color feminism as well as politicized social identity terms came about when she was older) and gives credit where credit is due (such as her interactions with Emory Douglas).<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, López serves as an example of how theory can inform artistic practice as her own training at UC San Diego, under Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula, provided her with the language and concepts that allowed her to explain and theorize her own art pieces better than any scholar could have. As Davalos notes, “López’s primary impulse as an artist is the investigation of images. She analyzes the production, function, and context of images that enter public culture” (2). López has always been interested in the underlying message behind images – whether the images are in art, media, or print culture; nothing was off limits for her. At the same time, López’s approach to art was intersectional as she brought in the different components of her identity to her art practice. Unlike other artists who heavily emphasized one aspect of their identity over another or were deeply attached to their nationalistic Chicana ideology, López’s “interrogation of images is more than a rejection of stereotypes. She aims to offer new possibilities for Chicanas and women of color living under conditions of patriarchy, racism, and material inequality” (Davalos 3). López was also able to accomplish her disruption of stereotypes through her clever and innovative usage of the vernacular in her work.

The presence of the vernacular in López’s art speaks to the *rasquache* sensibility introduced at the beginning of this section. Through her study of semiotics and interactions with figures like Douglas, who understood the power of imagery and everyday symbols, López was able to draw from the codes and messages tied to the Chicana/Latina culture around her to

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<sup>11</sup> Emory Douglas (born in 1943) was the Black Panther Party’s Minister of Culture until the 1980s. In this role, Douglas was responsible for creating graphic art and visual iconography that spoke to the politics of the Black Panther Party and helped inform wider audiences of the Black struggle. López met Douglas in San Francisco and he shared artistic techniques (such as layout manipulation) with her.

communicate her interventions. For example, one of her most well known pieces is her 1978 self-portrait titled, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen of Guadalupe*. In this painting, López pieces together key symbols associated with the Virgen de Guadalupe (such as the mandorla, the cherub, the star-patterned mantle) as she inserts herself in the Virgen's place. In doing so, López interjects her take on women's strength and brings in her matrilineal upbringing as a way to disrupt the narrow depiction of women in Catholic visual culture. *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen de Guadalupe* is a rich example of López's rasquache and semiotic artistic practices that were fundamental to Chicana art and play a significant influence in the work of her son, Rio Yañez, as will be explained in the next chapter.

The aforementioned scholarship on rasquache and the vernacular in Chicana art helps further the point of how Rio Yañez serves as an example of the ways in which the rasquache sensibility is still very prevalent among Chicana/Latina artists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – particularly in how he draws from bits and pieces found in the digital world and social media to create new cultural productions that make do with the information he is able to access online –as explored throughout this thesis. For now, however, the conversation will shift from the role of rasquache and the vernacular in Chicana art to an exploration of the term Chicana as it relates to art scholarship.

### ***Who Put the Chicana in Chicana Art?***

In addition to identifying key aesthetic practices, the field of Chicana art has had to face another challenge: What exactly makes Chicana art “Chicana”? As with any ethnic studies or identity-based discipline, the question of nomenclature is a constant one. The use of “Chicano” in Chicana art scholarship has been defined by art historian Carlos Francisco Jackson as a term

from the early twentieth century that was “widely used to describe a Mexican American identity... *Chicano* began as a derogatory word used both inside and outside the Mexican American community to describe the poor Mexican immigrant living in the United States” (2). While Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino draws on murdered journalist Ruben Salazar’s definition of “Chicano” as “a Mexican American who does not have an Anglo image of himself” (55) in order to illustrate the “dividing line between politically conscious Chicanos and other Mexican Americans who follow a less politically resistant and more culturally conformist ‘American’ identity” (56). On the other hand, art historian George Vargas uses Mexican American and “Chicano” interchangeably but also points out that “Chicano” came into more widespread use during the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s (xvi, xvii).

Debates over terminology and the components of Chicana art still persist. Most recently, CSRC director and film scholar Chon Noriega presented the idea of “post-Chicano” in “The Orphans of Modernism,” the opening essay to the *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* catalogue. Noriega first engages with the *American Heritage Dictionary*’s categorization of the term “Chicano” as having a “usage problem” in order to situate his analysis of the descriptor, “Chicano art,” which he identifies as also having a “usage problem” (17). Noriega initially is concerned about how the designation of art as “Chicano” has flabbergasted art venues like museums and galleries because such institutions are unsure of what to make of Chicana art, how to display it, and how to appraise it. The inclusion of “Chicano” in the subtitle of *Phantom Sightings* was used strategically as a reference to a time period. It was not the intention to use the term “as a description of the artists or even the art, but rather of the sociohistorical context for artistic production” (Noriega 18). Later on, Noriega also asks,

“Without a name and a context, how *can* this work be seen, let alone integrated into the art world and our national visual culture?” (18).

In order to begin grappling with the previous question and engage with the work that “Chicano” (as a descriptor) does, Noriega identifies three phantoms that “highlight several tendencies in works associated with the category of Chicano art” (20). The first phantom is “Chicano” art: “This category produces something that can be *seen*, that has even generated its own canon and corresponding debates, but otherwise does not *exist* in the art world, from the museum to the academy” (Noriega 21). The second phantom “is art by self-identified Chicanos who refuse the category, even if they also engage many of the same critical issues. This work speaks in an international idiom, but it also participates in the local environment” (Noriega 23). Lastly, the third phantom “is heard in the homonyms for *sighting* ... Siting: To situate or locate something on a particular place or position. Citing: To mention something or somebody as an example to support an argument. These are the actions that turn the apparitional into something real (or social), that locate it within a context and reference it within discourse” (Noriega 30). After identifying each phantom, Noriega proceeds to provide readers with visual analyses of art and artists who best exemplify the phantoms he is identifying. For example, Yolanda Lopez (first phantom), Asco (second phantom), and Juan Capistran (third phantom).<sup>12</sup>

Noriega also brings forth the white elephant in the room as it relates to the categorization and/or exclusion of Chicana art: “What is *American* about American art?” (38). This is an important question to ask because it mirrors the tactics often used to “other” marginalized groups, usually through the process of negation: This person is white because that person is

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<sup>12</sup> While I have already discussed Yolanda López in the previous section, Asco (which is Spanish for nausea) was an experimental Chicana performance art collective from East Los Angeles that was active from 1972-1987. Juan Capistran, originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, Capistran grew up in a predominantly African American neighborhood in Los Angeles and the influence of U.S. Black culture is prevalent in his artwork.



Black. Whiteness is superior because Blackness is inferior. But in both instances, there still isn't any concrete definition or understanding of whiteness. Perhaps the same could be said about "American" art and the category's continuous exclusion of art by U.S. artists of color. Noriega ends his piece with the declaration that:

In *Phantom Sightings*, the word *Chicano* signals an absence rather than an essence, dissension rather than origin. In situating this exhibition in historical context, we have chosen to use the word *after* rather than the more ubiquitous prefix *post*, as in post-Chicano, postidentity, postmodern. The artists in this exhibition do not agree upon or use a common name, other than that of artist. They are neither Chicano nor post-Chicano, neither pro- nor anti-identity, since these are false oppositions that give the illusion that the right choice will secure privileged access. Instead, they are artists deeply engaged in the paradoxes of their social being and historical moment – in other words, with modernity (41).

The readers are left with the question of what exactly is modern and how is this interrupted with different understandings of modernity and postmodernity. Perhaps Noriega is suggesting that "post-Chicano" solely refers to the temporality of El Movimiento but that the term "Chicano" itself is a product of modernity (read: colonization, European expansion) that still needs to be addressed before art and Chicanxs can move forward? How does this then influence or provide space for new ways of categorizing Chicanx art or what makes art Chicanx? If we maintain Noriega's idea that the term "Chicano" is a reference to temporality, it can serve to demarcate the type (format) and style (motifs, aesthetic practices) of Chicanx art along a timeline. Situating Chicanx art by time period can also prove useful because then scholars would have the wider freedom to explore the multiple approaches to Chicanx art over the years which, in turn, would

provide the space for a larger exploration of aesthetics that could potentially expand what Chicana art is (and can be) instead of trying to find one key factor that makes the artwork “Chicana” and is always present in all Chicana art pieces regardless of the year/time the pieces were produced.

The richness of Chicana art material and corresponding scholarship that has opened up the subfield to new discourses (rasquache, “post-Chicano”) helped establish the space for me join the conversation on Chicana art through new lenses: the role of the digital in terms of communication and aesthetics and, most importantly, fandom studies and non-Chicana/Latina culture as sources of inspiration for Chicana art content. Inspired by *mexicanismo*, bits and pieces, rasquache, and fandom studies scholarship, I now turn to a genealogy of theoretical interventions that have emerged from literary and media studies to set the grounds for my own Chicana art framework: textual poch@ practices. I draw heavily from Henry Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* and his interpretation of fans as textual poachers. However, Jenkins draws from Michel de Certeau’s interpretation of poaching for his own textual poacher concept.<sup>13</sup> Thus, I will begin the theoretical genealogy with de Certeau.

### ***The Theoretical Genealogy of the Textual Poch@***

Michel de Certeau’s “Reading as Poaching” chapter from *The Practice of Everyday Life* critiques the assumption that general, non-elite audiences are passive consumers and that the types of cultural works these audiences engage with are distasteful. He writes, “... inclined to believe that its own cultural models are necessary for the people in order to educate their minds and elevate their hearts, the elite upset about the ‘low level’ of journalism or television always

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<sup>13</sup> Just to clarify, de Certeau never actually provides a definition of “poaching” to help the reader understand whether or not he is using the term differently from the common dictionary definition that ties poaching to [usually illegal] hunting or catching.

assumes that the public is molded by the products imposed on it” (De Certeau 166). De Certeau is critical of the ways in which socioeconomic class creates hierarchies of taste and knowledge that dictate who is allowed to participate in culture and how they must enact such participation. He specifically focuses on the literature and the act of reading as the reader’s (consumer) opportunity to bring something new to the text despite the fact that they did not author the book:

The reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author’s position. He invents in texts something different from what they ‘intended.’ He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings. Is this ‘reading’ activity reserved for the literary critic (always privileged in studies of reading), that is, once again, for a category of professional intellectuals (*clerics*), or can it be extended to all cultural consumers? (De Certeau 169).

De Certeau believes such reading activity *can* be extended to all cultural consumers since they each bring forth their own interpretations of texts that are just as valid – regardless of whether or not the non-professional readers have the credentials or formal education to back up their insights. Instead, de Certeau is more interested in the creativity readers bring to the text. It is from such beliefs that de Certeau views readers (from all backgrounds) as “... travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (174). This particular quote marks the place in the chapter where de Certeau actually uses the term “poaching” but does not state a definition. Yet the context he provides readers with (nomads moving about freely, “despoiling the wealth” of key ancient civilizations) has colonial undertones in the sense that

poachers have the freedom of mobility, can take whatever and as much as they the want (in any manner they see fit), and not be concerned with the consequences of their poaching. Ultimately, readers are limitless in de Certeau's eyes and must be allocated the freedom to move about texts and bring forth their own subjectivities and interpretations. But who exactly are these readers and what subjectivities do they embody that grants them such extensive freedom to move about without consequences?<sup>14</sup> It is de Certeau's interpretation of readers as liberated poachers and tastemakers that informs the theory behind Henry Jenkins's intervention of fans (general audiences) as textual poachers. He builds on de Certeau's work in his own book, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins challenges the misconceptions that fans are obsessive, psychotic, and unable to develop their own tastes. Drawing from de Certeau's notion that readers are poachers, Jenkins situates fans as nomadic poachers to argue that fans have the ability to conduct their own reading and unique participatory engagement with cultural texts – even if fan practices do not fall in line with the reading methods developed by academics. After all, fans are not necessarily interested in institutional authority. Jenkins writes, “What is significant about fans in relation to de Certeau's model is that they constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto this process of cultural appropriation ... Fans are not unique in their status as textual poachers, yet, they have developed poaching to an art form” (27). For Jenkins, poaching-as-an-art-form refers to the cultural production fans have developed such as short stories, plot expansion (in relation to television shows), conventions, and other examples. Thus fans not only interpret the texts but through their

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<sup>14</sup> The subject of colonialism as metaphor is a topic for another essay but I still wanted to bring up this perspective for readers to keep in mind as to who the intended audiences are for texts like de Certeau's and how this might influence how readers engage with texts even if they (the readers) are not the intended audiences for these works.

interpretation, they also draw from the canon to present new ideas through their own cultural productions.

Unlike de Certeau, Jenkins defines poaching in his text. He explains poaching “as impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are useful or pleasurable to the reader” (24) while his idea of nomads means that “readers are not simply poachers ... they are always in movement, ‘not here or there,’ not constrained by permanent property ownership but rather constantly advancing upon another text, appropriating new materials, making new meanings” (36). Jenkins’s book set the foundation for fandom studies because of his critical engagement with fan audiences and the cultural works they produced. Additionally, his case study of a *Beauty and the Beast* fan collective helped center his fandom analysis on gender and, to an extent, sexuality.<sup>15</sup>

Both de Certeau’s and Jenkins’s interpretation of working class readers and fans as poachers who bring their own interpretations to texts (in various forms) and thus create their own cultural works with what is available to them (the bits and pieces that Seriff and Limón discuss), speaks largely to the aesthetic of rasquachismo present in Chicana studies. As previously mentioned, rasquachismo is an attitude and sensibility that informs Chicana’s approaches of making do with what they have and creating works out of the need for survival and immediacy. Rasquachismo has also been used by scholars like Shifra Goldman to describe the aesthetic relegated to working class and non-Chicana/Latina communities. Thus, rasquachismo can serve as a theoretical and aesthetic intervention for the concept of poaching due to its ties with high

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<sup>15</sup> The bulk of Jenkins’s observations are based on qualitative work he conducted with a *Beauty and the Beast* fan group made up of white women who were fans of the television show that ran from 1987-1990. This particular fan group met to view episodes of the show together, discussed plotlines, created their own stories based on the show, attended conventions, and partook in other fan-community activities. Jenkins sat in on some of their gatherings, interviewed members, and engaged in participant-observation.

and popular culture and the fact that this sensibility originated in communities of color instead of the predominately white audiences present in the work of de Certeau and Jenkins. However, the pastiche quality associated with poaching, as conceptualized by de Certeau and Jenkins, can also be tied back to the term “pocho” present in Chicana/Latina vocabulary. It is with this in mind that I now turn to my conceptualization of the textual poch@ as a way to put together bits and pieces from textual poaching and the term, “pocho,” to describe the sensibilities and digital aesthetic practices of Rio Yañez.

### ***Textual Poch@s of the World, Unite!***

Poch@, like Chicana, is a term that still holds negative connotations for some people of Mexican descent while others have reclaimed the word as a source of pride. Poch@ is/was used to refer to fruit that has rotted. The word is associated with taintedness, no longer intact or pure, spoiled. When poch@ is applied to a working class Mexican or Chicana living in the United States, it is meant as an insult or critique of the person’s Mexican identity. To be called poch@ brings into question the authenticity of their identity as Mexicans because the person might not speak Spanish or have close ties to Mexico, or practice their own version of Mexican customs that might not tie in with the dominant Mexican cultural narrative.<sup>16</sup> In other words, it is almost a way of saying that the Mexican in them has been spoiled and/or “Americanized.” On the other hand, someone who may be viewed as a poch@ is also practicing the rasquache sensibility in the sense that they might not have direct access to Mexico or the “traditional” ways of being Mexican (although this, too, is a social construction) but nonetheless, they make do with what they have. They draw from the bits and pieces available to them, both from the Mexican

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<sup>16</sup> As of the time of this writing, the word “pocho” still has not undergone significant theorization that attributes additional aspects to the word beyond its literal meaning. Thus, there is less material to engage with in relation to the term.

dominant culture and the aspects of culture based in the United States and other countries, and bring all the segments together to practice their own Mexican and/or Chicana identity in a way that speaks and makes sense to them.

Additionally, my understanding of *poch@* and the power the term can encompass is informed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and his work on the vernacular –particularly in his most well-known book, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. In this text, Gates, Jr. follows the tradition of scholars like Zora Neale Hurston by focusing his theoretical analyses on the vernacular. Rather than dismissing the vernacular as a tainted form of communication that may not follow proper form or speech, Gates, Jr. views the vernacular as a source of semiotic framing and empowerment by drawing on the signifying processes present in the tales of two African/African-American trickster figures: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey. The vernacular is situated in Gates, Jr.’s centering of folk stories and oral history tradition while the signifying process is demonstrated through the roles these two figures play in their stories as tricksters, or, as figures who push the reader and listener to analyze what they are representing in a particular story in order to learn the real meaning behind said story. As he notes in the introduction, “[t]he black tradition is double-voiced ... Signifyin(g) is the figure of the double-voiced” (Gates, Jr. xxv). In other words, things and meanings cannot be taken literally or at face value; they must be dug into or strategically chosen.

Later on, Gates, Jr. explains the importance that the process of signifyin(g) has for the Black community. He writes:

The theory of Signifyin(g) is arrived at by explicating these black cultural forms. Signifyin(g) in jazz performances and in the play of black language games is a mode of formal revision, it depends for its effects on troping, it is often

characterized by *pastiche*, and most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences. Learning how to Signify is often part of our adolescent education” (Gates Jr. 51, 52, emphasis added).

Signifyin(g) is thus a vernacular practice present in the Black community so much so that individuals are exposed to it at a young age, enabling them to learn the practice while growing up. As Gates, Jr. points out, signifyin(g) is informed by the idea of the pastiche, of imitating and drawing from multiple sources to create new meaning and communication. The focus, then, is not so much as whether the imitation is accurate or authentic but rather what all the adding, copying, and mixing ends up creating.

The aforementioned aspect of signifyin(g), the process of putting together the bits and pieces from the resources available, speaks very much to the idea of a *poch@* who, as previously mentioned, can be seen as an imitator of Mexican culture. The framing of the *poch@* as imitator may result in further misconceptions around accuracy and authenticity because the *poch@s*' cultural practices are seen as “tainted.” The textual *poch@* is an individual who experiences marginalization and/or has to justify themselves for deviating from their society's dominant narratives and cultural tastes. Their deviation results in their own interpretation and reconfiguration of their culture (usually associated with aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, physical abilities) through a *rasquache* framework – in terms of making do with what they have to create something new. Textual *poch@s*' sources of knowledge are usually cultural texts like (but not limited to): art, music, literature, ceremonial practices. They draw from their understandings of these texts – taking the bits and pieces that make sense to them and speak to their experience – to create their own cultural productions that are subversive in the sense that these new works challenge the dominant narratives that exclude



textual poch@s in the first place. Textual poch@ practices also counter the misconception that poch@s do not have the sufficient background knowledge on Mexicans, Chicanxs, Latinxs, since they (poch@s) must make reference to the coded messages of Chicanx/Latinx culture. In order to acknowledge such codes or reinterpret them, the textual poch@ would be required to have some understanding of the references they are trying to make as they resourcefully put together bits and pieces.

In addition to the vernacular present in textual poch@ practices, another factor that might cause others to overlook such acts is related to the idea of taste. Like the nomadic, poaching readers de Certeau and Jenkins write about, working class Mexican migrants and Chicanxs outside of Mexico are subjected to a hierarchy of taste as it relates to their exposure and consumption of Mexican popular culture. The influence of Mexican mass culture on working class Mexicans and Chicanxs brings into question their Mexican identity and authenticity of because they are seen as lacking the adequate upbringing, language, and sources of knowledge available to the elite Mexicans of Mexico who dictate dominant notions of Mexican identity. At the same time, Chicanxs and working class Mexican migrants must negotiate their “bicultural sensibility” while being racialized subjects in the United States. They thus become textual poch@ poachers of multiple texts, in and outside of the United States, and must draw from these texts to make their experiences decipherable to themselves and others as a way to survive in a society that seeks to exploit them, deport them, and/or kill them. In this sense, the failure of United States and Mexican society to acknowledge poch@ experiences makes textual poch@s hyperaware of their racialized and cultural differences within their group and within the larger mainstream public.

Despite their hyperawareness of difference and the threat such difference can pose, textual poch@s like Rio Yañez continue to create cultural productions. As we will see along this thesis, his ongoing fandom-based digital artwork serves as an example of how Yañez's intersectional Chicax identity, his fandom and tastes, and his approach to art all serve to not only revitalize fandom practices in a different way but also create digital art (and in turn, leaving behind documentation of his existence and experience, like *Pretty Vacant's* La Molly) that speaks to multifaceted experiences of being Chicanxs, or rather, textual poch@s in the United States.

**Chapter One:**  
**“No, It’s Not Like Any Other Love”: Morrissey Fandom in the Artwork of Rio Yañez**

***Morrissey, Morrissey, So Much To Answer For***

When I first became a fan of The Smiths and Morrissey, I did not think much of being a Chicax who liked Morrissey. Soon enough, I found out about the long-running joke that *all* Chicaxs/Latinxs are Morrissey and/or The Smiths fans.<sup>17</sup> I became a fan of The Smiths and Morrissey towards the end of my senior year of high school.<sup>18</sup> Many kids at my school were fans of Morrissey/The Smiths because of their older siblings’ musical influence on their taste – which made me dismissive of both the singer and the band since I believed people in my high school were claiming to like their music only to be cool. One day after school while I was in my friend’s car, the [then, newly-formed] radio station INDIE 101.3 FM played The Smiths’ “There Is A Light That Never Goes Out.” I quickly recognized the melody because of the well known rock en español cover/adaptation, “Esta Luz Nunca Se Apagará” by the Venezuelan singer, Mikel Erentxun. Initially I thought The Smiths were doing a cover of what I believed to be Erentxun’s original song but my friend (whose older brother is a Smiths/Morrissey fan) explained that The Smiths’ version was the original. Later that summer, I moved to Arizona and was miserable. I ended up buying The Smiths’ *The Queen is Dead* album *because* it included the song, “There Is A Light That Never Goes Out.” That album ended up changing my life and I immediately

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<sup>17</sup> I insert the “Chicaxs/Latinxs love Morrissey” information to provide some context. I briefly elaborate on some of the conversations that have happened around this topic but, reader beware, my chapter does not explore or try to explain a “why” to this phenomenon.

<sup>18</sup> Given that this chapter explores how Morrissey fandom functions in Yañez’s art, I decided to open the chapter with my own story of how I came to be a Morrissey fan. It is important for me to situate myself within the Morrissey fandom because it ultimately played a role in me learning about Rio Yañez’s work. I will share the story later in the chapter.

became a Morrissey disciple. Since then, The Smiths remain my favorite band and Morrissey is one of my favorite male singers.

Steven Patrick Morrissey was born on May 22, 1959 in Manchester, England. In 1982, he met Johnny Marr and later collaborated with Andy Rourke and Mike Joyce to form The Smiths. The band garnered attention for Marr's melodic songs peppered with Morrissey's insightful, witty lyrics. The Smiths were only active from 1982 until 1987 but their music and influence continues. After The Smiths, both Morrissey and Marr have continued their musical careers but it is Morrissey who has kept a consistent musical presence. He has managed to withstand the test of time with his wit, charm, and artistic openness. As Len Brown explains in the preface to *Morrissey: Fandom, Representations and Identities*, “[w]ith his ‘lovely singing voice,’ he has an old-fashioned, almost Victorian reforming zeal: everyday issues such as child murders, suicide, poverty, animal rights, violence, vegetarianism, racism, mental illness ... the very subjects that 99.9 percent of all recording ‘artists’ avoid for fear they will smear their lovely careers are faced head-on in Moz songs” (10). Morrissey has never been one to shy away from controversy and like his idol, Irish playwright Oscar Wilde, he baits controversy through his insightful wit.

Morrissey's clever manipulation of pop music has also earned him the title of the anti-Pop idol. The way in which he has approached his musical career serves as “[a] reminder that pop could in fact be literally an in itself: a (dangerously careening) vehicle for someone's prodigious, provocative, poisonous, perfectly beautiful scorn” (Simpson 2). Morrissey is widely known for his political incorrectness and criticisms that do not spare anyone – regardless of their title or fame. It was Morrissey's solitude, working-class upbringing, and love of popular culture and literature – with industrial Manchester as the backdrop – that made him the artist he is today.

It was Morrissey (along with other bands like Joy Division, New Order, Happy Mondays) that spurred my own interest in Manchester. In 2007, I made the pilgrimage to the notorious city with the intention to visit the places where Morrissey had lived, spent time in, and/or made reference to in his songs. My one-day outing was not planned well; I ended up getting lost and had to figure out how to get to London the next day. Even though my trip to Manchester did not turn out as I had hoped, being in the same city that inspired and influenced one of my favorite people in the entire world helped me understand his music better and furthered my appreciation of him as an artist. But it was not until a couple of years later that I first learned about others like me: Chicanxs/Latinxs who love Morrissey.

### ***Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before***

What do you call a Morrissey/The Smiths fan? Chicanx/Latinx! The perceived Chicanx/Latinx affinity for Morrissey is the subject of a documentary (William E. Jones's aptly named *Is It Really So Strange?*) and has been addressed in mass market books and media. For example, Simon Goddard and Mark Simpson, both well known British music journalists, acknowledge the Chicanx/Latinx phenomenon in their own works on Morrissey. In Simon Goddard's *Mozipedia: The Encyclopedia of Morrissey and The Smiths*, he includes an entry titled, "Latino fans." He writes, "Latinos, and especially Los Angeles Mexicans as an ethnic minority subject to prejudice and exclusion, immediately identify with his gospel of outsiderdom" (Goddard 218).<sup>19</sup> Goddard also notes that Latinxs might find Morrissey appealing

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<sup>19</sup> Morrissey is a first generation Englishman of Irish descent. His family migrated to England and due to the long-standing tensions between the Irish and English, Morrissey has stated in multiple interviews that he's never felt like England has ever been his. Additionally, Morrissey comes from a working class background and given his musical and literary interests, never quite had friends or felt connected to other people.

as a rebellion against hip hop culture and a preference for the singer's 1950s aesthetic.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Mark Simpson's *Saint Morrissey: A Portrait of This Charming Man by an Alarming Fan* highlights Morrissey's experience as an outsider growing up in Manchester and describes him as "a distinctively Catholic voice in a distinctly Protestant country. A man who lives between borders ..." (214). If Simpson situates Morrissey as a man who lives in between borders because of his cultural background, due to the fact that he is Irish and was raised Catholic, then it is possible to read these characteristics as examples of difference might draw in the Chicana/Latina audience. Additionally, Simpson brings up Morrissey's performance of masculinity as another factor that might appeal to "Mexican-American youth" and jokes that Chicana/Latinas might just like Morrissey because of their "evident good taste" (214).

Even U.S. Latina media has taken note of the Morrissey phenomenon amongst Chicana/Latinas. The Spanish-language television network, Telemundo, featured a segment on Morrissey that aired on Sunday, October 7, 2007. The segment focuses on the Morrissey fandom in the Latina community and features brief interviews with Latina fans discussing why they feel attracted to Morrissey and The Smiths. One fan in particular, Ricardo Chávez, explains how Morrissey and his music provided an escape from the violent neighborhood he grew up in: "Pues yo crecí en El Monte. En una área muy fea en El Monte y tenía muchos amigos que eran pandilleros. Lo que hizo Morrissey pa'mi y su música, pues en lugar de andar con mis amigos, me quedé en casa, escuchando su música y pues la verdad me tocó el corazón" (Telemundo). Morrissey is also interviewed as part of the segment. He provides his own theory as to why Chicana/Latinas like him so much. He states, "I think Latinos are full of emotion. Always. And whether it's tears or laughter they are ready to ... *explode* and they want to share their emotions

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<sup>20</sup> Goddard does not explain as to why Latinas in particular would want to rebel against hip hop culture or have a propensity for the 1950s so it is unclear as to what type of information led him to this conclusion.

and they want to *give* and to show and show and show. And so, I think that's the connection because when I sing, it's very expressive" (Telemundo). For Morrissey, is it the emotional nature of Chicanxs/Latinxs, along with their desire for free, open expression that draws them into his work and persona.<sup>21</sup> While I believe that the diversity of Morrissey fandom should be explored, once again, I am not interested in the argumentation that attempts to pinpoint one, all-encompassing reason as to why Chicanxs/Latinxs like Morrissey. I believe that such a narrow focus on the Chicanx/Latinx/Morrissey phenomenon prevents other related explorations from being carried out. However, I do realize the importance of mentioning the perceived phenomenon of Chicanx/Latinx Morrissey fans to provide context.

Rather than continuing to find justifications for *why* Chicanxs/Latinx Morrissey fans exist or limit this writing's perspective to my own fandom, this chapter will focus on how the affinity with/connection to Morrissey manifests in Chicanx/Latinx textual poch@ cultural production. Specifically, I will explore the cultural work these manifestations carry out through an examination of Rio Yañez's own fandom as it relates to the Morrissey-inspired digital art he has created since 2007 and makes available through his multiple social media accounts. For this chapter, I will be analyzing four of Yañez's Morrissey pieces: a Guadalupe-inspired Morrissey portrait, a Morrissey valentine from El Rio's Valentine's Day Cards collection, a Morrissey/Dr. Dre album cover, and a Morrissey/Snoop Doggy Dogg album cover. I selected these four images out of approximately 25 available Morrissey-Yañez works because of the richness of the pieces (in terms of potential analysis) and the multiple themes the pieces address in relation to fandom – such as the veneration of iconic figures, the fan as critic, and the fan as a practitioner of José

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<sup>21</sup> Morrissey has reciprocated the Latinx admiration through some of his solo work such as the song, "First of the Gang to Die," performing at concerts in L.A. in a Guadalajara Chivas soccer jersey, releasing a DVD music video compilation titled, *¡Oye Esteban!*, touring with Mexican band, Jaguares, and other instances.

Esteban Muñoz's disidentification. I argue that Yañez's reinterpretation of Morrissey not only challenges the subject matter of Chicana/Latina art but his fandom-inspired pieces also showcase a vast array of Chicana/Latina tastes and cultural interventions made possible through the re-imagining of iconic figures like Morrissey and the everyday practices of a textual poch@.

### ***To Me You Are a Work of Art***

I first became aware of Rio Yañez and his artwork back around 2009 when I came across a digital image he created of Morrissey. I do not remember exactly how I found the image but my guess is that it was probably during one of my random Google searches for "all things Morrissey." What drew me to the image was Yañez's use of Virgen de Guadalupe iconography (*Virgen de Guadalupe*, see fig. 1) in his stylization of Morrissey (see fig. 3). He selected a well-known, black and white photograph of Morrissey taken by Kevin Cummins during the singer's 1991 tour of Japan (see fig. 2). Morrissey is standing against the wall throwing the victory sign with his right hand, chin up, a smirk, and trademark bouffant hair. He is wearing a white t-shirt with an image of Oscar Wilde whose face is partially covered by text that reads, "Smiths is Dead," a reference not only to one of The Smiths' most popular albums (*The Queen is Dead*) but also alluding to the band's 1987 breakup.

In Yañez's reworking of the photograph titled, *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe*, Morrissey is cropped so that only the area from his chest and up is visible (viewers can partially see Oscar Wilde's eye peeking through).<sup>22</sup> The artist adds color to the image by making Morrissey's t-shirt a light maroon color, turning his pompadour brown, and adding a light flesh tone to the singer's skin. Yañez also playfully includes a blue cardigan, dotted with yellow stars, to Morrissey's outfit and replaces the blank wall with a bright yellow-orange mandorla.

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<sup>22</sup> *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe* is a play on Morrissey's song, "I Have Forgiven Jesus."



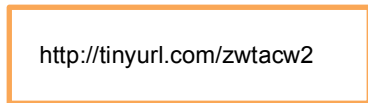


Fig. 1. *Virgen de Guadalupe*



Fig. 2. *Paradoxical Singer*, Kevin Cummins

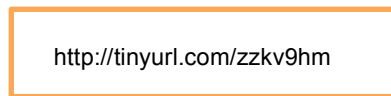


Fig. 3. *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe*, Rio Yañez

The image Yañez created not only re-envisioned Morrissey but with the artist's incorporation of key symbols from the Virgen de Guadalupe's own attire, Yañez highlights the importance of Morrissey as a key cultural icon for Chicanxs/Latinxs who most likely also revere the iconic virgin. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, Yañez elevates Morrissey to a holy status in a nod to Moz fans that are quick to refer to the crooner as Saint Morrissey. Ultimately, he is also juxtaposing the idea of fandom and fan practices as examples that parallel the devotional nature associated with religious figures. At the same time, the image can be interpreted as irreverent by some fans (and even non-Morrissey fans) because it plays with the sanctity of the Virgen de Guadalupe's depiction. Yañez's image is not the first time a celebrity or public figure is framed in terms of sainthood. James F. Hopgood's edited volume, *The Making of Saints: Contesting Sacred Ground*, focuses on the unofficial canonization of figures like Elvis Presley, Eva Perón, and Che Guevara, in an attempt to explain how and why people latch on to specific individuals

and attribute them with miraculous characteristics, such as Presley's hands having healing powers.

In the anthology's first chapter, "Saints and Near-Saints in Transition: The Sacred, the Secular, and the Popular," June Macklin writes that a star/icon image's "multivocality" provides a blank canvas for fans to re-imagine them and make the stars/icons relatable: "The stars' physical icons make visual their semiotic diversity. For example, today Elvis Presley is 'imaged' as a 'lean and energetic guitar-playing samurai' for Japanese audiences. So it is that various racial and ethnic groups can claim, 'He's just one of us' " (16). The idea that a star and/or saint can be "one of us" is clearly exemplified in Yañez's *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe* piece. The Virgen de Guadalupe became a strong iconic figure that facilitated the conversion to Catholicism in the Americas *because* her followers claim she appeared with a brown complexion and communicated with the indigenous people in their language. Her strategic representation allowed for key characteristics (in this case, phenotype and language) to surface and make her relatable to the people the Catholic Church wished to reach. In Yañez's *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe*, he plays up the joke that all Chicanxs/Latinxs are Morrissey fans by taking an iconic image of Morrissey and re-imagining it with key characteristics that are drawn from one of the most well-known Chicanx/Latinx cultural icons.

The image is also a humorous homage to Yañez's own artistic lineage given that his mother, acclaimed Chicanx artist Yolanda Lopez, is most well-known for her series of Virgen de Guadalupe-inspired images that center herself and the strong women in her family. In an interview with Christy Khoshaba for the online news source, *Mission Local*, Yañez explains that in addition to comic books, his parents have been a large influence on how he approaches his own art. He explains, "One of the things I'm interested in is iconography. And that's also an

influence on my mother's work ... so this whole idea of what an icon was, was etched into my mind from a very young age" (Khoshaba). Khoshaba follows up with the question, "What icons are you most interested in?" to which Yañez replies:

To me the icons of my childhood, as an artist still carry a lot of weight. And that's everything from comic book characters to pro wrestlers ... And there are things that I never really grew out of or lost interest in as an adult and a professional artist. It *involves sampling or remixing of those icons*, but it's really *a kind of a cultural study of presenting tropes and icons in a new light, a new way* (no page number, emphasis added).

His acknowledgment of the importance of "sampling or remixing of those icons" is reflective of the textual poch@ practices where Chicanxs/Latinxs who are not as concerned with constricting themselves to dominant understandings of Chicanx/Latinx culture are then able to make sense of their tastes, experiences, and influences by creating new cultural works like digital art.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, as a fan of such icons, Yañez's desire to carryout a "cultural study of presenting tropes and icons in a new light, a new way" exemplifies how Yañez, as a fan, is not a passive consumer but rather a cultural creator in his own right.

The content that fans like Rio Yañez create is truly a labor of love; love for both the artistic process and the subject matter.<sup>24</sup> But how does fandom reconceptualize love? Fans can be

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<sup>23</sup> Here, I would also like to point out that even though she is not the focus of my thesis, Yolanda Lopez's work with the Virgen de Guadalupe and other cultural icons also speaks to the idea of textual poch@ practices in that she, too, was not restricted by the long-held beliefs associated with previously "untouchable" images. Lopez has also done a great job of remixing and sampling and is illustrative of how textual poch@ practices have been present for a long time amongst a few select Chicanx/Latinx artists. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I am solely focusing on textual poch@ practices as they relate to fandom and digital art – hence my use of Rio Yañez's work as my case study.

<sup>24</sup> My thesis focuses on the cultural productions of Yañez as a fan but I also recognize that fans do not have to necessarily create original content, like art, to demonstrate that they *are not* passive consumers.

perceived as irrational fanatics whose obsession with a particular celebrity or artist is seen as obsessive (case in point: Beatlemania). Yañez's love for Morrissey is evidenced throughout his artwork – especially in the next piece, which merges fandom love while challenging popular understandings of love as it has been mediated by events like Valentine's Day.

### ***Last Night I Dreamt Somebody Loved Me***

In the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* titled, “Of Spiritual Strivings,” sociologist W.E.B. DuBois shares an anecdote from his childhood involving the exchange of “gorgeous visiting-cards –ten cents a package ...” among his classmates at the schoolhouse (10). DuBois explains, “The exchange was merry, till one girl, a *tall newcomer*, refused my card – refused it peremptorily with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (10, emphasis added). A visiting card, according to Agnes H. Morton, author of *Etiquette*, “is the representative of the individual whose name it bears. It goes where he, himself, would be entitled to appear, and *in his absence it is equivalent to his presence* ... Since the card is to be received as the *equivalent of one's self*, it is important that it shall be discreetly sent upon its embassy” (16, emphasis added).<sup>25</sup> The girl's refusal of DuBois's visiting card was essentially a refusal to recognize DuBois as a self worthy of visiting, interacting with, and reciprocating what he had to offer – in this case, his friendship.

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Fans are also able to participate in other ways such as discussion of the cultural production they are a fan of, hosting viewing parties (in the case of television and film), and so forth.

<sup>25</sup> I learned about Morton's 1892 book through a Google search that lead me to the blog, “History and Other Thoughts,” run by a person in Italy named Giorga.

The exchange of visiting cards is not such common practice in the United States anymore but other traditions, like the exchange of Valentine's Day cards (valentines) carry similar concepts to those of the visiting card. Valentines are usually exchanged once a year on February 14<sup>th</sup>, also known as Valentine's Day. The exchange of valentines is encouraged early on as many of the mass-produced valentines for sale often incorporate contemporary cartoon characters, animated films, and Internet celebrities. The messages on these valentines are friendly, positive, and reassuring. Rarely do they convey the complexities of love and friendship. Enter El Rio's Valentines.

Since 2006, Rio Yañez has come up with witty digital Valentine's Day cards that reference Chicanx/Latinx pop culture, non-Chicanx/Latinx mainstream U.S. popular culture, and current events. As of 2016, he has completed a total of 93 valentines. Each year he uploads them to his Facebook profile, blog, and Flickr accounts for others to download and use. The popular culture content Yañez has featured on his valentines has ranged from *Ugly Betty* and *The X-Files* to *Mi Vida Loca* and N.W.A. Out of the 93 valentines that make up Yañez's ongoing El Rio's Valentines project, six of them feature Morrissey and one of the valentines specifically focuses on The Smiths. Given that Yañez primarily uses his Facebook account to get the word out about his valentines each year, and that Facebook is a social media platform that encourages interaction amongst its users,<sup>26</sup> I decided to select the Morrissey valentine, *Tragic Moz*, because it has received the most "likes" as of the time of this writing (July 29, 2016).<sup>27</sup> Additionally, my thesis's focus on fandom lends itself to pay attention to how Yañez's virtual friends/fans both

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<sup>26</sup> Part of Facebook's interface and tools for interaction is a feature known as "like" button represented by an icon of a white hand with its thumb up. When any user posts a status update, link, video, photo, etc., other users can click on the Like button to show approval, acceptance, etc.

<sup>27</sup> On Flickr, the file is titled *Tragic Moz* so for the purposes of this section, I will be referring to the valentine as *Tragic Moz* even though I do not have a confirmation from the artist that *Tragic Moz* is the title of the piece.

interact and respond to his digital art. To give readers a sense of how Facebook and Flickr users have interacted with the valentine featured in this section, I will give some statistical information about the artwork. The valentine I selected for my analysis was uploaded onto Facebook on February 12, 2015, currently has 58 likes, and has been shared 13 times. The valentine was also uploaded onto Flickr on the same date and has been viewed 593 times. While these numbers may not be considered “viral,” the data suggests Yañez does have a significant online presence and his work garners visitors – which is quite important since Yañez’s art is most readily available through his online platforms rather than in gallery and museum spaces.

*Tragic Moz* features a colored image of Morrissey (see fig. 4). He is wearing a plain black t-shirt, his signature pompadour, and hugs an Oscar Wilde book close to his chest. Morrissey is coyly looking at the camera. His facial expression shows mischievous eyes that are enhanced by a playful smile that he is trying to hold back. Again, the usage of a Morrissey photograph that also features Oscar Wilde draws attention to Moz’s own fandom. Yañez’s modification of the Morrissey photograph into the “Tragic Moz” valentine showcases the trademark look Yañez has achieved through his valentines. He uses a wide-set serif font for his text and depending on the existing colors of the image, Yañez either makes the letters bubblegum pink outlined in hot pink or outlines the letters in bubblegum pink and fills them in with hot pink. He also always features a heart that follows the color scheme of the letters, making it somewhat reminiscent of the large heart that appears in the opening and closing credits of the television show, *I Love Lucy*.



Fig. 4. *Tragic Moz*, Rio Yañez

For *Tragic Moz*, the phrase Yañez came up with reads, “Valentine” (located across the top right side of the card) and “Let’s be tragic together” (on the bottom left of the card). Morrissey is known for the intensity of emotions in his lyrics and the melodramatic attitude towards, and performance of, elusive love. During his time with The Smiths, he penned songs with titles like, “Never Had No One Ever” and lyrics such as “I know I’m unlovable. You don’t have to tell me. I don’t have much in my life, but take it, it’s yours” (The Smiths, “Unlovable”). Through his valentine, Yañez alludes to the melancholy that Morrissey is infamous for, particularly through his inclusion of the word “tragic” in the valentine’s text. In the online *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, tragic is defined as “[o]f or relating to an event, situation, etc., that causes great suffering, destruction, or distress, esp. one that involves death on a large scale or premature death; catastrophic, disastrous, devastating” (no page number). Surely many people can agree to some extent that love can be tragic, especially if it remains unrequited because it can create a sense of alienation (such as in DuBois’s visiting card experience), suggest a lack of validation, or bring the rejected to question their worthiness. Under the entry of “love” in *Mozipedia: The Encyclopedia of Morrissey and The Smiths*, Simon Goddard writes, “A miserable lie. Or so Morrissey has always maintained” (231). Goddard includes a 1985 Morrissey quote in which the singer claims to associate love with pain “[b]ecause it’s never been reciprocated. Desire is extremely excruciating to me, and as far as I know, that’s all there is. I can’t imagine response, and I can’t imagine being loved by somebody whom one loves . . . A lot of people don’t want to carry around with them the notion that you care that much” (231). Morrissey’s ever-present heartbreak has drawn in many fans who share the singer’s pain and pessimistic view of love.

At the same time, most mainstream productions and mass-produced Valentine's Day merchandise present an idealized notion of love, one that is free from rejection, problems, or omits the constant effort that must be put into relationships in order to make them work. In her book, *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks critiques romanticized notions of love that obscure what love is, can be, or should be. Instead she suggests that "[t]he word 'love' is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if *we used it as a verb*" (hooks, 4, emphasis added). hooks also draws from the definition of love that M. Scott Peck presents in *The Road Less Traveled*. He defines love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (268). Love, when interpreted as a verb that acknowledges the work all parties involved must enact in order to help each other grow and nurture, it creates a sense of hope that is not necessarily present amongst the understandings of love as a noun. Love as a noun is a fantasy – which is probably why many end up disappointed – including Morrissey.

In the *Tragic Moz* valentine, Yañez is using humor to subvert the romanticizing of "tragic" experiences of love. The valentine's text, "Valentine, Let's Be Tragic Together," is Yañez's way of acknowledging the shortcomings of love that Morrissey and other people experience and as such, he draws on these shared experiences as a way to create an opening for hope and possibilities. Rather than perpetuating an embrace of "tragic" and encouraging wallowing in negative emotions, Yañez's reworking of Moz's lost faith in love situates love as a verb that leads to connections with others. In doing so, Yañez is drawing from one of the most-well known icons of misery (Morrissey) and remixes him, as well as misery, in a new light that shows not all hope is lost if people are willing to take the time to reconsider their understandings of both love and tragedy. Additionally, Yañez's position as a fan and textual poch@ means that



as much as he loves and reveres Morrissey, Yañez knows the singer is not above being critiqued. Fan criticism is a common practice amongst fandom communities. As Henry Jenkins explains in *Textual Poachers*, “Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate ...” (86). Through his valentine, Yañez is speculating on what love would look like for Morrissey if he approached unrequited love and the “tragic” aspect of desire from a place of action and hope. After all, as Morrissey once sang, “If it’s not love then it’s the bomb, the bomb, the bomb that will bring us closer together” (The Smiths, “Ask”) – in this case, the bomb is the discourse of love.

If the first Morrissey-Yañez piece showed Morrissey bathed in a holy light, and the second piece subjected Morrissey (and love) to critique, then the next two pieces showcase how Morrissey serves as a vehicle for fans like Yañez to create *new* fandom spaces while simultaneously engaging with other forms of popular culture critique.

### ***A Rush and A Push and the G-Funk Rap Is Ours***

On his blog post titled, “Mexicans Love Morrissey,” Yañez explains that he and his friends are hosting a Morrissey-inspired event. The party’s focus is on Morrissey, The Smiths, and Los Angeles nostalgia. He includes audio in his blog from a short interview conducted between himself and Elena White and Katynka Martinez. In the interview, Yañez asks White to explain why they are gathered and she answers, “We’re here to help make one woman’s dream come true ... I would say two women and one man’s dream come true ... the fusion of 80s commercials from Los Angeles with the spirit and the love of Morrissey and his music, I think will create an unforgettable and really bizarre evening.” She later adds, “I’d like to honor my

family and friends ... all of the outer L.A. county cities filled with angsty, second and third-generation Mexican-American goths and greasers who find themselves in love with a man from Manchester ... ” (Yañez, “Mexicans Love Morrissey”). In the comments section of the blog post, Maya C (Maya Chinchilla) posted “I’ve loved many a Mexican and also have grown up loving Morrissey ... I’ve done my time yo! I’m here to infiltrate as a Central American who loves Morrissey. Best recognize” (Yañez, “Mexicans Love Morrissey”). To which Yañez responds, “Eyyyyy! It’s nothing but love. The party is meant to be all inclusive, we just like the way the words Mexicans and Morrissey flow together” (“Mexicans Love Morrissey”). Later on May 5, 2011, Yañez debuts his *Chicano Heart, Irish Blood* piece and his *Mexicans Love Morrissey (Doggystyle)* piece on May 13, 2011 to help promote the event.<sup>28</sup> In this chapter, I focus on the Morrissey-inspired, digital artworks Yañez created as part of the “Mexicans Love Morrissey” event.

“Mexicans Love Morrissey” took place on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in Los Angeles at Elena White’s house. In addition to an art show of Yañez’s Moz art, the event also included an 80s dance party, screening 80s Los Angeles area commercials, games like Spin the Bottle and Truth or Dare, alcohol, vegetarian potluck, and Morrissey-influenced costumes were encouraged. Additionally, Yañez’s collaboration with White and Martinez on “Mexicans Love Morrissey” builds on the understanding that Chicanx/Latinx are Morrissey fans but makes the intervention since it showcases how Chicanx/Latinx Moz fans are not passive consumers. Instead, their mutual love for one figure and multiple genres/styles, brings them together to claim a space where they then can carry out their own interpretations and understandings of Morrissey through hip hop and nostalgia.

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<sup>28</sup> *Chicano Heart, Irish Blood* is a play on Morrissey’s song “Irish Blood, English Heart.”

Both pieces, *Chicano Heart*, *Irish Blood* and *Mexicans Love Morrissey (Doggystyle)*, are Yañez's homage to the classic album covers of, arguably, two of the most canonical g-funk rap releases of the hip hop genre: Dr. Dre's December 15, 1992 solo debut release, *The Chronic* and Snoop Doggy Dogg's debut, *Doggystyle* released on November 23, 1993 – both on Death Row/Interscope Records. *The Chronic* and *Doggystyle* are some of the most acclaimed hip hop albums and they helped secure Dr. Dre and Snoop's role in the rap industry as well as their innovative take on rap with their experimentation of G-funk.

Partly inspired by Simon Goddard's comment that Chicanxs/Latinx love Morrissey because in doing so, they are “conscious[ly] rebelli[ng] against the prevalent hip hop culture as a means of asserting their own identity” (218) and by the very limited analysis of rock music in Chicanx/Latinx scholarship, my analyses of Rio Yañez's hip hop homages is framed by José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification.<sup>29</sup> Introduced in his text, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz explains that disidentification is a survival strategy, a “mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11). In this section, I argue that Yañez's textual poch@ practices are examples of disidentification and result in the digital art mash-ups that re-work the hypermasculine g-funk genre by incorporating the flamboyant Morrissey.

G-funk is a subgenre of hip hop that emerged in the early 1990s and combines styles from gangsta rap and funk. Gangsta rap, G-funk, but in particular, hip hop as a whole, have often come under criticism for the content and lifestyles the genres promote. Tricia Rose's *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop – and Why It Matters*, addresses

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<sup>29</sup> Some exceptions to this statement include George Lipsitz, Michelle Habell-Pallan, Steve Loza, David Reyes, Tom Waldman, and Alice Bag –all scholars and public figures who have addressed Chicanxs/Latinxs role in the United States rock 'n' roll scene through their work.

the debates surrounding this musical genre. Rose discusses the role gangsta rap played in mainstreaming hip hop and the themes that popularized it:

In the early to middle 1990s, following the meteoric rise of West Coast hip hop music producer Dr. Dre and of N.W.A., widely considered a seminal gangsta rap group, West Coast gangsta rap solidified and expanded the already well-represented street criminal icons –thug, hustler, gangster, and pimp –in a musically compelling way ... the gangsta life and all its attendant violence, criminality, sexual ‘deviance,’ and misogyny have ... stood at the heart of what appeared to be ever-increasing hip hop record sales (3).

The content of gangsta rap, along with the catchy beats and lyrics that speak about hard lifestyles, created a strong consumer desire for this style of music but criticism about the lyrics the rappers penned claim it promotes violent and misogynist behavior.

Part of the appeal, Rose notes, is the clever mixing of musical styles (263). As a fan of hip hop, Rose discusses how conflicted she feels when she listens to G-funk classics like Snoop Doggy Dogg and Dr. Dre’s “Gin and Juice.” Initially, she is drawn to the song because of the musical style and does not pay much attention to the lyrics – partly because the rappers use slang she does not understand. But when she decides to listen closely to what is actually being said, she is conflicted as to whether she should “give herself over to the power of funk” even though the music scores content that might be against her (Rose 262). At the same time, Rose does not want to do away with hip hop. Instead she writes, “Music comes from but also makes community, so the question becomes: What kind of community do we want to make?” (Rose 264). Yañez’s artwork, along with what the pieces advertise, serve as an example of the type of community that can be possible when a fan like Yañez mixes aspects of dominant ideology he

disidentifies with, interrupts the problematic ideology with another cultural figure, and creates a space where both can exist and speak to the larger fandom community.

The first piece, *Chicano Heart, Irish Blood* (see fig. 7), is Yañez's take on the album cover for Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* (see fig. 6). The album artwork has a lot of white space that creates a clean look. The white space/cover is outlined by a fine gold line that curves inward when it reaches the top right and bottom right corners. In the top center, the rapper's name, Dr. Dre, is printed in wide, serif golden letters that curve downwards in a half-circle. The album's name is presented at the bottom of the cover in slim, blue sans serif type that curves up in a half-circle. At the center is a colored portrait photograph of Dr. Dre. He is staring at the camera with a serious expression and pursed lips. He wears a black baseball cap, a black t-shirt, and has pierced ears. The lighting in the image has been manipulated to create dark shadows that cover the left side (from the viewer's perspective) of Dr. Dre's face. Where the shadow is darkest on his face, the background is a light gray. Where the light is focused on the right side of his face (from the viewer's perspective), the background is black. This portrait is enclosed in a gold oval that is decorated with tassels and regal details reminiscent of French baroque architecture décor.

The album is Dr. Dre's (Andre Young) first release as a solo artist and includes hip hop classics like "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang" (featuring Snoop Doggy Dogg) and "Deez Nuuuts." Here are some lyrics from both tracks to give an idea of what topics the album addresses as a whole: "Never let me slip, cause if I slip, then I'm slippin'//But if I got my Nina then you know I'm straight trippin'//And Imma continue to put the rap down, put the mack down//And if you bitches talk shit, I'll have to put the smack down" (Dr. Dre, "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang"); "Got the Dana's on your hooptie and your fly-ass bitch//Throw off, go off, show off, I take that ho//If she proper, Imma pop her, the ho hopper" (Dr. Dre, "Deez Nuuuts"). The lyrics demonstrate a

hypermasculinity characterized by gaining respect through violence and being sexually promiscuous without consequences. The album artwork and title also reference a genealogy of masculinity through drug use.

*The Chronic* cover is a reference to the logo, “Zig-Zag Original White” for the French rolling paper company, Zig-Zag (see fig. 5) which depicts a zouave soldier framed by the same oval that contains Dr. Dre’s portrait with the exception of the lines being thicker and copper-colored on the Zig-Zag version. According to the company’s website, it was a zouave soldier who first came up with the concept of rolling tobacco in paper: “... his clay pipe broken by a bullet. He had the brilliant idea of rolling his tobacco in a piece of paper torn from a bag of gunpowder. For over 130 years, the image of Le Zouave has been part of the all Zig-Zag products as a tribute to that creative soldier” (Zig-Zag, no page number). While the rolling papers are advertised for tobacco use, the papers have been used to roll other contents that can also be smoked.



Fig. 5. “Zig-Zag Original White”



Fig. 6. *The Chronic*



Fig. 7. *Chicano Blood, Irish Heart*, Rio Yañez

As a title, *The Chronic* references many things from the idea of chronic as a habit that cannot be quit, the slang term for the best quality weed, to longer word, “chronicle” which suggests what is presented is an account of the truth (such as the chronicle of Dr. Dre’s upbringing in Compton). Keeping this in mind, along with the fact that the album cover (see fig. 6), is a riff on the Zig Zag logo, complete with Dr. Dre’s portrait replacing the image of the zouave soldier, the album, its creator, and its content all suggest that it is a quality musical

offering that is so good, creative, and original, it can create a habit for the listener who might become addicted to the album. This has proven true since *The Chronic* is still influencing contemporary musicians and is often named as the album that helped artists redefine their sound and approach to music.

Yañez's *Zig-Zag/Chronic* homage presents the same characteristics: white, clean space, gold trim, and French baroque details. However, the text reads "Mexicans for Morrissey" and instead of Dr. Dre or the zouave soldier, a digital rendition of Morrissey is enclosed in the gold-trimmed oval. The digital image of Morrissey is reminiscent of Yañez's *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe* piece because he incorporates key iconic details from representations of the Virgen of Guadalupe onto the singer such as the mandorla and the iconography of the Virgen's attire. Morrissey's facial expression is also suggestive of Guadalupe's face. For example, he has his eyes closed and tilts his head to the viewer's left. The Virgen is always depicted having her head tilted downwards and her gaze looks down as well (depending on the rendition a viewer is analyzing, she may also look like she has her eyes completely closed). In both instances, the downward gaze/closed eyes suggests both submission and deep thought (perhaps Morrissey and the Virgen de Guadalupe are thinking of their devotees?). In addition to the similarities with the Virgen de Guadalupe, Morrissey wears a dark pink collared shirt and a yellow tie. His head and torso are covered with a Guadalupe cloak: blue with gold trim and gold stars spread throughout. Behind Morrissey is a similar yellow-orange mandorla background similar to the one featured in *I Have Forgiven Guadalupe*, where the colors radiate to mimic the specter of light. By stating "Mexicans For Morrissey" and presenting another "holy" rendition of the singer that illustrates several layers of femininity (downward, submissive gaze, color choice – bright, pink), Yañez is interrupting the hypermasculinity associated with both the zouave soldier and Dr. Dre. Both

figures in their respective depictions are associated with ruggedness and innovation under duress that is supposed to emphasize how “manly” they are (the zouave soldier coming up with a new product during a time of war, Dr. Dre coming up with a new product during a time of violence and racialization in the Los Angeles area). Morrissey, on the other hand, is also known for his creativity and innovativeness. However, his cultural productions are influenced by his interest in literature, poetry, theater, and 1960s female pop singers. Morrissey’s upbringing was emotionally rough but he did not necessarily face violence on the streets. Instead, he was a witty loner for the most part and preferred to get lost in his books and fascination with pop music. Thus, by placing Morrissey in a re-imagining of a hypermasculine, hip hop context, Yañez demonstrates how a man like Morrissey – who is English but of Irish descent, white, emotional, deals with controversial themes, and is known for his flamboyant performances — can be showcased in a setting that celebrates the innovativeness, variation, and strength of masculinity. This is not to say that Morrissey is not masculine; on the contrary, Morrissey has helped redefine masculinity by refusing to address his sexuality, writing songs that keep the subject’s gender and sexuality ambiguous, and bridging elements of the feminine into his performances with his use of flowers, pearls, and scarves.<sup>30</sup> It is this challenge to the Westernized norms of hypermasculinity that elevates Morrissey to a creative innovator who merits to be seen amongst the likes of the zouave soldier and Dr. Dre. Yañez’s further re-centers Moz in a hypermasculine space in the next piece, *Mexicans Love Morrissey (Doggystyle)*.

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<sup>30</sup> For example, one of the most popular songs Morrissey penned while still part of The Smiths was “Hand in Glove.” In this song, Morrissey sings, “Hand in glove//The sun shines out of our behinds//No it’s not like any other love//This one is different, because it’s us//And if the people stare, then the people stare//Oh, I really don’t know and I really don’t care.” He sings about a new love, one that makes others raise their eyebrows but the song and lyrics are ambiguous enough where it is never confirmed why this particular relationship is “different” or causes others to gossip.



Like Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*, Snoop Doggy Dogg's debut, *Doggystyle*, helped with the mainstreaming of West Coast G-Funk rap. The original artwork (see fig. 9) done by Joe Cool, focuses on an anthropomorphized brown dog dressed in blue jeans, loafers, a blue/teal/brown checkered long-sleeved shirt, gold chain necklace, and a white baseball cap. He is supposed to represent the rapper, Snoop Doggy Dogg (hereon after, Snoop). Snoop is on top of a doghouse with red roofing and yellow walls. The doghouse wall that is visible to the viewer has a nailed gray board that reads "Beware of Dogg!!" The doghouse's design is reminiscent of the Peanuts character Snoopy's own doghouse (see fig. 8), a gesture Joe Cool makes given the origins of Snoop's rapper name. In the image, Snoop is straddling the roof as he positions himself to the right side of the doghouse. He is reaching down, trying to grope the tail/rear end of an anthropomorphized, scantily clad, brown female dog. However, only the lower half of her body is visible (sticking outside of the doghouse) since she is kneeling and the rest of her body appears to be inside the doghouse. Near her leg, on the green grass, lie a bone and dog bowl.

Behind the doghouse is a red brick wall that breaks apart towards the top where the bricks have been arranged to spell out the album's name. On top of the wall are three different dogs and each of them has a dialogue bubble near their mouth. All three of the are quoting lyrics from George Clinton's hit, "Atomic Dog" which Snoop samples on the track (and the first single released off the album), "Who Am I (What's My Name)?" The bottom right side of the artwork features an opening in the brick wall where a horrified white dogcatcher is holding a net. Near his head is text that reads "Dat Mean Old Dog Catcher" with an arrow pointing to his face. Below the dogcatcher is a white rat identified as Ratt Tat-Tat with a dialogue bubble stating, "Snoop is always on top of things!" which could either refer to Snoop's initiative, his position on

top of the doghouse roof, or a sexual innuendo as referenced by the album name and the depiction of the unidentified anthropomorphized female dog.



Fig. 8. “Snoopy’s Dog House,” Charles M. Schulz



Fig. 9. *Doggystyle*, Joe Cool

*Doggystyle* includes the hits, “Who Am I? (What’s My Name?),” “Gin and Juice,” and “Ain’t No Fun (If the Homies Can’t Have None).” Similar to the content of *The Chronic*, the tracks on *Doggystyle* promote a hypermasculine lifestyle that takes little notice of the consequences. Some of the lyrics from “Gin and Juice” like, “I got bitches in the living room gettin’ it on and they ain’t leavin’ til six in the mornin’ (six in the mornin’)//So what you wanna do? Sheeeit//I got a pocket full of rubbers and my homeboys do, too” and the chorus, “Rollin’ down the street//smokin’ indo//sippin’ on gin and juice//laiiid back//with my mind on my money and my money on my mind” showcase Snoop’s worry-free, indulgent approach to life (Snoop Doggy Dogg, “Gin and Juice”). The easygoing attitude demonstrated throughout the record is captured in the album art where Snoop’s anthropomorphized counterpart follows his sexual desires in a manner that disregards consent or authority.



Fig. 10. *Mexicans Love Morrissey (Doggystyle)*, Rio Yañez

In Yañez’s rendition of *Doggystyle* (see fig. 10), Morrissey is dressed in similar attire as Snoop with the exception of pink gladioli tucked inside Morrissey’s left jean back pocket. He is known for performing with gladioli in his back pocket and using them as props in his

performance as he swings them around while he sings – attributing femininity in his live performances. Moz is also straddling the doghouse roof (the “Beware of Dogg!” sign has been replaced with another that reads “Beware of Moz”) as he reaches down to the right side, not trying to grope a scantily clad female dog but rather the well-known brown eagle featured on the Mexican flag. Here, we see that Yañez is not only riffing off of hip hop iconography but Mexican iconography that, like the Virgen of Guadalupe, is tied to the mythology of Chicana/Latina origins. The brown eagle is perched on cacti supported by the red dog bowl labeled Moz. Just like on the Mexican flag, the eagle grasps a green snake in its beak. The snake in *Mexicans Love Morrissey (Doggystyle)* has a dialogue bubble that asks, “What the fuck? Why you bitin’?” Although the dialogue is one-sided (the viewer never learns what the brown eagle responds – probably because it needs to keep the snake in its mouth) and brief but humorous, the snake is challenging the brown eagle’s hypermasculine (and violent) approach to domination – a sort of counter-narrative never associated with this image that so many esteem since it symbolizes the “origins” of the strong, Mexica culture. In the background, a red brick wall takes up most of the space as the bricks are shaped to read Morrissey towards the top. On the very top of the artwork, in yellow lettering, is the phrase “Mexicans Love” while instead of dogs, three different humans are on top of the wall. They are Rio Yañez, Elena White, and Katynka Martinez. Each of them has a dialogue bubble that references both Snoop and George Clinton as the text from the dialogue bubbles collectively reads, “Why must I be like dat? Why must I chase da cat? Nuttin’ but da MOZ in me!!!”

In the space where the dogcatcher is featured on the original *Doggystyle* artwork is where none other than Robert Smith, lead singer of The Cure, is. He is presented with an all black acoustic guitar in an all-black ensemble with his teased hair, full makeup, and a tear running

down his right cheek. There is an arrow pointing at his head with text that reads, “Dat mean old Robert Smith!” while a light blue dead rat covered in blood and holding cheese is below him with an arrow pointing at it with the phrase “First of the gang to die.” The rat and text are obvious references to Morrissey’s popular song about Hector, a former gang member.

Meanwhile, Yañez’s inclusion of a crying Robert Smith is quite funny since both he and Morrissey have had an ongoing feud since the 1980s. Feuds between artists are also popular sources of inspiration for song material – especially in the hip hop world where having “beef” (conflict) with other rappers often results in unflattering insults and “diss tracks” as forms of retaliation. By addressing the “beef” between Morrissey (who is actually a long-time vegetarian) and Robert Smith, Yañez is once again recontextualizing hypermasculinity and bravado by focusing on the feud between two men who are known for the emotional distress expressed through performance and song as well as their challenging of gender and sexuality (Smith’s iconic look includes black eyeliner and smeared red lipstick).

Yañez, who often references hip hop culture in his work, is a fan of both Morrissey and hip hop but does not see the two genres or lifestyles as mutually exclusive. As Muñoz states about disidentification, it “can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production” (25). In this case, Yañez may listen to hip hop and appreciate the cultural legacy of G-funk but disidentify with the restricted understandings of gender the rappers represent. But rather than being completely dismissive of hip hop as an art form, Yañez is able to “shuffle back and forth” between his different tastes (hip hop, Morrissey, art) to create something new. After all, disidentification:

is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural

text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications (Muñoz 31).

Yañez's artwork honors both Morrissey and hip hop. In doing so, Yañez not only continues his interest in working with icons and iconic popular culture images, but reconfigures such icons in a way that presents them in a new light while simultaneously challenging ideas of what Chicanx/Latinx are supposed to like. Can Chicanx/Latinx like Morrissey? Can Chicanx/Latinx like hip hop? Yañez's work answers both questions in the affirmative and makes the case that a fan can disidentify with a piece of cultural production but still find value in it through the recoding of the content into something that *does* resonate with the fan. Rather than being held back by the ideas that he might not be the target audience for a specific work (i.e. G-funk), Yañez brings forth his own tastes, talent, and cultural understandings to make popular culture work for him instead of letting it exclude him.

### ***I Started Something I Couldn't Finish***

In this chapter, I focused on digital artwork by Rio Yañez that used British singer Morrissey as a muse. Morrissey has long been associated with Chicanx/Latinx fans and this phenomenon has created speculation as to why such an affinity exists. Part of the fascination with Chicanx/Latinx Morrissey fandom seems to stem from the assumption that Chicanx/Latinx would not typically be an audience for Morrissey's work. The assumption stems from the idea that Chicanx/Latinx are either nationalistic or devout to their ethnic and racial roots. If a U.S. Dominican music fan expressed their love for bachata or if a Chicanx who is a fan of art writes a book on a cultural figure like Frida Kahlo, their intentions might go unquestioned by dominant

U.S. and Latinx society because the fans in this example are focusing on cultural productions and figures that are historically tied to the fans' ethnicity and heritage. However, the fact that Morrissey is a cultural figure who is English, sings in English, and makes cultural references to figures like James Dean and Oscar Wilde, creates the idea that only those in tune with "white culture" (read: white people) would actually be the ones (or type of fan) that would appreciate his art. However, in creating false limitations of what a Chicana/Latina is *supposed* to like given their ethnic and racial background, notions of Chicana/Latina essentialism are reinforced. Such essentializations can be hurtful since it can turn into the policing of who can like what and when, thus hindering cultural exchange and understanding.

Instead of being restricted and held back by preconceived Chicana/Latina cultural limitations, textual pochs like Yañez who, through disidentification as a survival strategy, demonstrate the ability to be empowered to create new understandings of taste and iconography while challenging ideas of dominant ideology that are tied to race and ethnicity as it is understood within the Chicana/Latina community. Yañez's reworkings of Morrissey through his digital art give the singer a new dimension of humor and cultural relevancy as he is connected to concepts of sainthood, love, and hip hop's hypermasculine culture.

At the same time, Yañez's medium (the digital) and content (Morrissey) help reconfigure what Chicana/Latina art should depict and how (mural vs. digital art, for example). Further scholarly work focusing on the work of Rio Yañez and Morrissey can highlight the importance of acknowledging the cultural interventions these iconic figures do and how their roles as fan and muse can help push what the field of Chicana/Latina Studies could be (and center on) in the long run.

## **Chapter Two: He said, “Hola, cómo está?” He said “Konnichiwa”**

The Spring 2013 issue of *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* featured one of Rio Yañez’s “Ghetto Frida” pieces as its cover art.<sup>31</sup> In conjunction with *Aztlán*’s inclusion of his art Yañez penned an artist’s communiqué titled, “Aztlán on Blast: Social Media Art.” The majority of the communiqué focuses on the role social media has played in helping Yañez distribute his digital art as well as influencing his aesthetic approaches based on the information he finds on the Internet. He particularly addresses how Japanese fandom and youth subculture has been present in his most recent work. Under the section, “Tokyo Cholos and Homegirl Purikura,” Yañez explains, “... part of my visual art practice is dedicated to exploring how Chicano and Japanese youth have used social media to exchange aesthetics and language” (Yañez, “Aztlán On Blast,” 257). The Chicanx and Japanese youth Yañez is referring to, is specifically tied to the East Los Angeles cholx subculture.

Rio Yañez’s fascination with Japanese culture and iconography manifested itself early on in his life and art through various forms. In his interview with Christy Khoshaba for *Mission Local*, an online news source, Yañez explains how, in addition to his parents, his work is influenced by an early interest in comic books and Japanese icons like Godzilla. He states, “I was obsessed with Godzilla movies when I was a kid. And there are things that I never really grew out of or lost interest in as an adult ...” (Khoshaba, no page number). Godzilla, the Japanese Gojira monster, has garnered a strong following internationally and is often attributed as one of

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<sup>31</sup> “Ghetto Frida” is one Yañez’s digital art collections that incorporates Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, into scenes around San Francisco’s Mission district. She is depicted as a 90s chola who enjoys cruising around the neighborhood in her low rider and declaring her love for Diego Rivera through graffiti. The image, along with the rest of the collection can be found on Yañez’s blog and Flickr account.

the key figures responsible for Japanese culture's appeal in the United States.<sup>32</sup> From his initial exposure to Godzilla, Yañez has pursued his interest in Japanese culture through technological innovations such as social media platforms, photo editing applications, and photo booths. In this chapter, I will be focusing on Yañez's love of Japanese culture and use of social media aesthetics in his art as examples of textual poch@ practice by engaging with two of Yañez's portrait collections: his 2009, *Tokyo Cholos* series that was part of his first solo-curated exhibition titled, *Hybridity*, and his ongoing Purikura portraits with performance artist, Mayra Ramirez (Hella Breezy).<sup>33</sup> Drawing from Homi Bhabha's understanding of hybridity and mimicry and two of Yañez's portrait collections as my case studies, I explore how the cultural productions that emerge from Yañez's online cross-cultural encounters are artistic interventions that disrupt essentialized understandings of Chicanx identity. In doing so, I want to demonstrate how Yañez re-imagines hybridity and mimicry in a way that proposes a rearticulation of these concepts as proposed by Homi Bhabha.

### ***No Seas Bhabhoso, Listen to Your Theoretical Homi***

Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry are featured in his 1999 text, *Location of Culture*, where he explores how culture is conceptualized and practiced in a post-colonial world.<sup>34</sup> In his "Introduction," Bhabha explains the importance of space and time, in a post-colonial, global world, as it ties to his idea of the "beyond" – the space of disorientation and movement that enables the production of "complex figures of difference and identity, past and

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on the Godzilla and Japanese-U.S. phenomenon, see *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage* edited by William Tsutsui.

<sup>33</sup> For a definition of Textual Poch@, refer to the "Introduction."

<sup>34</sup> Homi Bhabha's pieces on hybridity and mimicry featured in *Location of Culture* were previously published in *October* and *Critical Inquiry*. See works cited.



present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (2). Essentially, the beyond refers to an in-between space, a terrain “for evaluating strategies of selfhood – singular and communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha, 2). Can the Internet, specifically social media platforms, serve as an example of what the beyond might look like? If we take the Internet as a space that is not bound by time (in the sense that multiple “times” can exist simultaneously – for example, content that was created five years ago can still be accessed and not disrupt the ability for new content to be created within the same platform; the past, present, and future coexist), then yes, it is a space where identities can be created, contested, and collaborated on (as will be exemplified in Yañez’s *Tokyo Cholos* series). These identity-centered evaluations, explorations, and discourses that occur on the Internet can be better understood through Bhabha’s notions of hybridity and mimicry. But first, I would like to point out that the bulk of Bhabha’s analyses and theories of culture in the post-colonial world specifically focus on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. However, part of my intervention in using Bhabha’s concepts is to demonstrate how the radical potential of these two concepts can be present even among two cultures (in this case, Japanese and Chicana) that do not have history of colonization with each other.

Bhabha defines hybridity as “the sign of the productivity of the colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal ... ” (159). In the colonial/colonized context, hybridity is performed by the colonized who incorporate aspects of the colonial power into their own practices of living and resistance. For example, Bhabha discusses a group of people outside of Delhi in the 1800s who enjoyed reading and owning a copy of the Christian Bible in the English language but refused to

take the sacrament because the English ate beef – which went against their religious beliefs. As such, “[h]ybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power” (Bhabha, 159). In the case of the colonial subjects in Delhi, the distribution of the English Bible was an attempt to convert them into Christianity and while the subjects partially conceded by requesting copies of the bible, they treated the book as a source of novelty and information rather than an authority reference that influenced their everyday behavior. The colonial subjects’ ambivalence towards the bible as an extension of colonial authority also proved to be a form of subversion since they continued to resist conversion.

Similar to hybridity, mimicry can also be an act of subversion against the colonial power. For Bhabha, [colonial] mimicry “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite ...*” (122). Bhabha’s understanding of mimicry brings to mind the example of the colonial subject in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* who leaves to France in order to learn how to better imitate the French colonial power through dress, language, and education. When the colonial subject returns to his homeland, he is viewed as sell-out by his peers who mock him for trying to be something that he is not: French, European (Fanon, 20). The effectiveness of mimicry relies heavily on ambivalence and excessively producing difference to the extent that it acknowledges that the Other can *aspire* to be like the source of power but will never actually ever reach equal footing to be identical. However, for Bhabha, mimicry is not just about focusing on its negative connotations that can emerge by a colonized subject imitating the colonizer. Instead, he views the process of mimicry as way to disrupt coloniality. He claims that “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace”

(Bhabha, 123) because the process of mimicry exposes the fragility of the colonizer's authority in the sense that no particular authenticity can be pinpointed that would then allow a colonized subject to be an exact copy of authority. If no true essence can be attributed to the colonizer, what aspect of their identity truly holds power? Mimicry thus exposes the social construction behind the authority figure and challenges the essentialism that is claimed but does not actually exist. While I will be applying aspects of Bhabha's hybridity and mimicry onto a different context – specifically, two cultures that do not have a history of colonization between one another — these concepts are useful for considering how cross-cultural interactions occur in the digital world as well as how textual poch@ practices, through the Japanese-influenced work of Rio Yañez, bring into question the essentialism – which also entails a relation of authenticity/authority/inclusions and exclusions – around specific Chicax identities.

### ***Pachucxs, Cholxs, y Chuntarxs...Aca los Tokyo Cholxs Rifan***

Rio Yañez received his professional artistic training at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, CA. While a student at CalArts, Rio Yañez was able to meet some Japanese exchange students from Tama Arts College (Tokyo). He decided to stay in touch with the students through a Japanese social media site called Mixi. Mixi is a social media site that works similarly to MySpace as it allows users to upload images of themselves, customize their profiles with different templates and graphic art, and share entries that hyperlink to other users' profiles who also list similar interests. When Yañez made his Mixi profile, he listed Chicano art and Chicano culture as part of his interests and was soon surprised by what he found:

I was shocked to discover thousands of young Japanese self-identified Chicanos, Chicanas, cholos, cholas, and Aztecs. This discovery sent me on an obsessive path to investigate this subculture of Chicano aesthetics, slang, music in Japan and how social media was propelling it forward. To my utter amazement there were groups

on mixi that modeled themselves after Chicano lowrider car clubs, Sureños, Norteños, and Mechistas. As a Chicano nerd that was made to feel isolated by my long fascination with anime, manga, and Japanese pop culture, it didn't seem possible that such mutual interest would exist. As I gained access to their world, it was clear how much social networking websites have allowed greater access to images of Chicanos for these teenagers and have likewise allowed them to find a public audience for their alter-egos ("Aztlán on Blast," 257).

Other Chicax like Yañez have also taken notice of the appeal of Chicax culture (specifically cholx culture) amongst some Japanese youth subcultures. Gabriel San Roman's *OC Weekly* article, "When East Los Meets Tokyo: Chicano Rap and Lowrider Culture in Japan," focuses on the Chicax music and car culture's appeal overseas. According to San Roman, the interest of Chicax culture to Japanese people was partially influenced by, and grew because of, the re-issuing of Chicax soul era classic recordings by the Japan-based label, Barrio Gold (San Roman).<sup>35</sup> The music that comes out of this genre has been taken up by the Japanese youth in their own creation of new music inspired by the sounds of G-funk and Chicax rap.<sup>36</sup> Some of these artists have taken to social media to distribute their music while simultaneously creating an audience in Japan for these particular genres that in turn welcomes Chicax musicians.

The appeal of Chicax culture in Japan has drawn mixed feelings from self-identified U.S. Chicaxs/Latinxs. San Roman writes, "Some Chicanos express supposed 'poser' dismay, but a greater majority are seemingly imbued with a certain sense of pride that their cultural expression has been adopted from far away" (no page number).<sup>37</sup> Chicax soul and rap labels

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<sup>35</sup> The article does not provide extensive context as to what led to the reissue of Chicax soul classics or how the market for such genre developed in Japan. The topic of classic Chicax soul music's appeal in Japan is beyond the scope of this chapter's focus but does showcase the need for Chicax/Latinx studies scholarship to explore these nascent topics.

<sup>36</sup> For information on G-funk, see the second-to-last section in the previous chapter on pages 43, 44.

<sup>37</sup> For those Chicaxs/Latinxs who "express supposed 'poser' dismay" in relation to the Japanese cholx youth, the dismay may stem from the threat Chicaxs/Latinxs feel when an outsider finds "their" (Chicax/Latinx) culture appealing and emulates some of its components without the outsider

however, appreciate the Japanese audiences: “Chicano Rap artists and the hustles behind the scene are among the more grateful [for the appeal of Chicano culture amongst Japanese audiences]. ‘Japan has been more of an avenue for profit,’ says Jaime Diaz, President and CEO of Urban Kings Music Group. ‘We distribute to stores out there and it has helped us out a lot. Japan will be first place to buy product from independent artists’” (San Roman, no page number). The Japanese fans not only like the Chicana cultural productions, but are also willing to spend enough money to sustain these markets abroad and further the careers of the Chicana musicians. However, with the Internet, in addition to the distribution of Chicana soul and rap, current Japanese youth have taken to social media and other digital spaces to learn about Chicana culture and practice chola aesthetics – which led to Yañez drawing a connection between social media and youth subcultures and exploring this phenomenon through his own cultural production.

Yañez is arguably one of the first Chicana artists to really incorporate Internet culture into his artwork. He makes extensive use of social media sites like Mixi and his keen eye for cultural innovations on the Internet led him to store a collection of Japanese chola profile pictures he had downloaded from social networking site. After acquiring a handful of profile pictures, Yañez “creat[ed] large-scale portraits based on the low-res images ... [and] develop[ed] more images of Japanese cholos in a style referencing classic Chicano silkscreen posters” (“Aztlán on Blast,” 258). This collection of portrait art led to his *Tokyo Cholos* series and set the inspiration for his first solo-curated art show, *Hybridity*. In collaboration with the work of other artists, such as the Japanese students from Tama Arts College, *Hybridity*, opened on Thursday,

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acknowledging their own subjectivity. One of the most well known examples is the rise and demise of “Ask a Chola,” a vlog (video blog) where a character named “Chola” would answer viewers’ questions and give her “chola” perspective. Scandal erupted when it was discovered that the person behind “Ask a Chola” was a white woman named Chloe Michalopoulos. For more information, see Gustavo Arellano’s article, “ ‘Ask a Chola’ Unmasked, and Guess What? She’s from Santa Ana!” for *OC Weekly*.

February 5, 2009, at the SOMArts Cultural Center in San Francisco, California. The exhibit ran until February 25, 2009, and featured the following Japanese and Chicana/Latina artists: Tonia Calderon, Kathy Fujii-Oka, Susan Kitazawa, Sofia Maldonado, Morena Marina Santos, Lydia Nakashima Deganod, MaiNaomi, Alex Neroulias, Niz, Shizu Saldamando, Jos Sances, Nichole Schach, Shizue Seigel, Mae Suzuki, Cynthia tom, and Mino Toyoda.

The term hybridity, as it was used in the show, aimed to “present the idea of hybridity as artists combining their own native aesthetics and subject matter with those of another, including bi-racial and bi-cultural artists and how they express their identities through art. The exhibit [explores] how utilizing themes, subject matter, or aesthetics of two cultures can speak to the relationship, permissions, and boundaries that exist between them” (Yañez, “Hybridity,” 2009). In the promotional video shot during the opening reception and produced by SOMArts, Yañez explains:

It’s my first exhibit that I’ve put together but it was definitely a collaborative process with another one of the artists in the show, Mae Suzuki. This exhibit came out of a series of dialogues we had when we were students at Cal Arts, California Institute of the Arts, together and after bouncing off all these ideas and talking about culture, and identity, and aesthetic influences. I’m just really inspired to assemble a show that kind of brought all the those different elements, talking about identity, talking about our creative processes, and what influences, and how we see ourselves, how we see the world so *Hybridity* is the result of that. It’s quite an amazing collection of artists and I’m really fortunate to have worked with a lot of these artists and bringing them together. I think a lot of the pieces are definitely looking towards the future ... and talking about identity, talking about aesthetics,

talking about the creative process and some of the pieces are, I think a little cautious and some are very optimistic about the future but I think what I want the cumulative effect to be when you walk in here and see the works is the possibilities are endless” (somarts, “Hybridity @ SOMArts”).

In the promotional video, Yañez gives viewers insight into the type of conversations he and other art students had about identity and its confluence with internationally influenced aesthetics. Yañez and the other artists who participated in the show do not view as the intermixing of cultures and aesthetics as a bad thing. Rather, they acknowledge the influence and productivity of hybridity as it has helped them explore new possibilities through their artwork. In a sense, by Yañez acknowledging that many of the pieces “loo[k] towards the future,” he is channeling Bhabha’s notion of the beyond in the sense that the “future” is a space for discourse on the directions aesthetics and art practices can take. It is not just about different elements coming together but the productivity such elements bring about.

Yañez included four of his own pieces in the *Hybridity* exhibit; a collection he titled, *Tokyo Cholos*. The series is made up of portraits of Japanese teens stylized from profile pictures on the social networking site, Mixi.<sup>38</sup> The common thread among the teenagers depicted in the series is their shared fascination with Chicanx and cholx culture and style as evidenced by the clothes they wear, make-up style (for two of the featured portraits), and hand gestures featured in their poses. The following section provides descriptive readings of the *Tokyo Cholos* series as a way to open up the role mimicry, as a discursive exercise, is present within the context of Yañez’s work.

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<sup>38</sup> The artist shares on his artist’s communiqué that he collected profile pictures from Mixi users but unfortunately, I was unable to find the original profile pictures the portraits are based on (with one exception) to include for comparison.

The first portrait in the *Tokyo Cholos* series is titled, *Don Barba*. It shows a close-up of a male-presenting teen, against an orange background, wearing a green Pendleton-style button-up (see fig. 11).<sup>39</sup> His dark black hair is slicked back and he sports a mustache and goatee. His forehead and eyes are covered up by the Dodger-blue bandana he wrapped around his head.<sup>40</sup> Don Barba's upper torso and head are angled towards the left and his head is tilted and slightly lowered.

<http://tinyurl.com/h8tnuj9>

Fig. 11. *Don Barba*, Rio Yañez

*Litt13 One* is the second portrait in the series (see fig. 12). The young Japanese teenage girl has her black hair in braids that come down the front of her torso. Like Don Barba, Litt13 One uses a bandana as part of her headwear accessory but hers is dark brown and it only covers up her forehead, allowing the viewers to see her eyes. She wears a light tan t-shirt that features the phrase, "Home Girl," in Old English, a font style often seen in cholx print culture, even though "Home" is the word most visible to the viewer.<sup>41</sup> Litt13 One is throwing up a gang sign with her left hand. Unlike Don Barba, Litt13 One looks directly at the viewer as she tilts her head to the right. Her eyes are outlined in thick, black eyeliner, adding fierceness to her stare but her

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<sup>39</sup> Pendleton Woolen Mills is a textile company based in Portland, Oregon that has been in operation since 1863. They are known for producing blankets and clothing, particularly long-sleeve flannel shirts for men. Flannel shirts are a key fashion staple for cholxs and since Pendleton was one of the original manufacturers of this shirt style, flannels within the cholx community are usually referred to as Pendletons.

<sup>40</sup> Like Pendleton shirts, bandanas are part of the cholx aesthetic most often used as an accessory. If a cholx is part of a gang or claims spatial territory within this neighborhood, the color of the bandana that they accessorize with may give some indication of their gang affiliation.

<sup>41</sup> "Home girl" or "homegirl" are terms of endearment used by U.S. youth of color in reference to their close friends. The inclusion of the word "home" demarcates familiarity and a sense of belonging; it suggests that the person who uses the word in relation to a friend may be emphasizing the closeness of their friendship, almost like family.



gaze is not quite focused on the viewer. Instead, it appears she is staring off into something that is further away, beyond the viewer. Her lips are outlined as well and filled in with dark red lipstick. In the main background, to the left of her is the Mexican flag placed diagonally from her stance, suggesting ties with Mexico and Chicanx culture.

<http://tinyurl.com/ju6sx3h>

Fig. 12. *Littl3 One*, Rio Yañez

*Mona* is the third portrait in the series (see fig. 14). Unlike the other three teenagers' portraits featured in the series, *Mona* is based on the cover art of her album, *Hearty Beat* (see fig. 13) and she is the only teenager in the series who is actually a public figure outside of the social networking site. *Mona*, who is also known as Sad Girl, hails from Kyoto, Japan. She styles herself in the 90s chola aesthetic – often wearing hoop earrings, heavy eyeliner, mascara, and outlined lips. She has garnered a following as a rapper and singer who incorporates Chicanx rap-style beats into her songs. She has also done a cover of Selena's "Dreaming of You," the English-language track that was supposed to serve as the Tex-Mex singer's crossover debut single.

In the original *Hearty Beat* album cover, the image is set in sepia tone with distressed, fading edges, and white text. The only color that disrupts the sepia tone is the pale red of the rose tucked in *Mona* a.k.a. Sad Girl's hair. In Yañez's rendition of *Mona*, she is the passenger in an old school, classic, orange car. Her arms are crossed and rest on the car window opening. She wears black criss-crossed jelly bracelets and holds her chin. *Mona* looks directly at the viewer with serious, black-lined eyes, and thick, colored eyebrows. She wears a light pink lipstick and a mole underneath her right eye. Her light brown hair is arranged in the Pachuca style, teased high

and decorated with a red rose over her right ear. All that is visible of her clothing is a purple top with white edges on the sleeves. The car's driver also appears to be looking at the viewer but his eyes are not visible behind his black loks.<sup>42</sup> He has a goatee and moustache and his hair is slicked back and held in place by a hair net. He wears dark blue, baggy jeans, a tan collared shirt over a black top, and a gold crucifix necklace. The driver rests one arm on the steering wheel and the other on the seat. The interior of the car is light grey. It is unclear if the car is in motion but through the car windows, unidentified teal and turquoise shapes make up the background.

<http://tinyurl.com/j7aorrl>

Fig. 13. *Hearty Beat*

<http://tinyurl.com/hwmezam>

Fig. 14. *Mona*, Rio Yañez

The last portrait in the series is titled, *Babu the Gangster* (see fig. 15). The male-presenting teenager wears a Dodger-blue bandana, like Don Barba, that covers up his entire face (with the exception of his eyes). Babu's upper torso is covered up by the dark, navy blue baseball jacket he wears. With his right hand, Babu the Gangster throws up a gang sign that is different from Litt13 One's. His head is covered up by an eggshell-colored beanie that has the word "Chicano" written across, in Old English font. The portrait's background is a dark, almost maroon color.

<http://tinyurl.com/jq5wwe7>

Fig. 15. *Babu the Gangster*, Rio Yañez

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<sup>42</sup> Loks is U.S. youth slang for sunglasses.

All of the portraits, with the exception of *Mona*, emphasize the individual being depicted, particularly their face and upper body. The close-up style of the portraits also pushes the viewer to engage with the subjects on a more intimate level and take note of the ways in which the youth depicted in the portraits are stylized through the clothing they wear, hand gestures, and strategic use of bold colors. Moreover, the portraiture approach and angles are highly connected to the poses and aesthetic practices of social media. Beginning with the first successful social networking site, MySpace, users would often upload pictures of themselves that were close-ups of their face from different angles. Many times, these profile pictures were taken by the users themselves, using a personal digital camera or early versions of mobile camera phones. Since the social media participants were their own photographers, most profile images resulted in close-ups or photographs that focused on their face but gave the illusion that the photograph had been taken at a distance (users were frequently betrayed by shadows of their extended arms) (see fig. 6). As viewers, we see hints of these poses and methods of portraiture in *Littl3 One*, *Don Barba*, and *Babu the Gangster*. In *Littl3 One* and *Babu the Gangster*, part of the subjects' arms are cropped out of the image. In *Littl3 One*, her upper right arm is slightly visible and angled away from her body, suggesting that she might have been holding the camera to take a picture of herself. With *Babu the Gangster*, Babu's left arm appears to be extended and angled away from him, also hinting that he could have been holding a camera with his left hand to take the picture. The self-photography in *Don Barba* is significantly subtler because his arms are not that visible in the image yet the camera's angle and his pose (lowered head, obscured gaze, and shifted torso) suggest that he might have extended the camera upwards to take the photograph from a downward angle. The subjects' self-photography furthers the idea of self-representation on social media as well as more direct approaches to portraiture.

<http://tinyurl.com/zcxcqnc>

Fig. 16. “My Selfie Life Demonstrated by Drake. LMAO,” MissNay

For the most part, the portrait backgrounds are presented as solid, bold colors that connect with the subject’s clothing palette but do not interrupt or draw attention away from the subject. Instead, the colors enhance the subject’s presence. As Yañez previously noted, he wanted the *Tokyo Cholos* collection to emulate the silkscreen style of Chicax posters in the sense of using bold colors and minimal use of props. In addition to classifying the digital art pieces as portraits, Yañez’s decision to bring out how the subjects present themselves on social media ties to a larger conversation around what exactly makes the portraits Chicax art and the subjects Japanese. Are there any characteristics in the portraits speak to the teenagers’ Japanese nationality or signal to the viewer that what the images they are seeing are Japanese youth’s interpretation of Chicax youth subculture? Would any markers in the portraits suggest that the teenagers are *not* Chicax? One of the most fascinating characteristics about *Tokyo Cholos* is the racial ambiguity behind the portraits’ subjects. That is, if the portraits were presented without context or details informing the viewer that the people depicted *are* Japanese, there are no other features within the portraits that would hint at this. How then, would the portraits be read by a viewer who did not have the background information for the images they are presented with? All the teenagers depicted are evidently non-White. This is determined by the color of their hair, eyes, and skin tone. They could all pass as Chicax because of the way they are presented in the portraits in terms of clothing, the signifiers depicted on their clothing (like the use of the word “Chicano” on Babu’s beanie and the phrase “Home Girl” on Littl3 One’s t-shirt), hairstyles, posture, gestures, and other signifiers (such as the Mexican flag displayed in the background of

Littl3 One's portrait) that have long been associated with the Cholx style as it has been depicted in the mainstream media.

Films like *Boulevard Nights* (1979), *Zoot Suit* (1981), *American Me* (1992), *Blood In, Blood Out* (1993), and *Mi Vida Loca* (1994) have all provided Hollywood/mass media depictions of Cholx culture. Most importantly, Allison Anders's *Mi Vida Loca* is the go-to Chicax/Latinx film for Cholx (and particularly, Chola) aesthetic. Journalists from blog websites like *Remezcla* and foreign publications like the United Kingdom-based *Wonderland* magazine have addressed the film's impact as a foundational cultural text that enabled the homegirl aesthetic to, for better or worse, go mainstream.<sup>43</sup> In the article, "A Look Back at the Move that Taught America How to Dress Like a Chola," *Remezcla* blogger Andrew S. Vargas rhetorically asks, "[G]iven that there are still very few university courses about chola style, and even fewer *New York Times* features, where all these fashion vampires taking their cues from? Our bet is that it's a little 199[4] indie gem called *Mi Vida Loca* (a.k.a. *My Crazy Life*)" (no page number). The impact of movies like *Mi Vida Loca*, due to their commercial success, means that more people are exposed to the films and in turn, the film audiences' interpretations of Chicax culture are informed by such depiction of cholxs. The information that the Japanese youth gather based on social media, Hollywood films, and other formats (such as music) provides them with a sense of what Chicax cholx identity entails. With these sources in mind, the Japanese youth then enact a form of mimicry in their attempt to replicate what they perceive to be cholx attitudes and aesthetics as exemplified in the portrait, *Mona*, and the original cover art for her album, *Hearty Beat* (see fig. 13 and fig. 14).

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<sup>43</sup> *Remezcla* is media website that focuses on "Latin" music, entertainment, and culture. *Wonderland* is a fashion and lifestyle magazine.

As Bhabha notes, mimicry involves the colonized's desire to replicate the colonizer as an attempt to gain access to the colonial power and authority. In the case of the Japanese youth and Chicanxs, there is no colonizing dynamic present. However, the appeal of Chicanx cholx culture to the Japanese youth does influence their attempt to come off as authentic to the cholx aesthetic as possible. This is evident in the *Tokyo Cholos* series where Yañez depicts the replication of Chicanx cholx culture that the Japanese youth enact through hand gestures and clothing style associated with cholx style. At the same time, there are factors that may interrupt the Japanese youth's attempt to claim authenticity through their mimicry of Chicanx cholx youth – primarily around the fact that youth are Japanese not Chicanx. Earlier in the chapter, I referenced the *OC Weekly* article by Gabriel San Roman in which he addresses how some Chicanxs have reservations about other non-Chicanx groups incorporating aspects of cholx culture into their own identity practices. Such concerns *are* warranted but in the case of Japanese cholx youth, their exploration of identity through the Internet, specifically social media, is one example of the ways mimicry can be subversive in the sense that it brings into question essentialized notions of Chicanx identity.

For example, the use of Pendleton shirts by Chicanx cholx youth is a practice that developed through the years – especially given that the shirts were manufactured by a white family-owned business in the Pacific Northwest and the shirts are meant to keep men warm while they work outdoors (“Company History”). The flannel shirts were taken up by cholxs for style and over time and became associated as a key staple of Chicanx culture. Now, the shirts are being used by Japanese youth in an effort to mimic Chicanx style yet the garment is not Chicanx or Japanese in origin. The mimicry enacted by the Japanese helps bring attention to the construction of cholx identity and de-stabilizes it in a productive way by pushing Chicanxs to be

aware of the components they hold dear to their culture while also acknowledging how such components have connections to Chicanxs' own mimicry efforts.

Yañez's *Tokyo Cholos* portrait series proves to be an exercise in mimicry as well since Yañez's interpretation of the way Japanese youth are trying to replicate cholx aesthetics, creating a hall of mirrors where the origins and endings become blurred and reconfigure Bhabha's notion of the beyond to a different level. Yañez's willingness to experiment with mimicry and the beyond through *Tokyo Cholos* is an important intervention because he is also addressing the limitations of the dominant Chicanx narrative that some Chicanx-identified individuals might experience if they, for example, do not identify as cholxs. As a textual poch@, Yañez has long been aware that not all elements of his own Chicanx culture speak to him while also recognizing the allure other non-Chicanx cultures (such as Japanese) have had on his lived experiences. In recognizing the different cultural aspects that have appealed to him and that he has tried to mimic, Yañez recognizes the power and radical potential of mimicry. Yañez is not necessarily breaking away from dominant [Chicanx] narratives since he is still depicting dominant cholx culture but rather is disrupting such narratives by pushing viewers to question their own assumptions of dominant Chicanx culture's origins as a means to further explore identity. And as Yañez's *Tokyo Cholos* series clearly suggests, the disruption of origins can provide groundwork for the future and expand the possibilities for [textual poch@] expression such as the new media technology covered in the next section.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> While this section of the chapter dealt primarily with Rio Yañez's interpretation of Japanese cholx youth subculture, I hope that in the future, I may have more space in which to also discuss the views and commentary of some of the Japanese youth who partake in the cholx subculture.

## *Towards a Purikura プリクラ Consciousness*<sup>45</sup>

Japanese culture's influence on Rio Yañez's work has not been limited to the content of his art but has also significantly been present in his aesthetic through the incorporation of new media technologies. The use of new technologies on Yañez's approach to art serve as an example of hybridity. As Yañez understands it, hybridity is the merging of two cultures to create something new. In Bhabha's conceptualization, hybridity does not just refer to the merging of cultures but names "the displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative ... it represents that ambivalent 'turn' ... a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority" (162). The merging of components interrupts the assumption that one component is greater than the other and/or holds more leverage; hybridity is subversive in the sense that it disrupts the hierarchy that may be present in systems [of culture]. In this section, I focus on Rio Yañez's use of the Purika プリクラ technology for the creation of his digital portrait collaboration, *Homegirl プリクラ* with performance artist, Hella Breezy, as an example of a hybrid approach to technology and identity representation. In doing so, I aim to highlight how new media technologies are useful resources for textual poch@s' exploration of self-representation.

Purika プリクラ is the name given to interactive photoboosts that were established around the late 1990s and popularized in Japan through their placement in amusement parks. They later emerged in the United States in the early 2000s (PuriGal, "History of Purikura"). As Yañez explains, Purika プリクラ translates to "print-club" and initially served as a "catalyst for creative expression and social interaction ... used primarily by urban Japanese girls" ("Aztlán on

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<sup>45</sup> プリクラ is Purikura; based on Japanese characters.



Blast,” 258). The photoboosts are essentially walk-in, closet-sized compartments equipped with a green screen (which provides a “blank canvas” that allows image backgrounds to be altered), a touch-screen computer that allows for the selection of superimposed backgrounds and themes and gives users the opportunity digitally decorate their photographs once they are done. In terms of decoration, “the options are vast and include wild glyphs, excessive starbursts of light, pre-made phrases, and the option to draw your own text directly on the image using a stylus. To that end, Purikura booths are a hybrid of digital photography with the interactivity of video games” (Yañez, “Aztlán on Blast,” 258). Even within his description of Purikura *プリクラ*, Yañez is quite aware of the hybridity present in the technology itself as he identifies the components of digital photography and video games’ interactivity that come together in the innovative photoboosts. The hybridity of the new media technology itself is a large draw for Yañez as an artist who is constantly experimenting with digital tools that enable the production of artwork.

Most of Yañez’s Purikura *プリクラ* work has been comprised of portrait collaborations with other fellow artists ranging from Guillermo Gomez-Peña of La Pocha Nostra to Mayra Ramirez, the performance artist behind Hella Breezy.<sup>46</sup> For Yañez, the Purikura *プリクラ* format and aesthetic enables further explorations of identity and politics –especially because the medium allows for a playful approach to performativity with tools like the green screen and digital editing. For the purposes of this section, I will be focusing on three images out of approximately 30 from Rio Yañez’s *Homegirl* *プリクラ* series.<sup>47</sup> This specific series is a

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<sup>46</sup> “La Pocha Nostra” is a performance art group led by Gomez-Peña. Hella Breezy is a Bay Area-based performance artist who will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>47</sup> The title, *Homegirl* *プリクラ* translates to “Homegirl Purikura.” Also, while the other digital art I have analyzed throughout this thesis has been the product of Yañez’s use of programs like Adobe Photoshop

collaborative effort with Mayra Ramirez/Hella Breezy, and I selected it for three main reasons. First, just like El Rio's Valentine's Day Cards which I touched upon in the previous chapter, *Homegirl* フリクラ is one of Yañez's longest running projects. Second, since I am focusing on the connections between Yañez, Japanese culture, and Japanese youth culture that has an affinity for Chicax culture (particularly cholx culture), it makes sense that I select the portrait series which draws from the cholx aesthetics and customs. Thirdly, I hope to draw comparisons between the current Purikura フリクラ Hella Breezy portraits and the portraits many Chicax cholx youth took at local mall photo shops. The analysis for this section is also an extension of the hybridity conversation I discussed in relation to the *Tokyo Cholos* series. I am continuing to engage with the concept because Rio Yañez seems to draw heavily from the idea of hybridity in his work –including his aforementioned description of Purikura フリクラ and his use of it in the *Homegirl* フリクラ series.

#### ***“EASY BREEZY BEAUTIFUL CHOLA GIRL”<sup>48</sup>***

Rio Yañez's *Homegirl* フリクラ series is currently being hosted through his Flickr account. The album contains a total of 41 images and the album itself (not the images) has been viewed 1,570 times since its creation in 2010. Yañez describes the series as follows:

*Homegirl* フリクラ is a collaboration between artists Rio Yañez and Mayra Ramirez. It is the next phase of Yañez's art series examining the relationship

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and Illustrator, I would like to clarify to the readers that for the Purikura series, Yañez and Hella Breezy worked solely with the technology available through the Purikura photo booths.

<sup>48</sup> This subtitle is taken from the tagline featured in Ramirez/Hella Breezy's blog.

between Japanese youth emulating Cholo and Chola culture and their counterparts in the United States. Homegirl Purikura reverses the appropriation of visual aesthetics and uses Japanese photoboos (Purikura) to create portraits of Cholas. The use of Purikura enables Yañez and Ramirez to create a hybrid visual presentation of portraits decorated in Chola cultural references but using uniquely Japanese visual tools to do so (“Homegirl プリクラ,” no page number).

Through this description, viewers are alerted that the series is a project and exploration of hybridity, art forms, and the extent in which hybrid approaches to art can function to create new discourse rather than default to critique and defensiveness of keeping a culture “intact,” “pure,” and “authentic.”

Rio Yañez’s collaborator for the *Homegirl プリクラ* series is Bay Area-based performance artist, Mayra Ramirez (who I will be referring to as Hella Breezy from here on out). Like Yañez, Ramirez has created a strong online presence that revolves around her preservation of Chicxanx cholx/homegirl culture through her performance and documentation as Hella Breezy.<sup>49</sup> Hella Breezy’s presence online can be found through many platforms. She has a blog hosted by Blogspot, a Twitter account, a Facebook page, a Tumblr, and an Instagram account. Currently, she is most active on Twitter and Instagram. Her Twitter followers count is currently at 314 and she is followed by approximately 18,200 Instagram users.<sup>50</sup> Hella Breezy presents herself as a homegirl/chola in her attire, makeup, hairstyles, and cultural references and musical

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<sup>49</sup> The word “hella” is Bay Area slang used to emphasize something, used in a similar way to “very.” For example, “The concert is hella packed.” The word “breezy” has two meanings: it suggests a cool, relaxed approach and can also be used to refer to a beautiful woman. Thus, the combination of “Hella Breezy” as Ramirez’s chola character suggests she is very laid back and can also be used to describe her aesthetic as a beautiful, femme-presenting chola.

<sup>50</sup> These figures are as of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

choices. Her followers can view images of her at classic car shows, art installations, and she often posts images that are cultural references to Chicanx culture.

As a curator of Chicanx culture through her social media accounts, Hella Breezy, like Yañez, stays up to date on the role the Internet plays in spreading information. One of her blog posts titled “Chola Japonesa,” dated November 30, 2010, focuses on Mona aka Sad Girl.<sup>51</sup> Hella Breezy writes, “I ran into her music some time ago while doing some research on the fast growing Lowrider scene in Japan. Anyway, I’m not sure how I completely feel about her yet, but its [*sic*] how they say ... ‘imitation is the highest form of flattery’ and this is what I say, ‘Always imitated never duplicated!!!’ c/s” (“Chola Japonesa”). She then goes on to explain she was initially bothered by Mona aka Sad Girl’s cover of Selena’s “Dreaming of You” but then comes to the conclusion that she should not be one to judge anyone who is wanting to honor Selena’s memory. She signs off on her blog post with: “Mona seems to be really down with the Brown and if she wants to show her love for our beloved Selena then who am I to judge ... knock yourself out Sad Girl!!! Shout out to all the Hella Breezys’ [*sic*] fans out there in Japan ... Stay Brown Homies!!!” (Hella Breezy, “Chola Japonesa”). Here, readers can see that although Hella Breezy was initially hesitant with the mimicry Mona aka Sad Girl enacted, she ended up viewing such mimicry as a means of honoring and showcasing appreciation for a culture that is not one’s own (in this case, Mona aka Sad Girl’s interest in Chicanx culture).

Both Hella Breezy and Rio Yañez are interested in exploring the Japanese cholx phenomenon which led to their collaboration on the *Homegirl* *ブリクラ* series. While the album features 41 images (a few of them with one of Hella Breezy’s friend), I selected the three images that only featured Hella Breezy and had the most “views,” meaning that users clicked on the

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<sup>51</sup> Mona aka Sad Girl is one of the subjects in Yañez’s *Tokyo Cholos* series portraits. See figure 4 presented earlier in this chapter.

image to be able to see the details and explore any additional information available. Therefore, the following three images are essentially the ones that users clicked on the most.

### *プリクラ Chola Por Vida*

The first image, *Chola Por Vida*, was uploaded on June 22, 2010 and as of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, it has been viewed/clicked on 1,197 times (see fig. 17). Hella Breezy is the main figure in the image. She is neatly centered with her hands in her pockets, arms angled outwards while her head is slightly raised and turned slightly to her right. Her stance and her stare (she is looking directly at the camera with an expression that challenges the viewer to defy her) convey a sense of authority and toughness often associated with veterana homegirls. Hella Breezy is wearing a white, close-fitting muscle shirt, a necklace, and dark brown Dickies-style pants with a silver belt buckle. She wears her dark hair long and with the exception of a small, teased pompadour at the crown. Her makeup – red lips, winged eyeliner, and thin eyebrows – is reflective of the chola-style. She has tattoos on her forearms and biceps that are visible but not quite decipherable. Hella Breezy's attire and stance emulate the cholx aesthetic – which alerts the viewer of Hella Breezy's affinity for cholx culture.

Through the use of Purikura プリクラ the image has been edited to show a striped background with the alternating colors of yellow and green. Hella Breezy is surrounded by multi-colored starbursts, stars, jeweled hearts, and Japanese text characters. Additionally, text has been added on each top corner and towards the bottom of the image. On the top left, written in red, is the phrase “Stay Down” which is complemented by the phrase “Stay Brown” written in blue and placed on the top right. The text featured in the bottom half the image is written in pink and reads, “Chola Por Vida.” The phrases incorporated into the image are references to the

Chicanx belief system of “Stay brown, stay down” meaning that Chicanxs are expected to stay true to their roots, their heritage in an effort to be real and authentic in their Chicanx identity. But, looking at the choice of decorations in the image, none of them (the stars, starbursts, and Japanese characters) really speak to the idea of being brown, down, or chola for that matter. Instead, the use of Purikura プリクラ serves as a tool that enables a hybridity with one particular Chicanx belief system (“Stay brown, stay down”) and interactive decorative practices available through the photobooth. The text, digital decorations, and Hella Breezy’s presence demonstrate how different aspects come together in this image to exist within one artwork but, at the same time, do not create a hierarchy about which image component dominates the other two. Moreover, the omission of explicit hints of “This is chola culture. These are chola tastes and beliefs,” speak to a similar ambivalence that is present in the *Tokyo Cholos* portrait series, which relies on context and the stylization of the subject, rather than just the image, to situate the portrait’s subject. By providing images with text but at the same time not including too much details within the image, Yañez is once again pushing his viewers to recognize how large of a role context plays in informing viewers’ interpretations of images. In doing so, he is also suggesting to the viewer that many visual and aesthetic aspects of what is often associated with a particular culture or group (for example, baggy jeans and their connection to cholx culture) has more to do with how those associations are communicated rather interpreting such associations as inherent to the group (for example, all Chicanx are cholx, all cholx wear baggy jeans, all Chicanx wear baggy jeans).

<http://tinyurl.com/js3z5dh>

Fig. 17. *Chola Por Vida*, Rio Yañez

The second image is called *Chicana Love* (see fig. 18) and was uploaded on June 22, 2010, as well. As of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, it has 954 views on Flickr. In this image, Hella Breezy's hair and make-up is the same as in *Chola Por Vida*. Her clothing is the same as well with the exception of a blue, black, and grey flannel print button-up she drapes over her white muscle tank. It appears that she is sitting down with her arms resting on her thighs. Although she is staring at the camera, her gaze does not necessarily translate to her explicitly looking at the viewer; she seems like she is staring at something or someone who is standing at a distance from her. Yet, her face still conveys a fierce chola attitude that is signaled by the arching of her left eyebrow.

Here, the strength and, to an extent, masculine stance in the way Hella Breezy is presented is hybridized and disrupted by the hyperfemininity present in the decorative choices made on the image. The color of the background is a dark, fading plum that is decorated with stars, bursts of light and stars, hearts, and two cartoon-styled skulls that have pink and red bows at the top. On the upper right corner, a fluffy, powder blue bow, with pink and purple polka dots, outlined in white lace is placed diagonally. The second part of the ribbon is also placed diagonally on the bottom right corner. Above Hella Breezy's head but slightly below the fluffy bow is the text, "Chicana Love" written in fuschia and pink bubble-style letters that are reminiscent of the typography Yañez uses in his El Rio's Valentine's Day series. Yañez's nod to his own previous work is useful to point out since the context for both instances in which the typography is used deal with "love," albeit in different contexts.

In *Chicana Love*, the choice of decorations (hearts, skulls, bows, stars), along with Hella Breezy's appearance (fierce Chola attire and attitude, somewhat masculine-presenting with the blue flannel) push the viewer to consider what exactly about the image makes it *Chicana love*

and what is it trying to say about “love”? The playfulness of the decorations and the extensive use of the Purikura プリクラ aesthetic creates an ambivalence about the context of Chicana love and it partially suggests that the love expressed through the text may refer to the aesthetic and technology of Purikura プリクラ that parallels a similar aesthetic of portrait photography known as Star Shots.<sup>52</sup> If viewers acknowledge some of the portraiture practices among California youth in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they will be inclined to remember that many youth (particularly cholx youth) would often visit the photo studios, known as Start Shots, located at local malls and strip malls.<sup>53</sup> The photo studios at this time had special deals where customers would come in, select an airbrushed background design and color (some of the most common designs were hearts, butterflies, bubbles, stars/starbursts, and the “Smile Now, Cry Later” Greek theater masks), be photographed in four different poses, come back to the studio after thirty minutes to an hour to view the “proofs” of the portraits they had taken, select which poses they liked best, and then wait about another fifteen to twenty minutes to receive fifty wallet-sized portrait photographs. The images (see fig. 19 and fig. 20) presented after *Chicana Love* (see fig. 18), serve as examples of the types of backgrounds and poses that were available at the studios.

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<sup>52</sup> As of the time of this writing (November 2016), academic analysis on the cultural practice of Star Shots photography in the United States does not exist. But thanks to social media and the Internet (particularly the Instagram account “Veteranas\_and\_Rucas” which serves as a digital archive of cholx and party crew culture), blogs like *Remezcla* have taken notice of the importance of Star Shots as a cultural practice among Chicanx youth (however, Star Shots were not exclusive to Chicanxs; many youth from other racial and ethnic groups also partook in Star Shots culture). For an example of how Latinx media sites have discussed the Start Shots practice, see the short blurb written by Yara Simón titled, “Before the Latinernet Chola Style Was Captured in Mall Photos” for *Remezcla*.

<sup>53</sup> I would like to point out that for the most part, it was female-identified Chicanxs and queer Chicanxs who often partook in these Star Shot photo practices. Male-presenting heterosexuals would usually only take Star Shot photos if they were posing with their girlfriends or dates.



<http://tinyurl.com/hd768jy>

Fig. 18. *Chicana Love*, Rio Yañez

<http://tinyurl.com/zglxmqw>

Fig. 19. “Chola”

<http://tinyurl.com/hgy88lw>

Fig. 20. “Cinco de Chola”

Based on poses selected and photographs available, Chicanx/Latinx youth would then exchange the photographs with friends as keepsakes, symbols of friendship, and symbols of loyalty. As can be seen from the backgrounds featured in figures 19 and 20, the aesthetic of Star Shots utilized the photographic lens to create a soft light glow that suggests a romantic ambiance. The placement of the background images creates a pattern of repetition that can be seen in the decorative practices of the *Homegirl* *プリクラ* series, particularly in figure 18. In *Chicana Love*, many starbursts and hearts are the main décor of the image and their placement as well as colors speaks to the aesthetic of Purikura *プリクラ* as well as how far technology has come to enable individuals, like Chicanx cholx to control how they are presented in images (as a way to challenge misconceptions about cholx culture in mainstream media), how they are now able to create their own images (Purikura *プリクラ* photo booths are usually available in most major cities), and decide whether or not to make such portraits available on social media platforms. The Chicanx youth are more interested in having access to the means of representation versus creating a hierarchy of which type of technology is best.

Thus, *Chicana Love* serves as an example of hybridity in terms of efforts that Chicanx youth have taken over time where different forms of technology are explored in order to carry out their self-representations and have control over how they will be perceived and remembered.

The last image I will be focusing on in the *Homegirl* プログラ series is *Lady Lowrider*, (see fig. 21) which was uploaded on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 and has been viewed 1, 114 times as of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Once again, Hella Breezy's attire has similarities with the previous two images and continues the cholx style. She wears her hair long, with the exception of small pompadour at the crown, and hoop earrings. Her make-up is stylized with red lipstick, thin eyebrows, and winged eyeliner. Hella Breezy wears a white muscle tank top that also makes her black straps visible. Her stance is defiant as she angles her body to her right and her gaze is directed at the viewer. She slightly squints, giving the appearance that she may be staring someone down. In her hands, she holds a partially opened issue of *Lowrider* magazine that features a picture of a Pachuca chola with big hair on its cover. In this image, Hella Breezy is also surrounded/outlined by different layers of color that create an aura about her – similar to the types of mandorlas Yañez's artwork explores (see previous chapter). At the top, she is surrounded by a deep blue, followed by fuschia, yellow, green, and a lighter blue.

The background in *Lady Lowrider* is black, which enables some of the colors used for the text and images to stand out, such as the multi-colored mandorla. For example, the starbursts, stars, roses, and stars used to decorate this image have a coloring that appears to be neon-like. The text's typography is similar to *Chicana Love* because it is curvy and bubble-style. On the top left corner, the soft pink text reads, "Slow & Low" while the phrase "Lady Lowrider" is written in fuchsia and placed vertically on the right side of the image. The phrase, "Slow & Low" refers to the lowrider culture of how the lowrider automobile is supposed to be driven: slowly since lowriders are meant for recreational, relaxed cruising and must be kept as low as possible to the ground since the real show is when the hydraulics are activated and elevate the vehicle at different levels.

“Lady Lowrider,” as a phrase, can be a reference to Hella Breezy, who is an avid connoisseur of lowriders and lowrider culture. Moreover, back to the sainthood and religious tradition, Virgins are usually referred to as “Lady” as in “Our Lady of Guadalupe.” In this case, Hella Breezy’s wisdom, curatorial practices, and proliferations of lowrider culture makes her a saintly figure because she spreads the “good word” about the lowrider car culture. The phrase may also refer to the woman on the cover of the magazine. Additionally, by gendering the word “lowrider” with the adjective “lady” is reclamation of who can claim and participate in car culture – a largely perceived cis, heterosexual male space.

Out of the three images, *Lady Lowrider* is the one that is most explicitly “Chicanx” in terms of imagery and visual references (the mandorla, the use of *Lowrider* magazine as a prop, the roses). Nevertheless, the image serves as a great example of the use of Japanese photo booth technology to facilitate the expression of Chicanx cultural components through hybridity. For example, the digital tools that enable the customization of the image allow Yañez to explore new ways in which to represent aspects of Chicanx culture – such as a hybrid version of the mandorla that surrounds Hella Breezy. The stylization of the mandorla and the key text of “Lady Lowrider” permit the incorporation of catholic Chicanx religious iconography in a remixed way that not only reconfigures how allusions to religious devotion can be conceptualized but also draw linkages to the customization practices of low rider culture. Low rider cars are not mass produced but are rather created and customized through different elements and technologies. The decision to use Purikura プリクラ to demonstrate connections between low riders and Catholic practices exemplifies the merging of these cultural aspects present in Chicanx culture without creating favoritism of one over the other. While Purikura プリクラ is the technology that Yañez

is drawing upon to continue the conversations around the interactions of cultures, it is his artistic interpretation on hybridity that enables for such conversations and interventions to be catalyzed.

<http://tinyurl.com/h8uvyhv>

Fig. 21. *Lady Lowrider*, Rio Yañez

### ***Sayonara/Adiós***

Over the years, more and more articles have been released on social media platforms, mass publications, and popular culture forums that express fascination with regards to the popularity of Chicana culture in Japan. Like the fascination with the Morrissey/Chicana phenomenon, many of these articles try to pinpoint a reason as to why such an affinity between Japanese youth and Chicana subculture exists and whether or not the Japanese attempt to replicate Chicana culture is appropriate or offensive. However, getting caught up in the debate over who is allowed to draw from Chicana culture for their own cultural productions can also steer away from larger questions that lead to fruitful conversation on how cultures are perceived in the over time and space, or in the words of Bhabha, “the beyond.” What might Chicana culture look like in “the beyond”? How will it be further destabilized? As such, Bhabha’s theorizations of mimicry and hybridity, terms that may carry negative connotations due to their ties to colonial history, can be reframed to expand interpretations of culture and examine the productivity the terms and related practices (such as textual pocho practices) that emerge. Bhabha writes, “Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence” (163). My intention throughout this chapter was to use Rio Yañez’s Japanese-influenced portraiture projects as case studies for the ways in which Yañez explores the concepts of hybridity and mimicry amongst two cultures that do not have a history of colonization with one another. Additionally,

in exploring how mimicry and hybridity are at play through the *Tokyo Cholos* and *Homegirl* *プリクラ* series I also wanted to highlight how Yañez's positionality as a textual poch@ pushes viewers (Chicanx and non-Chicanx) to be reflective of what characteristics they associate with Chicanx identity and cultural traditions, the characteristics origins, and how viewing such characteristics through a new lens can be a productive way to destabilize the essentialism present in dominant ideas of what Chicanx culture is.

Additionally, some questions that come to mind from these observations as they relate to Chicanxs and Japanese are: Why do these Japanese youths want to garner a public audience on the Internet for their Chicanx-inspired alter-egos? Also, what terms do these youth use to search the Internet for Chicanx culture and where? How do they make sense of the cultural productions like music if they do not speak Spanish or Spanglish? How do they interact with the Chicanx rap artists who go to Japan to perform? How are the algorithms on the websites and search engines generating "Chicano" content results?

While these questions were not answered in this chapter but may be subject for future research, it is important to keep in mind how the Internet and social media *do* provide extensive opportunities for information on, and exposure to, many different kinds of people and groups. But at the same time, the methods on the IT and engineering side are, for the most part, hidden from the public so how much control do we really have when presenting and re-presenting ourselves online? How does the technical side perform biases that then get reflected in people's epistemology of certain topics? The artwork of Rio Yañez, as it ties to Japan and its aesthetic practices, provides the space where many of these conversations can begin to happen.

**Conclusion:**  
**Textual Poch@s: Aqui Estamos y No Nos Vamos**

The artwork of Bay Area-based artist Rio Yañez, with its incorporation and remixing of Chicax/Latinx culture, mainstream popular culture, social media aesthetics, and Internet-borne epistemologies, serves as a rich, strong source of material that can serve to push interdisciplinary fields like Chicax/Latinx studies into new directions. In particular, Yañez’s willingness to steer away from essentialized notions of Chicax/Latinx identity politics grant him the creative freedom to explore his own multifaceted experiences of the United States Chicax/Latinx [fandom] communities.

As we have seen throughout this thesis, Yañez is heavily invested in multiple communities: Chicax/Latinx, fandom, artistic, and social media. His ability to draw from various sources as a textual poch@s pushes us to consider how foundational Chicax/Latinx art concepts like rasquache can serve to inform cut, paste, and remix practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first chapter, “ ‘No, It’s Not Like Any Other Love’: Morrissey Fandom and Chicax/Latinx Cultural Production” explored the Morrissey-inspired artworks of Rio Yañez. Building on the Morrissey/Chicax/Latinx fandom phenomenon, the chapter focused on how the affinity with, and connection to, the Manchester born singer/songwriter/cultural critic Morrissey manifested itself in Yañez’s digital art in an effort to challenge perceived Chicax/Latinx cultural tastes. “He said, ‘Hola, cómo está?’ He said ‘Konnichiwa’” the second chapter, explored the cross-cultural influences of Japanese youth subculture and technology-based aesthetics present in the portraiture work of Yañez.

Both chapters also deal with aspects of cultural appropriation – whether it is Yañez appropriating British or Japanese culture or Yañez making sense of the Japanese youth’s cultural appropriation of Chicax cholx culture. While the term “cultural appropriation” usually carries

negative connotations because it is often used to refer to power dynamic present in the appropriation of people of color cultures by dominant, white individuals and communities, which are problematic nearly 100% of the time, I do believe that in the case of Japanese/Chicanx cultural appropriation, the act is carried out as a form of admiration by both parties. As such, I decided to view processes of cultural appropriation through different theoretical frameworks like poaching, disidentification, mimicry, and hybridity. Moreover, the clever, rasquache approach to cultural appropriation by both Japanese and Chicanx youth (as demonstrated in this thesis) serves as a vessel for identity exploration and the destabilization of essentialized notions of identity. Therefore, an analysis of cultural appropriation that goes beyond the “cultural appropriation is wrong/cultural appropriation is fine” conversation can prove to be fruitful since my aim throughout the second chapter of this thesis has been to explore how both the epistemologies of “what is Chicanx/Latinx” and “what is Japanese” are mediated (pun intended) through social media, technology, and art.

In addition to the cultural work that can emerge when instances of cultural appropriation are viewed through a different lens, this thesis was able to carry out such engagement through its interdisciplinary approach to scholarship and theoretical frameworks. My concept of the textual poch@ was put together, rasquache-style, from the bits and pieces of Chicanx art scholarship and fandom studies. In each subfield, elements (bits and pieces) were present that spoke to my interest of identity formation, identity and artistic expression, aesthetics, the role of the digital world in building communities, and the power of fandom in bringing about new cultural productions. I made do with the bits and pieces I was exposed to throughout this research in an effort to learn how these coded, theoretical messages might be able to communicate with each other. The fields of Chicanx and Latinx studies are at an important and crucial turning point

where new aspects of Chicana/Latina experiences are being explored, particularly as these aspects continue to address the diversity within the Chicana/Latina communities. As such, the fields have the space to explore new lenses and frameworks that can enhance the interdisciplinary toolbox. Fandom studies, which is a young (it has only been around for a little less than thirty years) subfield within media studies, has made significant interventions that speak to the larger cultural studies tradition of situating the general public as sources of knowledge rather than passive consumers. While fandom studies work has addressed aspects of identity present in the general public, such conversations have still generalized audiences in the United States as white. The time is right for fandom studies to push its engagement with intersectionality and fandom identity by taking notice of people of color fandom communities and international fandom communities as a way to avoid universalizing audiences' experiences. Doing so can only improve the critical engagement already present in fandom studies scholarship.

This thesis has raised many questions and issues that were borne out of the artwork of one individual, Rio Yañez. His work and interventions, in and “beyond” the Internet, serve as an example of the new directions Chicana/Latina and fandom cultural productions are heading. Additionally, his work enables discursive spaces from which to explore how certain aspects of Chicana/Latina culture are global phenomena that influence other non-Chicana/Latina communities such as contemporary Japanese youth. In exploring these international influences, Yañez's work creates an urgency for Chicana/Latinas to interrogate their own conceptualizations and understandings of Chicana/Latina identity. While a comprehensive analysis of his complete works was beyond the scope of this thesis, the richness of Yañez's artwork is ready to be explored by new interdisciplinary researchers.



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