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The Production of Architectural Hybridities in Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In Architecture

By

Gustavo Leclerc

2017

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

The Production of Architectural Hybridities in Los Angeles

By

Gustavo Leclerc

Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Dana Cuff, Chair

The relevance of contemporary architectural design is intrinsically dependent upon it's being in-step with the aesthetic and spatial sensibilities of its time. Within Southern California, one of the most dramatic contemporary influences on aesthetic and spatial sensibilities is that of Latinization, in particular, Mexican/Chicano cultural practices. This dissertation speculates on the emergence of an architectural hybridity autochthonous to Los Angeles informed by a theoretical framework termed the Spanglish Turn. The development of this framework begins with an analysis of visual arts, and material culture in Los Angeles. This strategy aims to 'stretch' the relationship between architecture and specific forms of popular and material culture by speculating on the behavior informing them. Then guided by a formulation of this emergent spatial logic, it looks for tangential inroads and alternative patterns to begin to articulate a new 'grammar of translation' for LA's popular and visual culture into the realm of architecture.

The Dissertation of Gustavo Leclerc is approved.

Sylvia Lavin

Diane Favro

Michael Dear

Dana Cuff, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

For Hannah, Octavia, and Artemio.

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Biography

Gustavo Leclerc is an architect and an artist. He is a partner and founding member of the multidisciplinary collective ADOBE LA (Artists, Architects, and Designers Opening the Border Edge of Los Angeles). He was a fellow at Harvard University in the prestigious Loeb Fellowship program during the 1999-2000 academic year. In 2000, he co-chaired the ACSA National Conference in Los Angeles, titled *Heteropolis: Immigration, Ethnicity and the American City*. He's been involved in several art exhibitions as a curator, artist, and exhibition designer such as *Mixed Feelings* at the USC Fisher Museum of Art; *Revelatory Landscapes* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; *Facades: Architecture, Urban Space and The Moving Image* at the Long Beach Museum of Art; *House Rules* at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; and *Urban Revision: Current Projects for the Public Realm* at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. He co-edited *Postborder City* (Rutledge, 2003), *Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina in L.A.* (Sage Publications, 1999), and *Hybrid City/Ciudad Híbrida: The Production of Art in Alien Territory*, (SCI-Arc Public Access Press, 1998). He has taught courses on architectural history, architectural theory, landscape theory, and design studio at Woodbury University and Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, California. He lectures throughout the United States and Mexico on art, architecture, border culture, new cosmopolitanisms, (im)migration, and cultural criticism

PART 1. INTRODUCING THE ‘SPANGLISH TURN’

Chapter 1. The Production of Architectural Hybridity

1.1. Goals and Overview

In the creation of artistic and cultural works, where you are, and at what time period, will have a constitutive effect on the kind of work you produce. Especially during times of turmoil in social, economic, or political life, there are opportunities for a radically altered art and architecture. Such creative processes are both a reflection of changing contexts but also an act of re-creation: it is an interpretive strategy and an opportunity to reimagine, even transcend the present.

Los Angeles, currently in a time of radical change itself is one location where new hybridities are created, a process which is heavily influenced by the changing cultural dynamics of Los Angeles (Davis 1992, 11). This process, along with the current urban turmoil, produces an emergent hybrid culture, visible in the arts, and contemporary urban practices, and architecture (Gonzalez, 1999; Rojas, 1999). This dissertation describes and explains the process by which hybrids are created as the result of the convergence or mixing of two or more cultural spheres. It explores the dynamics of a special type of hybridity autochthonous to Los Angeles, a cultural hybridity that contains its own novel aesthetic and formal expressions. It also includes its visual themes and material outcomes, and how these changes impact current and future architecture. The process described here is referred to as the “the Spanglish Turn.”

This inquiry of the Spanglish Turn focuses on the social production of the built form and the aesthetic qualities that result from it, concerned with the past and present Latino influence in Southern California, particularly in Mexican Los Angeles. The

primary lens to look into such dynamics is through expressive material and popular culture, contemporary visual arts, the visual sensibility¹ imprinted on the diverse urban designs within the Los Angeles landscape, and especially in architecture.

This research further examines and analyzes the permutations of artistic, architectural, material and popular cultures in Los Angeles as influenced by three cultural streams: Historic California, Chicano Culture, and Mexican Immigrant. The focus will be on cultural forms and practices that: *1) have predictive qualities of future creative expressions in Los Angeles as related to architecture; and 2) reflect the emergent Spanglish hybrid condition of Los Angeles culture.* This analysis will occur through researching scholarly publications, interviews, and viewing and experiencing material/popular/artistic culture and the physical/designed urban landscape.

The Spanglish Turn in Los Angeles is made up of parallel traditions, materials, scales, and visions, which coexist and co-mingle to create new urban forms. It is occurring in large part through a combination of Californian and Mexican influences motivated by a widespread Latinization process in Los Angeles and other U.S. cities, due in part from immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Throughout U.S. history, new innovative cultural sensibilities have risen out of the joining of different peoples. The present-day changes occurring with the U.S. population are causing significant adjustments to the appearance, consciousness, and content of American urbanism. While many of these changes are in their emergent form, this dissertation theorizes that with the expected continuation of current demographic,

¹ The concept of sensibility referred to here is that of sense perception and responsiveness as a means through which to gather knowledge.

political, and economic trends, these forms will continue to mature and become ubiquitous across U.S. cities. (Davis, 2000; Valle and Torres, 2000).

Due to these contemporary urban evolutions, the context for my research is Los Angeles, a city that is in many ways a trendsetter for other large U.S. cities (Dear, 2001; Sanchez & Villa, 2005). It is huge, densely populated, and complicated; it is multicentered, multicultural, and multilingual. It is a world city of increasing national and international significance. Statistics tell us that Los Angeles is the second largest city in the U.S. (<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb07-91.html>) and also the city with the largest Latino population counting for 46.53% of the total population of the city of Los Angeles (<http://losangeles.areaconnect.com/statistics.htm>). Based on demographic information, we can discern that, de facto, L.A. is the most Latinized American metropolis in this country (with other cities experiencing the same trends at different scales).

For this study, my focus is on Mexican immigrant and Chicano populations in L.A. The reason behind this choice has to do with two different factors, one is socio-historical and the other is politico-geographic. Mexican Americans (or Chicanos) have had the longest and most complex history in the United States as compared to any other Latino group in Los Angeles.² In addition, the geographical proximity to Mexico has created a condition for a constant flow of immigration during the last few decades. Mexican immigration to the U.S. by far surpasses immigration by any other group from

² Historically, the relationship of Mexican American people with the dominant white population has been extremely complex and in many cases contentious. The annexation of the Southwest (including Los Angeles) into the United States in 1948 has been a very complex process of unequal power relationship.

Latin America and elsewhere.³ Currently the effect of Mexican immigrant and Chicano culture in Los Angeles has reached a tipping point of influence, so that many forms of popular culture originating in this city are awash in its style, from music, to visual media, to food, (Leclerc, Villa, and Dear, 1999; Villa, 2000; Sanchez and Villa, 2005). As such, this dissertation aims to characterize and speculate about the nature of contemporary aesthetic and spatial changes in Los Angeles as they are manifested in both the built environment and in various architectural and aesthetic practices. It uses a system of analysis and interpretation that also serves as a system of translation, a speculative translation of Mexican Los Angeles' urban, spatial aesthetics into the realm of cross-cultural creative sensibilities in the city and architectural design.

As an important source of “raw” material for the production of cultural hybridities in Los Angeles, this research also considers the spatial and visual dynamics of Mexico City. Historically this connection has been intermittent, in part due to the “push and pull” of the two cities (Sanchez, 1993). But recently, the “pull” of Los Angeles has increased along with the “push” from Mexico. Out of this strong directional flow, people, customs, beliefs, and objects, have streamed into Los Angeles and other U.S. cities to make up and join the Latinization process. As such, the relationship between these two major cities has matured, establishing the high speed and dynamic corridor where interchange and hybridity are second nature to a continually transitioning and emergent urban population.

³ The U.S. economic recession from early 2000s to late 2009 and reinforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border region (2006-2012) contributed towards a decline in Mexican immigration, but this group still represents the largest immigrant population.

John Leland in, *Hip, the History*, describes the dynamic outcome of converging different sensibilities, stating that, “This line of mutual influence, which we seldom talk about, is not a decorative flip on the national identity but one of the central, life-giving arteries” (2005, 6). With that in mind, this dissertation investigates these current life-giving arteries in Los Angeles and their impact on the creation of material and cultural hybrid forms.

An example of the Spanglish Turn can be seen in the artwork of Einar and Jamex de la Torre, two artists based in Southern California. In their sculpture, *Colonial Atmosphere* (fig. 1), inspired by the colossal Olmec heads found in the regions of Tabasco and Veracruz in Mexico, they have created a hybrid artwork that contains its own contradictions. While this contemporary Olmec head may be gold and glittering, it is also coated with unholy objects like candy wrappers and broken hub caps instead of carefully carved stone. In its visual extravagance, ephemeral quality, and impermanence, a very real and consuming experience of theatrical depth occurs for the viewer. It gives him or her permission to feel a sense of freedom and inspiration while also being grounded in a deeply possessed archaeology of memory. In this way, it provides clues as to the nature of our changing cultural texts, including the emergence of material fragility, non-preciousness, and experiential drama. Additionally, *Colonial Atmosphere* demonstrates that the creative inspiration provided by hybridity within the context of place can be a rich and delicate wellspring.

Such artistic traits are an example of one type of Latinization but other types might be considered to be less positive. These include shopping malls themed to attract Latino consumers and the massive fences along the militarized U.S.-Mexico border



Figure 1. de la Torre, Einar and Jamex. *Colonial Atmosphere*, mixed media, 2002



Figure 2. U.S. – Mexico Border Fence at the Pacific Ocean

(Herzog, 2001) (fig. 2). Nowhere are altered urbanisms more prominent than in Southern California, evidenced by the formal architectural projects of religious and cultural institutions, contemporary “high-art” architecture, as well as the informal architectures of the street and domestic life (Gonzalez, 1999). Such material manifestations of the built environment are multiplying with great intensity. Through this transformation there is now a high degree of adaptation and ephemerality in the urban fabric of Los Angeles, qualities that have contributed to the city’s growing cosmopolitan demeanor (Rojas, 1999). These hybrid changes are viewed by some as indicative of intercultural and interracial tension, while others regard them as optimistic precursors of a ‘post-border’ or ‘post-racial’ society. Either way, the current hybridities encompass multiple dimensions and can be read as a diagnostic text of our collective future.

1.2. Producing Architecture

By carefully observing how a megalopolis such as Los Angeles works through its own emergent processes, architects and other creative practitioners have found new ways to relate to and respond to contemporary conditions where no overriding system predominates. Bernard Tschumi, in *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*, speculates on innovative types of relationships between urban conditions and architecture, making a strong argument for the consideration of context specificity in architectural production. Additionally, Tschumi advocates for an architecture that is in tune with the characteristics of contemporary urban culture, where “conflict,

confrontation, contamination, and their inherent tensions and differences might lead to alternative architectural knowledge and new modes of action.”⁴

The concept of contextual considerations itself has also been expanded in architecture in recent decades to include aspects such as geography, aesthetics, culture, and the existing built environment (Crawford, 2005). Well-known architectural firms, from Morphosis to Hirsuta, have mentioned that responding to, and taking inspiration from, the ecotypes in which their designs are to be built is a central consideration in their design process.

Currently, the field of architecture is also learning from various types of creative processes, disciplines and forms. John Leighton Chase’s *LA 2000+: New Architecture in Los Angeles*, declares that, “Architectural trends emerge first in Los Angeles. The city is a breeding ground for adventurous experimental architects..... [in] a region known not only for its explosive population growth but also for the artistry of its inhabitants.”⁵

Critic Charles Jencks contended that from this environment, there has come to be a specific trend in L.A.’s architecture characterized, “by a collision of disparate parts.” He believes that this trend is “inspired by the vitality and cacophony of the urban environment, or the ‘heteropolis.’”⁶ Chase also states that a common trend in L.A.’s architecture today is, “a formal preference for mixing rather than matching.” Some critics and theorists also discuss the existence of a Santa Monica School of Architecture

⁴ Tschumi, B. *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2005

⁵ Chase, J. L. *LA 2000+: New Architecture in Los Angeles*. New York: The Monacelli Press, 2006.

⁶ Jencks, C. “Hetero-architecture and the LA School.” In *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

that includes among others, Frank Gehry, Tom Mayne, and Eric Owen Moss. The similarities among contemporary architectures in Los Angeles could be considered to be the result of addressing similar working conditions, problems, materials, and the climate of the region, but could also be a result of the ‘zeitgeist’ itself of the city, now heavily influenced by the Spanglish Turn.

The Spanglish Turn relates to Fredrick Jameson’s Cultural Turn in that both reference a sudden cultural shift provoked by external forces. For Jameson, such a force is Postmodernism, or what he called ‘the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’ (Jameson, 1992); for the Spanglish Turn, it is globalization. Both “turns” also find their main expressions in very unique and different formal and aesthetics manifestations. Culture in the Spanglish Turn works as the thermometer to measure the changes in contemporary society as well as an indicator of the effects of economics on culture due to the forces of globalization. A marked difference between this and Jameson’s Cultural Turn lies in the fact that the Spanglish Turn is a theoretical framework that works within a specific cultural condition: the present Latinization of Los Angeles. It is not a general theory of postmodern culture.

1.2.1 Types of Mixing.

In Los Angeles, new sensibilities and mental cartographies are the reprogrammed “code,” establishing the unique and emergent contemporary culture influencing the creative practices in L.A., including current and future architecture in the city (as well as the work of L.A. architects working outside of the city) (Dear & Leclerc, 2003). At one level, the notion of cultural hybridization seems incontrovertible, if it is

understood to imply a simple mixing of traditions and practices. Such mixing has occurred for centuries, and is a fundamental element of the human condition. Yet many researchers now understand hybridity as going beyond notions of simple convergence to suggest a deeper form of integration that involves the development of practices and forms that are new and original, (i.e. previously non-existent) (Kradly, 2005; Prabhu, 2007; Burke, 2009; AlSayyad, 2001). Hybridity also has a highly charged political meaning, where some understand it as a loss or corruption of earlier, cherished traditions (Kradly, 2005). This mixing can happen and alter all different dimensions of culture: High and Low, Mainstream and Marginal, and Universal and Particular. Despite these ambiguities in meaning, the notion of cultural hybridity has a significant impact on the design disciplines. It has been registered at many levels from the design of *lowriders* (elaborately decorated cars), landscaping around private homes, choice of dress, taste in food, the production of art, and architectural design (Gonzalez, 1999). As the Latinization of the U.S. population continues, cultural hybridization will play an increasingly central role in the creation of space, architecture, aesthetics, and identity (Leclerc, Villa, and Dear, 1999; Sanchez and Villa, 2005).

For my purpose, there are three perspectives that define hybridity: first, as mentioned earlier, hybridity is a general and natural condition of humanity. Through all the different phases of human development there have existed forms of cultural contact and intermingling (Burke, 2009), creating conditions for mixing. The present-day discourse on globalization and culture draws support from this view. These interactions have taken the forms of mixing, fusion, *mestizaje*, syncretism, creolization, cultural translation, and transculturation (Kradly, 2005).

Another view sees hybridity as a critical strategy to “enter and exit Modernity” and postmodernity (Garcia-Canclini, 1995). This idea is one that has been predominantly a Latin-Americanist perspective. In this context, the term hybridity is often thought of in relation to the concept of ‘critical transculturation,’ which refers to the effects of mixing occurring for both borrowing and lending cultures (Ortiz, F. 1995). A third perspective comes from postcolonial discourse. In his seminal book, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha, explores hybridity within the framework of the postcolonial novel and celebrates it as a symbol of resistance by the colonized. For Bhabha, hybridity produces a “third space” that is understood as a subversive practice of resistance by the marginalized and subaltern. He states that, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation (1994, 25).”⁷ One could argue that it is precisely in this space that new political and cultural possibilities can be formulated.

Above all, hybridity is a combination of the three concepts presented above. In addition, the nuances of cultural context and the particularities of physical circumstances inform cultural mixing processes. Within the Spanglish framework, hybridity is autochthonous to Los Angeles in the second decade of the XXI century, closely tying recent Mexican immigration to this process of cultural mixing. As broader cultural processes in contemporary Los Angeles rapidly intertwine with Chicano and Mexican

⁷ Bhabha, H.K. *The Location of Culture*. East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, 1994.

immigrant cultural dynamics, hybridity is rapidly becoming the force forging the future of the city

1.2.2. Levels of Mixing

Interestingly though, it is not only profound levels of mixing that are occurring in Los Angeles as a result of the Spanglish Turn. Due to the large scale of demographic change and the landscape itself, mixing occurs to various degrees and on multiple levels between and within cultures. Beyond, what I refer to here as deep mixing, resulting in the creation of new and more enduring forms, superficial and transitional mixing also occurs in the city, as well the various degrees of mixing between these two poles. These various confluences all have a significant effect on the nature and tenor of the city. Deep mixing requires a longer and more stable engagement from two or more distinct cultural spheres. It tends to be solid in meaning, history, and spatial location. In other words, deep mixing requires a longer and more stable cultural exchange, one that will produce at the end, novel and more durable forms of hybridity. The resultant hybrid culture is synthetic, plastic, and durable. Deep mixing also has the potential to accommodate unequal or unbalanced cultures, insofar the engagement is dialectical. A theory of mixing which is important here in addition to hybridity is that of “kissing architecture,” a term in architectural theory coined by Sylvia Lavin (2011). This is mixing that does not leave a print or a new creation in its wake but instead creates a unique experience that is the result of the interaction between two distinct forms/media/disciplines that come into proximity, that touch, for a brief time. Through the interaction of the two, each element is temporarily transformed and appears part of the other and a new whole.

This concept does not claim that the union is seamless or creates a oneness, but that it remains somewhat ill aligned and the continued “twoness” of the situation, with its perceptible roughness of fit, is part of what makes the experience of “the kiss” memorable. The friction, contradiction, and inexact matching are as much part of making the experience new and interesting as the softness, blurriness, and integration of it. Today mixing, from the level of kissing to the creation of enduring, more Creole-like cultural forms exist side-by-side and in various configurations across the city. Among these are also those forms that resist any mixing at all.

1.3. Context

In Los Angeles, by way of immigration from Mexico, one of the most distinct and significant ingredients in this mixing, and propelling its transformation, is the ever-increasing presence of Mexican Indigenous peoples (Martinez, 2004). It is estimated that more than 12 million of Mexican Indigenous people live in Mexico (11%) and if the percent that indigenous Mexicans making up of the total Mexican immigrant population in Los Angeles is anywhere near that number, the indigenous presence here is significant. (Comision Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas website, 2010, http://www.cdi.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1387&Itemid=24). Guillermo Bonfill Batalla (1996) puts forth the argument that Indian culture in Mexico exists in a type of “Parallel Universe” to contemporary society where it has developed effective forms of co-existence with other groups and sustainable practices of cultural and social life. He proposes the idea to learn from the experiences and practices

of today's indigenous cultures. Now, twenty years after Bonfill Batalla's statements, indigenous Mexicans increasingly live in a spreading diaspora, where the ability and/or the need to keep separate from the rest of society is less and less. With the ubiquitous presence of media and telecommunications, people from different communities in Los Angeles, including indigenous Mexicans, are reaching out to one another and engaging in various degrees of cultural mixing and transformation (Ziff, video documentary: *Oaxacalifornia*, 1994).

Drawing from this framework, Michael Dear and Edward J. Soja have both configured new conceptual paradigms that assist in the understanding of the social and spatial dynamics of Los Angeles today. In *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (2000), Dear proposes a theoretical model to decipher the current dynamics of the contemporary city which is a type of postmodern urbanism (decentered, flexible, and heterogenous) and that takes the form of a conceptual gridded structure called Keno capitalism. It is composed of different parts of a postmodern city: Interdictory spaces, Edge Cities, Theme Parks, Gated Communities, Corporate Citadels, Ethnoburbs, Containment Centers, Consumption Opportunities, Command and Control Centers, and Spectacle. Dear suggest that a city like Los Angeles presents the urban conditions that most likely will guide the direction of future urbanism. Ed Soja's articulation of "thirdspace" as the space of otherness and difference also sheds light on understanding Mexican L.A. Soja, departing from Lefebvre's theories of social space, formulates a concept of trialectics (dialectics of triplicity): sociality, historicity, and spatiality that works in a trialectical fashion to break the traditional and stubborn, dominant binaries (man/woman, margin/center, high/low, rich/poor, etc.), (1996).

As can be seen, these types of social changes have resulted in profound adjustments in the nature of 'the city' itself, both globally and in Los Angeles. Twentieth-century modernity, initiating this change, reflected an optimism that found expression in modern architecture, but this also came with a high cultural price, namely a set of universalizing rules that often produced negative side-effects. In Los Angeles, this can be seen in architectural projects such as the Mar Vista tract homes designed in 1948 by Gregory Ain. The complex of 51 houses recently became part of a HPOZ ordinance. This has created an array of contentious dynamics between the different residents who hold divergent points of view about the role of HPOZ in the community.

Challenges to what some regarded as the failed promise of modernism, (e.g., social utopianism) has taken many forms, including the development of a 'postmodern urbanism.' Critics of modernism often adopted a decentered perspective that recalled Robert Venturi (1966, 1972) and Reyner Banham (1971). As the critique of modernism has gained traction, issues of what type of theory would be relevant for various kinds of urbanisms is more prominent, questioning the very meaning of the term 'the city.'

In the last few decades, new theories of social space have transformed many of the disciplines in the humanities, including sociology, geography, urban planning, architecture and urban design. Henri Lefebvre's theoretical ideas about the production of (social) space (e.g., that it is never innocent), provide a broad platform to study the dynamics of local space/place production. Lefebvre believed that space always contains traces of the process that produced it. He argued that space was acted upon by a series of material and mental processes that provided the context for producing knowledge. He developed an intricate and complex "conceptual triad" to decode spatial practices

(representations of space, spatial practices, and representational space), (1991). This dialectical triad has been the foundation for analyzing postmodern urban space and is a fundamental part of contemporary postmodern theories.

Michel Foucault also discusses these ideas in *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1967), providing a glimpse into some of the structural changes in society that were arising at the time. His theory became the discursive apparatus to deconstruct issues of race, gender, and class. Marxist literary theorist, Fredric Jameson's incisive critique of postmodernism and its "cultural logic" was set as a new condition for our times. The term he used is the "postmodern moment." For Jameson, the importance lies in formulating a theoretical understanding of such a moment within the totality of capitalist social, political and cultural relations. In *The Cultural Turn*, Jameson sets out his analysis of postmodern culture, including the substitution of pastiche for parody, the preference for nostalgia, and the withdrawal from historical reference as exemplified in new forms of populist architecture. He states that postmodernism is the product of a new era of "intensification of the forces of reification."⁸ Postmodernism then is defined by a new cultural logic of consumption. With the collapse of the distinction between culture and economics, culture now seeps into everything, and everything is subject to the logic of commodification. The importance of his theoretical postulate has had many ramifications in various disciplinary fields. Although the current reception towards his theoretical ideas has cooled down, his critical framework and delineation of a postmodern moment are still resonant.

⁸ Jameson, F. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. London, UK: Verso Books, 1998.

1.4. Recent Architectural Theory, Activism, and The Spanglish Turn

Architectural Theory and the 'Expanded Field'

Traditionally, in mainstream Architectural Theory there has been reluctance to directly engage with the social, economic, and political implications of race, gender and class. Attempts to engage with these problematics have been insular and sporadic. In the last two decades, significant postcolonial and feminist critiques have made crucial inroads into the realm of architectural history and theory. More recently, emergent new critical debates problematizing issues of race, gender, and class are creating resonance in architecture's theoretical field. The complex racial history of the U.S., together with our current pervasive cultural climate, addressing and confronting issues of race in architecture are of urgent concern. This theoretical effort is part of a larger stratagem that seeks to 'expand the field' of contemporary architectural history and theory. This widening has mainly twofold repercussions for architecture: to include divergent views of alternative cultures and histories in architecture, and directly engage architecture and its theories with current social and political activities.

Some recent significant anthologies of critical texts have spearheaded fresh debates that (re)situate architecture within its social and political contexts. In their Introductory essay "Architectural Theory in an Expanded Field,"⁹ Greig Crysler, Stephen Cairns, and Hilde Heynen, claim that their compilation is a concerted project that continues and expands earlier cross-disciplinary theoretical critiques of logocentrism, phallogocentrism, and eurocentrism. They also assert the book "builds

⁹ Crysler, G., S. Cairns, and H. Heynen. *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012.

upon the [previous] theoretical energy...by putting the critical sensitivities, the pluralist sensibility, the self-reflective, and speculative ambition that post-structuralism inculcated into contact with wider set of world conditions,” (2012).

Another provocative anthology is “*Where are the Utopian Visionaries? Architecture of Social Change*,”¹⁰ edited by Hansy Better Barraza. The main ideas and themes of this book (published in 2012), where originally presented more than a decade ago in a 2004 symposium at the Rhode Island School of Design called *Xchange: Architects Committed to Social Change*. Since the symposium, changing attitudes within the architectural discipline have become more pronounced, this gives some validity to the symposium’s theme and book essays of social responsibility in architecture. It is an intriguing compendium with some old familiar voices, such as Michael Sorkin and Alberto Perez Gomez, who wrote the preface and epilogue respectably. Nevertheless, the collection of essays in its totality is a solid mix of fresh critical positions on the social relevance of architectural production.

In a similar vein as the previous two books, but with a less conscious political agenda, *This Thing Called Theory*, edited by Teresa Stoppani, Giorgio Ponzio and George Themistokleous (2017),¹¹ explores current practices of architectural theory and their critical and productive role. Theory here is presented as an open question in architecture, as it relates and borrows from other disciplines. This approach posits

¹⁰ Better Barraza, H. *Where are the Utopian Visionaries? Architecture of Social Change*. London, UK: Periscope, 2012.

¹¹ Stoppani, T., G. Ponzio, and G. Themistokleous. *This Thing Called Theory*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.

architecture as inextricable connected to other social and theoretical practices. Theory is conceptualized as a proposition and as a critical task of architecture. Together, the collection of essays aims to propose a new vision of the contemporary role of theory in architecture.

Architectural Theory, Activism, and Black Lives Matter

A more specific line of alternative theoretical inquiry is presented by *Aggregate*, an East Coast based Architectural History Collaborative founded in 2006, with a website presence and a digital journal. In general, the aim of *Aggregate* is to generate, present and publish innovative architectural scholarship from multidisciplinary perspectives; particularly research work and projects that foregrounds the multiple ways of understanding architecture's relationship to the world. Through their on-line journal, *Aggregate* seeks to support the production, discussion and publication of innovative research in architectural history and theory. Under four thematic umbrellas/themes: discipline, matter, plots and systems, *Aggregate* pursues critical questions about the societal role of the built environment, and how value and meaning are assigned in and through the activities of architectural history and theory. What makes this project unique, is the notion that the practice and production of architectural theory is a form of social and political activism.

In volume 2 of the journal (published in March 2015), a special section is dedicated to address the complex, and often contentious relationship between architecture and urban space with African American lives. *Aggregate* in collaboration with the socio-political movement Black Lives Matter present a series of poignant essays that address questions

of race and racism in American architecture and urban design practices; it also presents provocative positions that illuminate architectural practices that figure and reimagine *Blackness* through a variety of aesthetic, educational, and formal practices.

All these theoretical undertakings demonstrate a concerted effort to steer contemporary architectural history and theory in a new divergent direction. An alternative discursive space in which architecture is engaged with real issues of social and political relevance. These new discourses are helping to define a timely emerging ‘activist school of theoretical and historical thought’ very pertinent to contemporary architecture.

Migration, Kino-politics, and The Spanglish Turn

The Spanglish Turn analysis has some affinity with the theoretical positions mentioned above. The Spanglish Turn seeks to propose a flexible theoretical framework that is engaged with the social and political dimension of architecture and the build environment. There are two central issues elaborated in the Spanglish analysis that are of current social and political relevance: cultural hybridity and migration. Particularly Mexican immigration has become one of the most contentious issues of the current political climate in the U.S. Within this context, the Spanglish Turn is of pressing political relevance.

Migration in all its forms is rapidly becoming a powerful socio-political force affecting most places in the world. In his book *The Figure of the Migrant*, political theorist Thomas Nail states that “the twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant and there are more regional and international migrants than ever before in

history . . . that in a way we are all becoming migrants.”¹² The foundational characteristic of migration is motion, and this presents a challenge to the established and dominant notion of identity and citizenship based on the fixity and stasis of the nation-state. Within this framework, Nail puts forward the notion of *kino-politics*, a political theory of an alternative concept of citizenship identity based on migrant mobility.

Because migration heavily informs the social and spatial dynamics of present Los Angeles, it creates its own version of a fluid space where people are constantly moving, and goods, ideas, and beliefs are transformed and readapted on regular basis—similar to the activities in a country. In this context, the dynamics in Los Angeles may present an opportunity to examine and apply this concept of migrant kino-politics. Migration, international or regional, legal or illegal, formal or informal, is having, and will continue to have, profound effects in the cultural make up of U.S. society. Regardless of the current backlash against immigration and cultural diversity in the U.S. and Europe, (im)migration and cultural hybridity will continue to be a major social and spatial force with significant repercussions for architecture and urban design production.

Chapter 2. Cultural Streams in the Creation of Place

In today Los Angeles we are experiencing social, political, and cultural changes of unprecedented nature. Los Angeles is the place where an emergent hybrid culture is being forged. This cultural and spatial transformation is what I define as the Spanglish Turn.

¹² Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

The Spanglish Turn is comprised by three cultural flows: the historical California, the Chicano, and Mexican Immigration. These three dimensions work in a trialectical fashion and offer the capacity to produce new and innovative cultural hybrids that are essential for understanding and defining the spatial and formal expressions of contemporary Los Angeles. These three forces can happen at different degrees of influence, they don't have to be equal to produce novel cultural hybrids. Cultural hybridity happens at different levels of mixing, from 'deep' mixing to 'light' mixing to not mixing at all.

Understanding the context (cultural, social and physical) is essential to comprehend a complex big city like Los Angeles that is going through a rapid urban and cultural transformation. It is important to make a distinction between a generalized idea of context and context that is specific to a particular condition of time and place. Los Angeles context specificity can offer us multiple possibilities for novel creative design practices, especially in visual arts, architecture and urban design. In addition, L.A.'s Latino context provides us with an enormous capacity for formulating complex and unique cultural hybrids, due in part to its receptivity to others cultural manifestations. All of this, results in the elaboration of a cultural synthesis that has the power to transform society and culture from their structural foundations.

As shown above, hybridity is here to stay. It matters because is both, a reflection of the present cultural dynamics of contemporary Los Angeles, and an indication of its future direction, in other words new hybrid expressions are indicative of the current present, and of a possible future. What follows is a set of three cultural flows that aim to form the basis of the theoretical coordinates for the Spanglish Turn.

2.1. Historic California

Twentieth century California ethos is a key cultural stream informing the current Spanglish Turn in the Los Angeles region. Thomas Lawson, the Dean of the School of Art at Cal Arts in Valencia, California wrote recently in *Art Forum* that the Beat subculture was an important part of the mid-century ethos. He writes that it was hugely influential in its openness to non-European, unconventional thought and experimentation of all kinds – with drugs and lifestyles, with philosophies and materials – was always a defining attitude. This condition would correspond with Peter Burke’s assertions that some cultures are more open to adaptation and appropriation than others, which would account for much of the innovation that took place in California in the twentieth century, (2009, 83).

In 1974, in one of the early sustained assessments of West Coast art, Peter Plagens agreed that geography mattered in what artist created and in what happened to their work. However, in a 1999 postscript to the reissue of his study, Plagens opines: “The influence of regional geography has declined precipitously since 1974, partly because artists have simply willed it to be less influential.”¹³ By this he means that artists have now shrugged off their provincialism; they possess goals that extend beyond “newly embodying a regional aesthetic.” Moreover, Christopher Long states about modernist ideas in California, in the catalogue for the exhibit, *Living in a Modern Way: California Design 1930-1965* that “at the end of the 1920’s, the handful of modernist designers in Southern California and the Bay Area were still searching for ways to

¹³ Plagens, P. *Sunshine Muse: Art on the West Coast, 1945-1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p. 13.

express the special conditions and culture of California -its mild climate, its relax and informal lifestyle, its deep influences from Mexico and East Asia, its pervasive optimism. All that would change in little more than a decade: by the time United States entered World War II, California would emerge as one of the most important generators of modernist design, it would become the laboratory for a new aesthetic, one that was vibrant, original and distinctive”¹⁴ (p. 62). This demonstrates that California and especially southern California (with Los Angeles as its fulcrum) were places with an openness for radically alternative forms and ideas.

In his landmark study of visual arts and poetry in California from 1925 to 1975, Richard Candida-Smith emphasizes the state’s relative isolation as a stimulus to creativity, linking this to an anticipation that artists were on the threshold of a renaissance, of bringing a “new culture into the world” (Smith, 1995). Similar sentiments are expressed in Paul Karlstrom’s study of California Modernist art during the period 1900-1950. According to Karlstrom, during this period California artists were stimulated by “distance” and the consequent need to “reinvent traditions for a new landscape and society” (Karlstrom, 1996). As Candida-Smith underscores, it was not that California artists desired isolation, but that the tabula rasa represented by the west coast offered the opportunity to strike out against the primacy of New York and Europe. In much of the twentieth-century in California, there was a non-rigidity in the cultural norms and practices that allowed for greater artistic and political experimentation. In

¹⁴ Long, C. “The Rise of California Modern Design.” In *California Design 1930-1965*, editor Wendy Kaplan. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011. This Exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was part of a larger set of exhibitions about California Art, Design and Architecture called Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980, which aimed to demonstrate the birth of a radical art culture in Southern California. It was spearheaded by the Getty Research Institute in 2011.

California, artists, architects, and other creative practitioners participated in the 'place making' process; in their work, they were forming identity out of the surrounding spaces. In short, they were creating place out of space.

This was made possible also because of the fact that California is a frontier-type location and also contains the large metropolises of San Francisco and Los Angeles. These types of locations are particularly susceptible to change due to the fact that as frontiers, there exists within them a type of intersection between cultures, an 'interculture', so to speak (Burke, 2009). Lavin describes this phenomenon similarly when she discusses the interaction between exterior urban surfaces that together create enveloping, affective atmospheres. She likens them to weather fronts which she says are, "planes of negotiation between different atmospheric densities and the principal cause of meteorological phenomena" (89). The types of connections and conflicts that are occurring at a rapid pace and with increasing frequency between cultures in places like Los Angeles today can be said to also be equitable to meteorological phenomena.

As metropolises, California cities have also been home to large numbers of immigrants who push forward the development of cultural creolization, the development of new cultures that contain elements of existing cultures, together making one culture that is richer and more complex than the originals. In these situations, it is also frequently easier for people to accept newness, because they can easily take bits and pieces of what they like from other cultures without having to have any agreement about the meaning of what has been exchanged. Working misunderstandings then become a main ingredient in the creation of new, hybrid cultural forms (Burke).

Other important influences on California culture and creative practices have been both Hollywood and technology. Lawson states that they create limitless source materials for Southern California artistic practitioners, “that abbreviated exposition, fast edits that elide time and space, and sublimated continuity are inspiration for the varied narrative strategies. These influences can be seen in the works of Southern California artists and designers like Mike Kelly, Paul McCarthy, Frank Gehry, John Baldessari, Kenneth Anger, Allen Ruppersberg, and Jack Goldstein.”

A perspective that presented Los Angeles urban condition in an unorthodox and original manner is the one presented by British architectural critic Reyner Banham. His perspective is of relevance to this inquiry because he saw the city within a contextual framework. Context (cultural and physical) were of paramount importance to develop his theoretical cases about Los Angeles. The Spanglish Turn uses the same type of approach, and it sees and describes the city within a similar contextual semblance. Banham’s study of Los Angeles serves as a foundational reference for the Spanglish Turn. Banham’s *Four Ecologies* offers an original analytical strategy for the analysis of Los Angeles. The Spanglish Turn can benefit greatly from it, specifically when approaching Latino Los Angeles, in a novel and unorthodox way.

His analysis, presented in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971) serves as an important framework to understand the qualities and evolutions of Los Angeles’s various neighborhoods and regions before and since, especially as they relate to the Spanglish Turn. He presents the city’s culture, art, and architecture as existing within defined geographical and cultural contexts, contexts which Banham posits as essential for understanding Los Angeles. Additionally, his reading of Los

Angeles architecture stands out in its recognition of the potential of popular, consumer, and material culture for design and architecture. These characteristics relate to the Spanglish Turn in that both analyses have as a foundational principle, the specificity of the urban and cultural context of Los Angeles, including its geography, social and cultural conditions (both high and popular culture), and the various creative expressions produced in the city (arts, architecture, film, etc.). His view shows L.A. in its state just prior to the influence of the Spanglish Turn, and provides a glimpse as to how and why these terrains were ripe for transition. Later in this dissertation, I will describe how these ecologies look today after the Spanglish Turn influence.

A foundational characteristic of Banham's writing is its emphasis on American mass culture, ranging from magazines to automobiles. He studied and celebrated various aesthetic and architectural values, a process which deeply affected his experience of and writings about Los Angeles. When observers mocked Los Angeles as a city of chaos, monotony, and confusion, he responded that the fault was theirs because the "context" had escaped them. There is a certain resonance in this statement with respect to the contemporary Latino cultural landscape which "has escaped" understanding by many artists, architects and urban designers. When there is concern for cultural context by these groups, the interest normally lies in globalized generic cultural phenomena, a new type of universality so to speak, instead of the specificity of the Latino cultural landscape of Los Angeles.

Banham fell in love, temporarily at least, with one of L.A.'s icons: the beach (what he called Ecology I. Surfurbia). The beaches according to him were what other cities envied about Los Angeles. He stated that the "Sun, sand, and surf are held to be

ultimate and transcendental values.” His fascination was not limited to the beauty of the beaches, its piers, and sublime sunsets but included their primarily homogeneous, male culture. He admired the casual, highly individualistic style of surfer culture, which appeared oblivious of the rest of the world.

The Foothills, in contrast, encompass the lower slope areas that run adjacent to the Santa Monica Mountains and Hollywood Hills (Ecology II. Foothills). They are organized in several “mini” cities or neighborhoods. From east to west, these are: Silver Lake (built around the reservoir of that name), Los Feliz, Hollywood, West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood, and Pacific Palisades. The foothills can be seen as a socio-economic map, showing a distribution of incomes, with the height of one’s home in the hills corresponding with the amount of money that resident makes. The lower slopes of the hills have served as a challenging ground for innovative and eccentric designs, such as the Smith House in West L.A. designed by Craig Elwood in 1955, and the cinematic alluring design of the Chemosphere house in the Hollywood Hills by John Lautner in 1960.

Banham opens his third ecology, The Plains of Id, with the following statement, “The world’s image of Los Angeles is an endless plain endlessly gridded with endless streets, peppered endlessly with ticky-tacky houses clustered in indistinguishable neighborhoods...” In this statement, he refers to the expansive flatlands in Los Angeles that generally do not have the dramatic natural beauty of the previous two ecologies. They were instead considered to be ultimately generic in terms of the built environment and for the people that lived there to be without distinction. Today this is where the bulk of L.A.’s population lives and includes all ranges of incomes and cultures.

The freeway system was Banham's connective ecology (Ecology IV. Autopia). This traffic infrastructure made it possible for all the ecologies to come together as a whole. His joyful interest with the city's freeways system and automobiles becomes almost tangible in his text. He states, "indeed the freeways seem to have fixed Los Angeles in a canonical and monumental form." He thought of the Santa Monica-San Diego intersection as a work of art as well as a system that is full of life, a place in itself, and a state of mind. Freeways, he thought, are where Angelinos most feel at home. For Banham, his relationship to the automobile and the freeways was intimate. Los Angeles is where he learned how to drive in order to understand the city.

Today, many small changes occurring throughout Los Angeles have collectively become monumental influences on the city, changing it from Banham's times. These changes are primarily the result of the region's Latinization process and have accumulated to create a quiet revolution of innovative social and cultural networks (Leclerc, Villa, and Dear, 1999; Davis, 2000). These are based on hidden informal economies, appropriated technology, and rapid communication and mobility. Such change is layered across the landscape like a spatial constellation with different luminous points of energy, integrating themselves into (Banham's) pre-existing conditions. In some ways, this new, at times virtual, network is part of a larger hybrid system including Banham's notion of the freeways as the web of connectors joining all the other ecologies. This hybrid constellation slowly reinvents the interpersonal, economic, cultural, and built structures of the city. It is connected to a new type of transnational cosmopolitanism formed out of globalization and postcolonialism.

Cosmopolitanism in L.A. is neither European based nor class conscious, but instead primarily grounded in immigrant, diasporic experiences of constant transnational crossings. No longer universal and privileged, cosmopolitanism(s) are now plural and particular (Robbins, 1998). They are occurring from the bottom up, consisting of strategies through which people adjust, survive, and even thrive in this new world. With current projections of population change, it is foreseeable that this cosmopolitan Latino constellation will continue for many years to be an energetic creative force motivating and directing urban adaptation and transformation in Los Angeles.

For many contemporary creative practitioners in Southern California, these same cultural shocks, the creative by-products of rapid changes in the region, are the very tangible raw materials they use to create an engaging new aesthetic vocabulary. Their emerging vocabulary, or invented languages, may provide the most concise translation we have yet for reading the altered landscapes around us.

With this in mind, we can discern that the Latinization process of Los Angeles has had a transformative effect on the portrayal of the city described by Reyner Banham. In other words, the Spanglish Turn has rewritten Reyner Banham's ecologies of the city. Banham's ecologies are of great importance to this study. His unorthodox analysis of the city provides a critical framework for The Spanglish Turn, so that Banham's conceptual principles are a point of departure to reanalyze and reconstitute Los Angeles. It provides a new and fresh lens to which update, or describe, Los Angeles. Possibly most importantly, it also provides data as to why the Spanglish Turn has taken hold in Los Angeles to such a great degree (beyond just accounting for the number of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos in the city). This is, that the historic culture of Los Angeles

and the variations of its geography, promoted acceptance of newness, difference, and innovation. In cities that are more conservative, both in terms of preserving their historic characters and built environments and in terms of expecting their populations to have conforming social values and aesthetics, the influence of the Latino population may not have had such a dramatic influence in such places. That is not to say there has no resistance over time by certain groups or in certain areas in Los Angeles, but overall the ethos of historic California and Los Angeles of accepting newness and difference, and actually defining itself by these vary characteristics, is a big part of why the creation of so many hybridities has occurred on the scale that it has, and why this city is, at heart, more adaptive than many other metropolises.

2.2. Chicano Culture

Another major influence in Los Angeles has been and is Chicano culture. Chicano cultural cohesiveness and creativity has developed rapidly over the last several decades due to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. This movement was born in Los Angeles in response to negative stereotypes of Mexicans in mass media and the American consciousness. Edward J. Escobar from *The Journal of American History* describes some of the negativity of the time in relation to Chicanos' experience with the LAPD, stating that their conflict spring boarded, "Mexican Americans [to] develop a new political consciousness that included a greater sense of ethnic solidarity, an acknowledgment of their subordinated status in American society, and a greater determination to act politically, and perhaps even violently, to end that subordination."

The movement addressed a broad range of issues, in part through the creation of works of literary and visual art that validated Mexican American ethnicity and culture. This large-scale creative expression developed into what is now known as the Chicano Art Movement, through which Chicanos expressed their ideals in media such as painting, drawing, sculpture and printmaking. This process helped Chicano artists and activists create a place-based identity and history separate from Anglo-American iconography and its European roots.

This sensibility also promoted many Chicanos to create art centered on their own personal and place based experiences. This trend continues today for many artists. It can be seen in the paintings of John Valadez. In his work, *Car Show* (fig. 3), people are gathered around a winning lowrider car after a competition, an iconographic scene in youth Latino culture in L.A. Valadez has painted this scenario in a hyper real style,



Figure 3. Valadez, John. *Car Show*, painting, 2001

almost like a larger than life snap shot photo where participants seem to be caught in the act of hyper self-consciousness.

In 1991, a seminal essay titled, *Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility* by Tomas Ybarra-Frausto was published in the catalogue of the landmark art exhibit at UCLA's White Art Gallery, *Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation: An Interpretive Exhibition of the Chicano Art Movement, 1965-1985*¹⁵. In the essay, Ybarra-Frausto sets up a conceptual and theoretical framework to define and understand predominant Chicano aesthetics, the first theoretical attempt to demarcate the types of influences and progressions, and diversity of forms and styles, that have predominated Chicano art. Rasquachismo, according to Ybarra-Frausto is a type of 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 –sort of good taste of bad taste. It is witty and ironic, but not mean-spirited, there is a sincerity in its artifice."

Within this framework, Chicano creative practices have included a focus on spirituality, politics, geography, and culture while also demonstrating a high consciousness of context and symbolism. This could be considered a combination of the Dutch art of description and the Italian (symbolic) art of representation (Svetlana Alpers, 2004). That is, traditional Chicano art 'describes' everyday Chicano experience and identity though a symbolic and playful lens. This can be seen in the work of artist Carlos

¹⁵ This landmark exhibition (1985) and its accompanying catalogue (1990) served as a foundational theoretical framework to present in a critical manner the multiplicity of voices and experiences that conformed the Chicano cultural and artistic experience at the time. Also, it is worth to mention another prominent art exhibition that provided an updated version of the state of contemporary Chicano art, this was *Phantom Sights: Art after the Chicano Movement* at LACMA in Spring 2008. Eclectic and multifaceted the Phantom Sights exhibit was a comprehensive overview of the state of contemporary Chicano art and aesthetics at the beginning of the XXI Century (a total of 125 works of art in various media: painting, installation, sculpture, video, etc.).

Almaraz with his freeway crash painting series, where the violent and complex relationships that exist within the urban freeway environment in L.A. are evident.

Many of the artists who have been part of this movement have, through their work, defined a culture and aesthetics apart from the mainstream as an act of celebration and preservation. Judy Baca and Yolanda Lopez provide good examples of this trend through their paintings of L.A. street scenes, and contemporary Chicana women as versions of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Another aspect of the work arising out of the Chicano Art movement has been to define place and experience through the depiction of culturally relevant activities and settings, frequently including a central subject carrying the weight of this representation. While this approach often occurs in a somewhat transparent manner, such as with the straight forward use of the archetypal figures of the Virgin, the *calavera*, or the *abuela* for example, other Chicano artwork created during this same period has utilized more abstract and original modes of representation to convey the Chicano experience. This trend has intensified in more recent years creating a type of splintering of Chicano artistic approaches.

An exploration of the artistic trajectory that has resulted from this splintered development of Chicano art over the last few decades could productively focus on two perspectives. These are, first, the formal qualities related to the use of color, line and shape, and second, the development of the concepts of flatness. Qualities of depthlessness and obliviousness have also developed in this type of work as a response to the heavy investment in the concept of cultural and historical 'depth' of the more traditional Chicano works since the movement began.

To gain a better understanding of the developments within the Chicano art community, it is important to note the profound impact that Mexican immigration has had on it over time. In fact, because of recent immigration and the concurrent cultural and aesthetic qualities present in L.A. from urban Mexico, there has developed an intense cultural spark between Mexican and Chicano popular cultures and aesthetics. This is evident in a photograph of Los Angeles' landscape by Pedro Meyer where a giant, pre-Colombian sculpture is superimposed over the buildings of downtown L.A.

Chicano art in the 60s presented some early visible signs of the Spanglish Turn. Chicano culture was already a hybrid culture (Mexican and American cultures working in a dialectical fashion to create a new hybrid culture often distinct of the original cultures) with a disposition for openness and receptivity, although in a process of formation, Chicano culture and art indicated a hybrid culture that was reflected in its daily life and creative practices. Chicano culture is a hybrid culture, based in an open cultural system that allows for absorption and incorporation of other cultural practices that it finds necessary for its own benefit. Urban theorist Rem Koolhaas expands on this notion of cultural and spatial transformation to state that, "our old ideas about space have exploded. The past three decades have produced more changes in more cultures than any other time in history. Radically accelerated growth has redrawn our familiar maps and reset the parameters: Borders are inscribed and permeated, control zones imposed and violated, jurisdictions declared and ignored, markets pumped up and punctured. And at the same time, entirely new spatial conditions, demanding new

definitions have emerged. Where space was considered permanent, it now feels transitory -on its way to becoming.”¹⁶

Chicano artists over the past thirty years have responded to these social and cultural changes to become more cosmopolitan and hybrid over the years as well as more engaged with the aesthetics of diverse communities. Others argue that Chicano art has changed over the years at a loss to its relevancy to community issues and has lost sight of the goals of the movement, selling out to dominant aesthetics. The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle of these two arguments. It is safe to say though that the development of Chicano art over the past decades has shown a high degree of innovation and sensitivity to various aesthetic discourses within Los Angeles and is now heavily influencing the larger L.A. culture and aesthetic sensibilities.

2.3. Mexican Immigrant

In Los Angeles, since its beginnings and in various degrees, Mexican immigration has served as the cultural influx to the already established Mexican and Chicano cultures. The Mexican immigrant influence in the cultural dynamics of the city of Los Angeles has been of vital importance, it has invigorated the existing cultures and has been a key ingredient for the formation of new cultural hybrids. Mexican immigration in Los Angeles is an essential part of the cultural triad (with the other two being the Chicano influence and the historical progressive California influence) that conform the Spanglish Turn. In addition, Mexican immigrant cultures bring with them

¹⁶ Koolhaas, Rem, “The New World.” *Wired Magazine*, 1 June 2003: 2

fresh formal and aesthetic sensibilities that tend to mix with existing ones creating new sensibilities that result in novel hybrid forms and aesthetics.

A large percentage of immigrants in Los Angeles from Mexico come from Mexico City itself.¹⁷ They bring with them much of that city's urban sensibilities and practices. The current state of Mexico City, and to some degree, the country of Mexico itself, can be seen as the result of the accumulation of small and catastrophic events related to physical and political forces intertwining to produce an urban experience of highly creative forms of survival and pliable adaptation that find expression in urban and architectural forms and aesthetics. These spaces of survival are not the product of a social harmonious co-existence but rather they are the expressive consequences of the intense contradictions, differences and conflicts characteristic of Mexico.

Related to this is a distinguishing quality of Mexico City, that is, people's use and creation of public spaces. The public spaces in Mexico City are unique in so far as the distinction between private and public space is consistently blurred: from the large official Zocalo to the discrete little plazas spread over the city. The street, often the most dynamic space in the city, is vibrant with multiple forms of usage (from street vendors to protest marches). It is in the public spaces that one can see an expression of a contemporary sensibility based on temporality, informality, adaptability, and performativity. It is in these public spaces that the city comes alive, in motion, and in a state of constant change.

¹⁷ The flow of immigration in Mexico has changed over the last few decades. Although, traditionally immigration from Mexico came directly from the different States and regions outside of Mexico City. A large part of today's immigration come from Mexico City itself, bringing a new and unique urban sensibility characteristic of a Mexico City's ethos.

This state of continuous unpredictability has resulted in a sensibility expressed with aesthetic and performative exuberance within an aggressive and rapidly changing environment. It includes a strategic disregard for potential disaster on the one hand, and a disinvestment in the notion of permanence on the other. This has led to a perspective that has greater investment in acts and aesthetic forms which are short lived, spectacular, and fantastic. It requires an attunement to, and participation in, the rhythms of chaotic improvisation, which has led inhabitants to discard static beliefs that have become unnecessary cultural and social baggage.

With different scales of elaboration and size, these spatial practices frequently require a great degree of preparation and planning, and usually result in a comparatively rapid, intense final formal event. Their explosive ephemeral quality creates a unique sense of being a participant in an exhilarated cohesive experience. From the explosive sound of cracking a ceramic centered *piñata*, to the intense dysrhythmic cacophony of firecrackers burning a *castillo*, these spatial practices are all forms of an exuberant celebration of the improvisation and uncertainty of life and space.

An example of a visually spectacular practice is the *Quema de Castillos* (fig. 4). Perhaps this colonial form of popular celebration relates most directly to architecture, not in terms of design or meaning, but in terms of its imitation of structure and form and its dependency on existing buildings as physical support. Castillos often work as façade



Figure 4. *Quema de Castillos*. México City, 2012

like masks attached to existing buildings with some social or institutional significance such as city halls, churches, old colonial buildings, and kiosks. They vary in size and complexity. Sometimes they can be small freestanding structures of abstract lines and shapes, anthropomorphic beings such as bull heads on wheels pushed by people, or large size facades imposed on a building. They represent a desire for danger, a teasing of death, and a potential rebirth. Castillos burn in sections from top to bottom. This burning process slowly reveals a new face for the building, although only for a few minutes. When it is over the remains of the extinguished mask juxtapose with the existing building structure; a cyclical ritual to sustain and endure the hardships of life. Although

castillos can take weeks to prepare they only last for few minutes, culminating in a frantic display of spinning fireworks and a concert of terrorizing celestial sounds. This practice is embedded in the Mexican cultural conception of death. Since pre-Columbian times and the conquest of Mexico to the modern nation-state, the notion of death has remained very ingrained in the psychological, social, and cultural makeup of the country. In *Dead and the Idea of Mexico*, Lomnitz wrote that “intellectuals thought of ‘totemism’ as a primal form of identification that preceded formal religious and state institutions. As such, the cult of dead could be thought of as the oldest, seminal, and most authentic element of Mexican popular culture,” (2005, 24). As an essential part of the construction of Mexican identity, the concept of death, and its related permutations of dying and the perception of afterlife, have provided the nation with a rich range of engaging cultural images, figures and objects. Attitudes towards death in Mexico can be understood as powerful manifestations of cultural hybridity and mestizaje, two forces representing a space in which indigenous and popular culture have transformed and subverted the culture of the colonizer.

Another ubiquitous evanescent practice in Mexico City that uses ideas of death at its core, is the *Quema de Judas* (fig. 5). Judases are large sized paper mache puppets that are paraded through neighborhood streets and then hanged and burned. These exist as visually dramatic celebration highlights that began during colonial times. Originally, they represented mythical or other-worldly characters, such as the devil, *el nahual* (a pre-Colombian boogie man), and skeletons. Post-revolutionary judases expanded the range of representations to include characters with political connotations and serve as a form of subtle social critique. Some of the new characters also include *el politico* (the



Figure 5. *Quema de Judas*, Mexico City, 2010

politician), *el cacique* (land owner), and *el policia* (the policeman). More recently the characters also include international figures such as *el empresario* (the corporate executive), Rambo, former Mexican Presidents, and more recently Donald Trump among others.

The *Quema de Judas* celebration resembles Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. In the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of Russian narratives, he offers a view of narrative that has polyphonic structure and dialogical narration (2009). The forms derived from a carnivalesque point of view describe the power of human emotions, oppose the monologue, and refuse to put faith into the ideas of an already completed truth. Instead Bakhtin infuses contrast and conflict in the form of narrative movement itself. The carnivalesque thus sets in motion an enormous capacity for innovation –innovation that can transform reality itself. It can become a

form of experimentation that links the imagination to desire and utopia. The concept of the carnivalesque with its spatial implications becomes universal when it facilitates the creation of new worlds. In a polyphonic conception of narrative there is no center that dictates meaning but meaning arises only out of the exchanges between all the singularities. In this case, these are individuals in Mexico City who express themselves through dialogue, both verbally and spatially, to create common narrative structures.

Within this framework, contemporary urban environments such as the Los Angeles region and Mexico City can today be said to contain all the rich ethos of large-scale cultural and aesthetic change. This evolution is created by an overlay of peoples' diverse dreams and sensibilities onto their respective cities – a cacophonous assemblage of individual perceptions – that evolves over time through the dynamics of emergent patterning. And while individuals and groups may not be able to understand the underlying meaning of each other's spatial and aesthetic expressions, they can still experience the phenomenological environments that are produced.

Emergent patterning is a concept initially developed to explain organizational processes in biology and has recently been applied to architectural design theory to analyze the development of architecture and urban design. This mode of analysis focuses particularly on the organizational properties of large groups of organisms within a species and the manner in which, through multiple local decisions, they can create overall intelligent patterns. Steven Johnson discusses in his book *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*, that a city's residents can form a type of collective intelligence through use of emergent behavior, that is, through simple random acts of contact, communication, and adjustment. Because of many factors, in

places like Mexico City and L.A., “top down” controls are not a strong force at the street level, and so popular agency begins to take the form of emergent behavior. This would also explain how in times and places such as fin-de-siècle Vienna, the participants of cultural change did so while scarcely knowing one another.

In attempting to understand the changes underway in contemporary metropolises and how they have related to past social and architectural events, one cannot help but be struck by the scale of their populations. Mexico City itself has over twenty million residents while metropolitan Los Angeles contains another thirteen. As Steven Johnson describes in his discussion on evolving cities, more is different; the patterns created are not the same only bigger, they instead are intrinsically different.

2.4. The Spanglish Turn and Architectural Hybridity

Los Angeles is currently in the process of absorbing and modifying new practices and sensibilities from Mexico City into its existing cultural streams. As mentioned earlier, Los Angeles has always been a fertile ground for experimentation in terms of artistic expression, culture, and social movements: from the aloof attitude towards New York’s artistic culture and up tight sensibilities, to the anti-war movement, radical punk and rap; from popular culture to art and architecture. This openness to new and innovative forms is also the result of different determinant factors such as its climate, geography, cultural history, and the built environment.

Malcom Gladwell, in his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, states that it is also the tipping point dynamic that causes large-scale changes in style, taste, and sentiment. Changes occur, he posits, not because of a slow

diffused interest by many, or because of a top down effort by corporate executives, but because of small groups of people who quickly get “into” things, or adopt certain styles, and then catch the attention of others, causing what he calls an epidemic effect (2002). With the Spanglish Turn in Los Angeles, small groups of creative practitioners have acted upon the synergy between the California alternative, glamour cultures and the Mexican baroque, low and slow enacting hybrid creations that have caught the attention of the multitude, leading to an overall Spanglish shift which is beginning to take the city by storm.

While architectural design may or may not be the first creative practice to show evidence of the Spanglish turn, historic trends suggest that it will eventually become a strong force in defining it. Historically, architecture has benefited from using methodological and epistemological strategies from other disciplinary areas, such as art, biology, philosophy, literary theory, and sociology. In architecture, this “appropriation” has in the past lead to some of the most radical architectural forms and ideas: from postmodern deconstructivism (based in the theory of literary deconstruction proposed by Jacques Derrida), to contemporary “digitalism” (the relentless exploitation of digital software technologies with the primary goal to generate different types of architectural formalisms). Therefore, there is a high probability of architecture increasing its “borrowing” or intermingling with other disciplines outside its own disciplinary realm to incorporate many of the new hybrid cultural forms of Los Angeles.

This process is already evident in the new unorthodox ideas and concepts in architectural theory developed recently in Los Angeles (Banham, 1971; Jencks, 1996; Cuff, 2000; and Lavin, 2011). The preeminent architectural schools in the city are also

utilizing the L.A.'s landscape to inform their students' studies. USC's website description of its architectural program, states that it is committed to studying the city of Los Angeles and considers it "a future capital of the Pacific Rim, both the gateway and the mirror of a dynamic nation," (USC website, Nov. 2012). Clearly, the study of Los Angeles by a significant cohort of architect's next generation will play an important role in the future direction of architecture itself, and specifically, how it is manifest in Los Angeles.

PART 2: THE SPANGLISH TURN IN ART, CULTURE AND ARCHITECTURE

Chapter 3. From Mexico City to Mexican Immigrant: Individual Perceptions

3.1. Introduction

Walter Benjamin has stated that, “While content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds,” (1996), Benjamin explicitly sees translation not as a derivative process, but instead as a philosophy of language in which the translation provides an object or idea with liberation and release in order to meet its potential. He calls this act, “translatability,” and locates it mainly in that which resists translation. Deleuze later echoes this concept in his formulation of the fold, embedded in his portrayal of baroque aesthetics, (1993). With these concepts in mind, this dissertation develops more articulate modes of translation for the Spanglish Turn, and how this translation informs the production of hybrid forms in the process of translation.

Through this lens, two modes of analysis provide the framework for looking at the Spanglish Turn. First, a set of Spanglish Turn “comprehensive case studies” are analyzed (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). These include independent close readings of specific aspects of material, artistic, architectural, and popular culture in Los Angeles. Second, creative practices across multiple modes of expression, including material and popular culture, receive analysis by looking at their spatial and aesthetic principles. Chapter 6 includes further description of the spatial analysis variables along with the findings, while Chapter 7 includes a set of architectural representational experiments serving as formal articulations of the Spanglish Turn.

Seven case studies divided in three categories: visual arts, popular and material culture, and Modernist architecture are included in order to demonstrate the affectivity of the Spanglish Turn. The visual arts are selected as a form of analysis for new cultural hybridities because through the visual arts it is possible to delve into the intricacies of the dynamics of form and its aesthetic expressions. In addition, visual arts can open up a window to look into the subjective/objective dichotomy that exists in any visual or spatial phenomena used here to explore cultural hybridities. Through these forms of analysis, the territories of representation, materiality, and performativity can be unhinged, as well as what constitute public and private space which in turn gets reconstituted and transformed into a new critical hybrid space.

Through these case studies one can see how hybrid dynamics occur and get produced, and especially how the Spanglish Turn gets formulated, developed and applied within specific contextual conditions. The first six case studies have as a principal goal, to demonstrate the production of cultural and aesthetic hybrids and how they are being affected by the Spanglish Turn condition. In the following examples, the great potential that visual arts, and popular and material culture have for creating new hybrid conditions will be shown. A definition of a hybrid architecture that responds to the principles of the Spanglish Turn will also begin to take form. These six particular case studies were chosen for the capacity to show their propensity for manifesting hybrid cultural conditions and synergy towards the Spanglish Turn. It is important to note that the six case studies demonstrate how Latino creative practices in Los Angeles are formulated by hybrid conditions and a tendency towards the Spanglish Turn. Each case explores in unique manner the question of hybridity, searching for a critical

synthesis that finds its expression in formal and aesthetic elements. In addition, there is a sense of intertwining between the case studies, sometimes they overlap and juxtapose with each other making the state of cultural hybridity more complex and richer.

The last case study helps illuminate the fact that not all places in Los Angeles are affected by the Spanglish Turn phenomena to the same degree. This is not an indication of having a positive or negative effect on the architecture, but serves to show the panoply of spatial conditions present in Los Angeles and their readiness to engage with Spanglish Turn dynamics. Through an analysis of the Gregory Ain Mar Vista Housing Complex designed in 1948 and its current designation as a HPOZ complex, one can see through this case study, the workings of resistance towards the Spanglish Turn.

3.2 Visual Art and the Spanglish Turn.

The following case study examples of Spanglish Turn aesthetics are within the discipline of the visual arts. They include examples of “paring down” or “stripping away” to get at the essentials of line, color, form, and movement, as well as the opposite, the display of the ornate, decorative and baroque. These trends exist separately and in juxtaposed proximity, creating tension, excitement and unease. The two trends are conflicting and complementary, relating to the different charged forces within the Spanglish Turn.

3.2.1. Case Study # 1: Ruben Ortiz-Torres

A ghost haunts America. It is the ghost of 'Desmotherism'. Exhausted by the insipid kitsch (schmaltz) and the banal, ambiguous gestures that tend to pass for

post conceptual contemporary art, we have opted for liberation based on a playful and hedonistic approach to modes of production. We are searching for new strategies and forms of producing culture and design that spectacularly celebrate the act of labor and its tools making evident the inherent contradictions in the production of goods and services in the era of globalization.

Ruben Ortiz-Torres's Manifesto

Ruben Ortiz-Torres is an L.A. based artist originally born in Mexico City. For the last few decades Ortiz-Torres has explored relationships between cultural identity and representation, popular and material culture, and new aesthetic forms. By combining these three aspects he has created a body of work within specific context that is unique and exciting. In his artwork, he creates ultra-hybrid movable forms based on existing elements in popular culture. For many years, he has focused on the idea and process of customizing, taking functional mundane machinery (usually old and left-over objects) and altering them into objects that are both aesthetically and functionally extraordinary. Building on the Chicano lowrider tradition, he has applied both the ideas of customizing and hybridizing to his artwork, notably in his installation, *Alien Toy* (fig. 6).

In this work, Ortiz-Torres isolates the aesthetic of the lowrider hydraulics, which give his car the ability to “dance,” – to split, move up and down, and spin – then he exaggerates these movements ten-fold. His works also employ leaf blowers and simple rectangles of metal to both reference and confound popular and conventional art forms. In his essay on Ortiz-Torres's work, David A. Green observes that the “challenge to us



Figure 6. Ortiz-Torres, Ruben. *Alien Toy*, mixed media, 1997

is not to decorate or deconstruct our cultures to the point of (un)recognizability, but simply make them do something new: to declare the future here, right now.”¹⁸

In his series, *Power Tools*, consisting of customized leaf blowers, lawn mower, and gardening tools (fig. 7), Ortiz-Torres addresses the pervasive artificial nature of Southern California landscapes and the economic and labor apparatuses that are set in place to sustain them. Through the aesthetics of customization, hybridization, humor and delight, his work conveys a form of subtle critique of the social, political, ecological, and cultural dynamics of appearance in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles climate and geography is equivalent to a Mediterranean type of landscape where semi-arid conditions dominate its geography. Through a tremendou

¹⁸ Green, David A. *Desmotherism: Ruben Ortiz-Torres*, exhibition catalogue, p. 44. September 19 – November 8, 1998. Huntington Beach Art Center, Huntington Beach, California

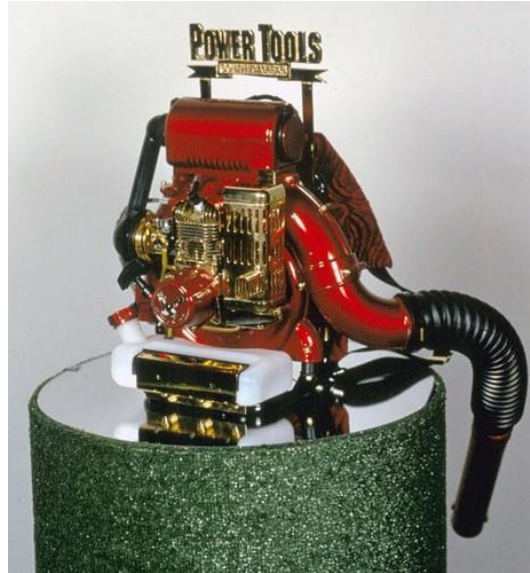


Figure 7. Ortiz-Torres, Rubén. *Power Tools/Herramientas de Alto Poder*, mixed media, 1999

economic and cultural effort, the natural L.A. landscape has been transformed in places into artificial green blankets with imported plants and trees. Ortiz-Torres exploits this marked contradiction between the natural and the artificial and produces objects that reflect this condition. He beautifies the tools that are used to domesticate and make artificial the natural L.A. landscape. Through this process of aestheticizing everyday working-class tools, the artist insinuates a coming change in power dynamics among the city's inhabitants.

In recalling Ortiz-Torres's manifesto, it is interesting that the main idea grounding it, *desmothernista*, is hybridized spanglish, allowing for it to have various ambiguous meanings. The term is a phonetic play between English and Spanish and composed of two complex made-up words. The first part, *desmother*, refers to the Spanish term, *desmadre*. Someone can be *desmadroso* which means a little crazy. To

hacer mucho desmadre is to create chaos. *Ya se armo el desmadre* means the shit hit the fan. As in, there is no mother around so everything is crazy. To be motherless, without a mother is *Que poca madre*. In Mexican culture, this is a very serious affair, since after the virgin of Guadalupe, mothers are the most sacred, revered beings. Ironically, in Chicano culture, *desmadre* is used frequently to refer to that which is spectacular.

While the word *madre* in Spanish means mother, *desmotherna* also refers to the concept of the modern, the contemporary, or more specifically to the de-modern (removal or reducing of the modern). The term *desmadre* then could be said to refer to a world that is irreverently out of hand and chaotic that tends to give little weight to the tumults and preoccupations of the harsh reality of the everyday, in other words, it can resemble an oblivious and “going for broke” attitude that finds outrageous, creative expressions in street popular culture, contemporary visual arts, and social body language. The full term, *desmothernista*, with all its linguistic complexity is full of potent irony and attractive playfulness.

But beyond playfulness, the art of Ortiz-Torres is also sharp and serious, tending to demystify and challenge the predominant ideas prevalent in today’s contemporary art: post-conceptual art and neo-formalist art (art in which technique and form -often a euphemism for beauty- are the primary and often the only concerns). In both of these concepts, context and content are not part of their preoccupation. They are denuded of any signifiers or real meanings.

Ortiz-Torres’s spanglish term relates to the Spanglish Turn because it conveys multiple hybrid intonations. His myriad of hybrid spanglish terms are expressions of a Mexico City urban ethos. Ortiz-Torrez takes as a strategic design principle the process

of customization from lowriding culture and translates it into an aesthetic vocabulary that through different ways of combining and recombining results in spectacular and dynamic art objects. Some of his work is inspired by architecture, in that he is very concern with context and dynamics of public and private space. Besides, some of his art objects resemble architectural forms, such as a project that starts with graffiti shapes and gets transformed (through animation software programs) into movable abstract architectural forms.

For Ortiz-Torres context is essential, both cultural and physical context. Culturally his work has established an uneasy relationship with various forms of popular culture. Of particular importance is his relation to diverse forms of cultural hybrids that are the product of both the global nature of a city such as Los Angeles, and the particularities that are reflective of unique and specific cultural and social conditions. These states of simultaneity and of dual cultural hybridities (globalization and bottom up) are the distinct dynamics of the location of Ortiz-Torres's work.

This is a hybrid space itself. It includes the generalized and to some extent superficial hybridity that results from the dynamics of contemporary globalization, 'floating deterritorialized hybridity.' Its characteristics are those of being easy, benign, fast, and superficial. It does not challenge the structures of the cultural and social status quo. On the contrary, often their creative manifestations serve to reaffirm and redress old values with new clothes. This globalized hybridity is very seductive and alluring. Its potency comes from the dynamics of commerce and is one of the principal products of late consumer capitalism.

In the other hand, 'situated hybridity' is characterized as a 'trickled up' cultural phenomena. Based on multiple factions that come in constant (and intense) contact by their proximity, they tend to produce cultural forms that tend to be radical, malleable, wild, and bold. They are the result of what Ortiz-Torres has denominated to be a product of a "savage city" (*una ciudad salvaje*), Los Angeles. These forms are not born of harmonious and easy co-existence but on the contrary, are born of the tensions, contradictions, and conflicts between different cultural groups that are fighting to co-exist and for the right to the city. We can see this savageness in the fires, earthquakes, floods, and riots that become cyclical in the history of Los Angeles. As mention earlier, this condition of unpredictability and wildness (*desmadre*) sets the conditions for the formation of certain types of attitudes of survival and a 'go for broke' sensibility at the street level.

In Ortiz-Torres's work he "injects" objects with a quality that gives them levity, vulnerability, and playfulness. Playfulness is mainly characterized by an attitude that privileges a light mood and rejects heaviness. This is different from the postmodern irony reflected in art as a form of negation and critique. Playfulness can habilitate the object with a certain sharpness, a form of gentle critique. In other words, playfulness in Ortiz-Torres's work serves a dual purpose: to disarm the viewer by making him or her laugh or experience humor, and then provoke a subtle form of critique on the conventions and relationships between "high culture," cultural identity, Chicano and Mexican culture, and cultural representations.

In Ortiz-Torres's works, beauty, delight and style seem to be paramount to everything else, other issues such as content, symbolism, metaphor, narrative, and

identity take secondary place in his artistic approach. It is noticeable in his artistic manifesto when he states that “we have opted for liberation based on a playful and hedonistic approach to modes of production” that he equates playfulness and a hedonistic attitude with freedom or liberation, freedom from cultural conventions, freedom from prescribed styles, and freedom from representation. The term Hedonism refers to a school of thought that posits that pure pleasure is the only intrinsic good. It derives from the Greek word for “delight.” The notions of pleasure or delight together with the notions of taste and value are at the center of the discourses of art history and philosophy of aesthetics, frequently over the appreciation and experience of art.

In Ortiz-Torres’s work the diverse combination of mediums (sculpture, installation, video, painting) and material and techniques result in a tension between two dual experiential and perceptual conditions: from quasi-schizophrenic to a poetic experience. This aesthetic approach demands a special effort from the viewer because his work is both static and dynamic, sometimes in the same piece. This is the case in his paintings on metal geometric shapes. They can be static with one color dominating the field if the viewer watches it from one angle, or they can change colors and give the impression of movement if the viewer moves around, demands a different type of visual perception and mental registration. The viewer is given several options to experience the work. In these paintings, created in the lowrider style of car painting, the other aspects of lowriders, that is, their decorative, maximalist qualities, have been stripped away to highlight the sublime quality of the painted surface.

This special relation between the object and the viewer is crucial in Ortiz-Torres’s work. His customized movable “sculptures” and his metal “paintings” emanate

an exuberant force and special atmospheric effects that stimulates a unique electrifying space-object experience. He calls this condition “social sculpture space,” where the object seduces the viewer to be an active participant, whether by direct participation or by the sensorial whirlwind of the aesthetic experience. This experience can be considered hedonistic because it results in an experience of delight and pleasure.

In Ortiz-Torres’s movable sculptures there exists a quality in the display that affects the space around the sculpture. This space is stimulated by the whirlwind of experiences, through a dynamic display of colors, textures, patterns, and through the parts operating in a schizophrenic and euphoric display of movement and action; they activate and transform the space around it. This charged space is transformed into a space of super, visual and spatial effects, an atmospheric space where a full array of sensations and stimulations are experienced by the viewer. It is like the experience of the visually spectacular practice in Mexico City, the *quemada de castillos*.

The work of Ortiz-Torres is based in customization, a process derived from lowrider culture. Ortiz-Torres's work has as a central formal expression the process of cultural and aesthetic hybridity. This creative approach, customization and hybridity, fits well within the Spanglish Turn principle. The fact that hybrid linguistic terms with multiple meanings are of great significance to his artistic manifesto shows that a spanglish approach is at play in his ideas and concepts. Ortiz-Torres's work operates between the liminal spaces of the contemporary cultures of Los Angeles. It also questions simplistic and rigid notions of cultural identity, representations of Mexico and the U.S., high and low culture. Through his work, Ortiz-Torres is able to propose a different paradigm in which aesthetic forms are reconstituted, reformulated and

reconceptualized resulting in highly novel and experimental expressions. An underlining characteristic of Ortiz-Torres's work, is that expresses humor and delight, characteristics that serve to dismantle and to seduce the viewer.

3.2.2. Case Study # 2: Salomón Huerta

Salomón Huerta is an L.A. artist who exemplifies a trend in Chicano art towards subtle aesthetics and a focus on color and surface. He, like many of his peers, portrays a re-imagined contemporary urban and suburban L.A. landscape in abstract, alternative styles beyond those originally outlined in the Chicano movement. Salomón Huerta created early works early on in his career as part of the Self-Help Graphics and Art (SHG&A) and the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) communities in Los Angeles, and has since grown away from the traditional Chicano aesthetic to incorporate a more eclectic style, imagery, and signification in his work. This case study describes the developmental phases of his artwork over the last fifteen years and the manner in which they reflect changes in the social and political tenor of the city.

Salomón Huerta, originally from East Los Angeles, utilized the traditional framework of the Chicano movement in his early work, namely, the use of specific cultural signifiers and figures within time based events to portray symbolic attributes, actions, and relationships. This can be seen in a large untitled work completed in the early nineties after the L.A. riots based on a Flemish baroque painting by Peter-Paul Rubens, *Lion Hunt*, 1621 (fig. 8). In Huerta's rendition, *Los Tres Caballeros*, young Chicanos dressed in *cholo* style ride together on horseback to collectively spear a

fighting boar. The young cholos are portrayed as righteous young warriors retaliating against the boar which represents the abusive police (fig. 9).



Figure 8. Rubens, Peter Paul. *Lion Hunt*, painting, 1621



Figure 9. Huerta, Salomón. *Los Tres Caballeros*, painting, 1994

While this painting does not portray an actual event, it does reflect a collective emotional response towards the frequently abusive police. The viewer of this painting is simultaneously invited into the scene and diminished in significance in relation to the aggression and power of the young men portrayed. It is classically narrative in style and action, describing a poignant and archetypal story of collective retaliation.

In the next stage of Huerta's artistic trajectory, he painted detailed and realistic full portraits of cholos, styled characteristically with dark sun glasses, short cropped hair, bleached white tee-shirts, baggy starched and creased Dickies pants, and a sway back posture with one foot stepping forward, like in the painting *Sniper* (fig. 10). In this series of paintings, Huerta kept the central focus on a specific, identifiable figure who could be seen as symbolizing contemporary Chicano youth. While the image of the cholo is similar to his previous work, in other ways Huerta has shifted away from his earlier style, losing any reference to specific settings, and any relationship between subjects. Each young man in the series is painted on a separate canvas apart from the others. While the viewer comes face to face with each painted individual, they no longer are represented as part of a group or community. More generally, these paintings contain only one central shape in the center of a void. The figures also seem to have gone through a process of slowing down from the active roles portrayed in earlier work. They are poised in these paintings to only watch and wait, with the viewer not able to sense the subjects' past or future. In this way, Huerta begins to hint at a trend that will become more pronounced in his later work which is an emphasis on static shape and non-specific referentiality toward people, time, or places.

Huerta's next artistic phase is represented by his painted series of shaved heads (fig. 11). These paintings, which are generally square in shape, depict with exacting detail, the back of a person from the base of the neck up to the crown of the head. Each head in the series is framed by a single vivid color. The singular shape in these paintings

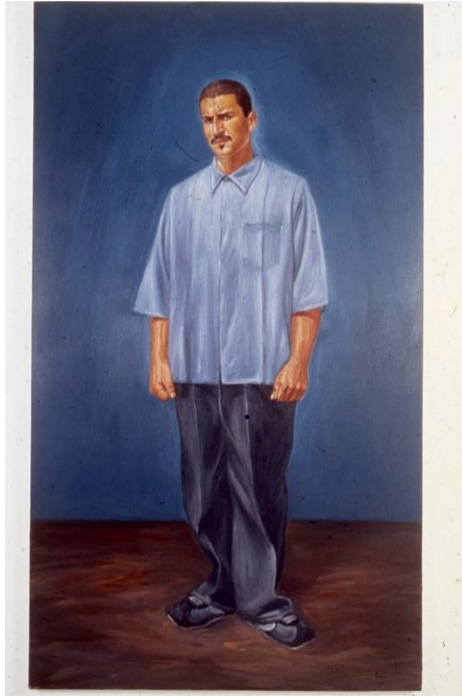


Figure 10. Huerta, Salomón. *Sniper*, painting,

is ovalesque in nature and painted with some three dimensionally with hints of shading around the head and neck. It is a midway phase in Huerta's move towards painting flattened imagery with attention focused only to surface. What is most strikingly different between these paintings and his earlier work is the loss of the identity of his central figures. While the viewer can generally discern the ethnicity of the subject by skin color and guess at the gender by proportion of neck to head, the identity of the

person is indiscernible without a view of the face. As with the cholo portraits, these head shots are set within a single-colored two-dimensional field. As such, the imagery has become divorced from meaning or symbolism.

In light of the goals of the Chicano art movement, these paintings may suggest that Huerta had begun to question the validity of art as a vehicle to express cultural or personal identity, central concerns of much Chicano art. In contrast to the cholo portraits, these paintings express a greater level of distancing from the subject by the artist. With the loss of a view of the person's face and any cultural signifiers, the viewer is left to merely contemplate the person's identity. Lastly, these paintings all suggest a new level of vulnerability in the subject. While the images of the cholos were portrayed as strong and impassive, these heads are bare, and present no type of posturing. In fact, the bareness of each neck may evoke a greater sense of theatricality, as the viewer serves the greater role of a participant in the scene, clearly standing behind an unknown figure.

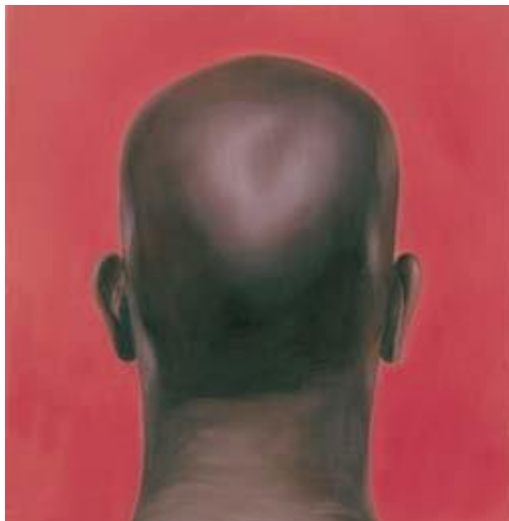


Figure 11. Huerta, Salomón. *Shaved Head*, painting.

This relationship between the subjects of the paintings and the viewers is a change from most traditional Chicano paintings that attempt to reduce this sense of vulnerability through portraying scenes of people in moments of connectivity with others, or at a minimum, purposeful in their actions and in control. The viewer of traditional Chicano paintings would to a degree, have the sense of being included in the portrayed scenario because of its non-exclusivity. The paintings of John Valadez could be said to reflect this ethos. In Huerta's head paintings in comparison, the subject is completely still.

And you may ask yourself what is that beautiful house?

And you may ask yourself where does that highway go?

And you may ask yourself am I right?...am I wrong?

And you may tell yourself, My god!...what have I done?

Once in a Lifetime, David Byrne, The Talking Heads

In Huerta's next body of work, the central figure is no longer human but instead a modest suburban home. The house is placed centrally in each composition and is geometric in shape – rectangular, triangular, and square. These individual homes are static and two dimensional, seeming to live solely on the surface of the painting. While some of the house paintings contain shadows to show three-dimensionality, many are rendered as simple flat surface forms. Additionally, the surrounding environments for

the homes are simplified into brightly colored geometric shapes with no internal detail, shading, or patterning of any kind. In one painting simply called, *Purple House* (fig. 12), Huerta creates a symmetrical composition including a bright purple one story home with a steeped pointed roof and two identical windows on either side of a white front door.



Figure 12. Huerta, Salomón. *Purple House*, painting, 2002

door. This 'figure-as-house' is seemingly vacant, creating the effect of isolation, dystopia, and vulnerability, all aspects of the charged force of sedation. In these paintings, Huerta has created an alternative, deadly-still science fiction world of flat brilliant colors and shapes. In part, Huerta has used the logic of another discipline to create this affect. This is the discipline of commercial design. He often chooses his color combinations for paintings based on those found in fashion magazine layouts (interview with the artist on 3-12-2015), with the assumption that these colors have been carefully considered for compatibility with one another and are seasonably fashionable to conform to consumer tastes.

This uneasiness and sense of futility is evident in the works of other contemporary Latino artists such as Jeff Soto and Camille Rose Garcia who create jarring landscapes and unnerving creatures. As Huerta's, their paintings possibly reflect a few different dystopian visions, including interpretations of: the existing urban landscape, the identity art project, and their own mental cartographies. This trend in paintings evokes the self-reflection and doubt in contemporary life that is expressed in the Talking Heads song above, *Once in a Lifetime*.

The post WWII California bungalow homes in Huerta's paintings are archetypal houses of suburbia and represent all the promise and disillusion of suburbia for America's middle class. They have been filtered to remove any cultural or individual signifiers, and so, are the most distinct of Huerta's work from the Chicano movement. Yet while they do not depict any specific place in Los Angeles, they represent the emotional pitch of the city. This body of work remains true to aspects of the movement in the manner in which it retains the symbolism of the figure even after it has been denuded or stripped of its specific cultural (or historical) signifiers. In these paintings, there is no narrative or story to tell anymore, historical truth has been adulterated and loosened by the stretching and condensing of the surface to the point that reality (the quotidian L.A. built environment) is no longer grounded in everyday life; the built environment is morphed into an interior mental paradoxically 'soft' landscape of both cultural doubts and spatial reassurance. In these paintings time is slowed down and space is held still to produce a reworked sense of 'homeness', but this new home is alien, artificial and superficial, very distinct from the reassurance of the domesticated deep landscape favored in traditional Chicano art.

Yet it is in the tension within this thin veneer-like and uneasy zone between the hard materiality of space and the soft emotionality of place and its aesthetic manifestations that contemporary Chicano art in Los Angeles struggles to find its place, its new homeness; a journey that started more than three decades ago in the streets of Los Angeles.

Huerta's work demonstrates that thirty years after the various civil rights, cultural and art movements first began, many artists are no longer interested in creating art of describing or art that is culturally affirming. Conversely, they seem to be collectively casting their nets forward into the future to envision wild possibilities of change. Chicano artists, like many other artists from different communities are immersed in the creation of alternate realities in their work brought about by current culturally hybrid urbanism in Los Angeles.

During this time of political conflict, economic downturn, and disappointed hope in society, artists have begun to delve into their imagination as well as look for inspiration in the external world. Whether these visions and landscapes are dystopian or utopian, they represent an exploration into possibilities for our future that do not depend on structure and logic to get us there, but instead on the power of collective and individual imagination.

These types of expressions are influencing many creative practitioners and are taking place in various places in Los Angeles. The components of the Spanglish Turn (metafunctions and charged fields) are manifested in various contemporary structures. In this case, art and architecture are the vehicles that convey the different forms of hybridity that are part of the Spanglish Turn framework. In architecture in Los Angeles

we can find some indications of the Spanglish Turn, although not the entire building some fragments are expressions of a new hybridity that is specific to Los Angeles.

An existing architectural manifestation of this framework is the Bobco Metals Showroom (fig. 13) in downtown Los Angeles, designed to reflect the dark, dystopian feel of its environment. Created by NULL.LAB, it uses reappropriated pieces of metal



Figure 13. NULL.LAB. *Bobco Metals Showroom*. 2003. Los Angeles, California

from its storage of a variety of scales, shapes, and thickness to eclectically clad both its exteriors and interiors. This also expresses the charged field of adulteration through its repurpose and extension of materials throughout the various spaces it creates. The metal layered and protruding over all the surfaces create strong lines and geometric shapes that most concretely establish the building's environmental affect.

Huerta's work provides us with an aesthetic vocabulary that is hybrid, synthetic and highly formal. The way he uses the elements of line, color and shape (re)present a unique way to show Chicano culture and art as a hybrid culture. His

aesthetic sensibility is a subtle reflection of the tone and tenor of the urban context.

Within this framework the Spanglish Turn principle enters his aesthetic domain and incites new (cultural and aesthetic) hybrid possibilities.

3.2.3. Case Study # 3. Refugio Posadas

In the City of Veracruz in Mexico there is a restaurant called *La Parroquia* (the Parish). It exists as part of an outdoor cacophony of sounds and smells and is unique, not just for its tradition of making excellent coffee, but because of the theatricality of its presentation. When serving a *café con leche*, a statuesque waiter holds the coffee and steaming milk high overhead, frozen for a moment in time to calculate accurate aim. He then pours the liquids simultaneously into a pint size glass on the table, creating a frothy delicious mix, seemingly from the heavens above. All around, the sounds of people talking and music playing mix with the tinkling sound of people tapping their glasses to receive their own alchemic mix. *La Parroquia* is a place where all sensations blend together, where the locals mix indistinguishably with the foreigners, where discussions of corruption in local politics merge with discussions of global warming. Everything revolves around the ritual of serving and drinking coffee. This perfect mix of ingredients relates to Refugio Posada's unusual approach to architectural design, not based solely on the logic of mathematics, but also privileging intuition and direct experience to inform aesthetic and formal choices.

Refugio Posadas is an architect and visual artist from Veracruz, Mexico who creates fantastical architectural designs in a series of paintings called, *Stories about Buildings*, the creation of which has spanned over twenty years. These works

demonstrate both his architectural design sensibility and his connection to cultural and geographic contexts. His work is significant to this investigation because it demonstrates the manner in which the frontier, metropolis of Los Angeles can influence the aesthetic and spatial understandings of an immigrant designer, as well as the manner in which this designer can then incorporate and recontextualize American cultural artifacts, practices, and principles in his work. This process of incorporating U.S. popular and high culture into his existing mental schemata or cartography is a significant aspect of the process of hybridity. When his designs moved into the public domain, with their reformulated and recombined aesthetics, they completed the cyclical process of hybridity where original forms are reconsumed by the original producers in revamped conditions. In addition, Stories about Buildings works in the intersection between art and architecture. The result is a hybrid operational space that is dialectical and projective, it allows for experimental and cutting-edge ideas to materialize and to take form. The relationship between art and architecture is complex and difficult. This is in part because architecture, in both theory and practice, often tends towards an autonomous space. A space that marks its own discursive parameters making difficult for other disciplines to penetrate the protected realm of architecture. Refugio Posadas experiments with this relationship making it an essential part of the investigation of the architectural process. The results tend to be a series of small “paintings” that work in the rich in-between space of art and architecture. This hybrid and liminal space is charged with tremendous stimulating energy that is conducted towards visual arts and architecture, making them (visual arts and architecture) innovative, sensual, affective, and open to embrace different cultural hybrids.

Posadas began this body of work in 1990, two years after his arrival to the United States from Mexico. Constructing these designs helped him establish a new sense of home, and as the images describe, are very connected to the condition of being an immigrant, that is, of leaving one's home and trying to find another. The designs, dated with the day, month, and year, are mediations on cultural shock, and vehicles to process the new, bombardment of information. His personal experience as an immigrant was full of contradictions, from living in Bel Air while not knowing what the name Bel Air signified, to contrarily, not having much money, a car, or access to public transportation.

His experiences, like his images, were as if two distinct geometries had been inscribed onto the same space. He was in a "double" space. His images describe a fictional space where two ways of living in the world are colliding. He came to understand, how different geometries, inscribing boundaries that fold and refold like a quicksilver, can superimpose themselves upon one another. His experience and architectural drawings are like magical realism itself as he tried to make sense of conflicting paradigms. This required a faculty for boundary-skipping between worlds.

To this effect, Posadas relates ideas of architecture and imagination to various author's work such as Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1978), and *Empire of the Signs* (1983), by Roland Barthes. But the main direct influence on his ideas is by the late John Hejduk, whose unusual and original design process was the result of intuitive process and artistic expressions such as painting and poetry. He also integrates pre-Columbian myths and forms, the idea of a complex, large urban city, popular culture, folk art, writing passages, songs and poems that relate to notions of space and place. In this work,

he imagines possible buildings and certain spaces, where function is not a main consideration, but instead only forms responding to themes in different combinations.

In Los Angeles, he developed an interest in the ways that three major metropolitan areas of the Pacific Rim relate to each other. These metropolises are Mexico City, Los Angeles, and Tokyo. Between the three exists several connections, including their size and their ecological fragility. They each experience natural and man-made disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, and high levels of pollution. Also, the three cities are great producers of popular culture: street culture (e.g., street vendors and castillos) in Mexico City, pop culture (e.g., super flat and anime.) in Tokyo, and popular culture (e.g., graffiti, music, and fashion) in Los Angeles.

Posadas explores these commonalities and differences in his image, *Sotoyama-Chinampa* (fig. 14) where he focuses on historic forms rather than the metropolis.

Within this painting, there are two representations of a single building. One is a façade view and the other a floor plan. The entire land around the building is covered



Figure 14. Posadas, Refugio. *Sotoyama-Chinampa*, painting, 1990

with crops, half made up of Sotoyama, rice fields, and the other half of Chinampas, floating corn fields: representing two of the primary sustenance crops in the world. Sotoyama is an agricultural system of rice fields from Japan that uses the land between the slope of the mountain and the flat areas around it. He was interested in the idea of Japanese systems, where highly domesticated landscapes are made very productive with unique forms. Chinampas on the other hand are pre-Columbian “floating gardens” on the Lake Texcoco from the area around Tenochtitlan, currently Mexico City. They are an agricultural system that was constructed on a grid made out of large “beds” made from compressed mud and serviced to cultivate corn, squash, beans and flowers. In addition, Posadas wanted to combine representations of these sculptural agricultural forms with pre-Columbian systems and myths. In the design of the building itself there is a large retaining wall, actually a wall composed of nine interconnected smaller walls. Then from that main wall, different sections of the building extrude. The walls are all painted purple. It has the look of a space age fort surrounded by 18th century French gardens.

This style and perspective towards design has overtones of the work of Hejduk, whose unusual approach to architectural design was not based solely on the logic of mathematics, but also privileging intuition and direct experience to inform aesthetic and formal choices. This break with the traditional design paradigm, and the development of his own process, gave Hejduk unique tools with which to examine and disassemble many aspects of architecture’s formal vocabulary and syntax. The meaning, or semiotics of his work, is rooted in an aesthetic language developed over years of repetitive processes, of coding and translations.

Instead of eschewing the architectural models of his time like Hejduk, Posada often also considered contemporary architectural trends in his work. In the 1990s, postmodernism and neoclassical styles were popular, also high-tech modernism, which included buildings that looked like machines. These were approaches that were very rational, approaches that favored either history or science. Posada's approach, while incorporating some of these styles, looked more to the whimsical and magical. *Stories about Buildings* was intended to be a series of organic narratives, or stories that would reflect a new paradoxical condition of both the old and the new cultural identities, location and dislocation, and English and Spanish. Posada's arrival in the United States in the late 1980's marked the rupture with some notions of his past and the arrival to a new cultural alien territory. For example, being in the U.S., he became rapidly aware of race dynamics, though he had never thought of it much before in Mexico. This awareness was at first felt on an intuitive level, related to how he was observed, addressed, interacted with, everything soft. Later people's attitudes became more obvious. His own proclaimed immature political consciousness had been previously only of class – rich versus poor. This self-proclaimed naiveté came out of the experience with his own immediate family, where everyone was already so different – his grandmother Indian, his grandfather white, his brother and sister light skinned, and he dark.

The identity whirlwind he experienced in those initial years became crucial for the formation of a longer and deeper sense of belonging he developed later (which is shown in the painting *City with Two Faces* (fig. 15). As Posadas began exploring

Los Angeles, he discovered the multiple urban layers that make up the city, layers that defied the conventional rules of what a city should look like, or how it works. Quickly he learned that to really know Los Angeles he would need a different mental and emotional attitude towards the city, a different psycho-geographic map. Posadas

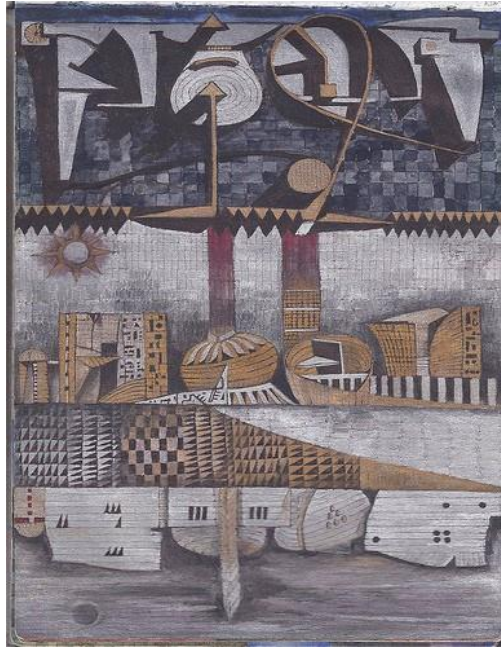


Figure 15. Posadas, Refugio. *City with Two Faces*, painting, 1990

discovered that the sinuousness of L.A. was an invitation to understand it from a perspective that challenged the rational and privileged the intuitive and subconscious. After he made this shift in his feeling about the city, suddenly the city opened up to him and he was immediately immersed in the spaces of the city that he felt were full of mystery, and unpredictable, this is reflected in *Cuiculco*, (Fig. 16).

From this perspective, *Stories about Buildings* responds more to a counter-intuitive process where affective cognition is privileged over logic and rationality. By giving feelings a generative position to create imagery that resonates with architectural forms the creative process goes through a reversal approach method. It is important to mention that the affective cognition is not a random system of producing weak knowledge but on the contrary, it is grounded in sensory perception. Hejduk is also notable in this type of effort in his process of translation of his final works, where his



Figure 16. Posadas, Refugio. *Cuiculco*, painting, 1991

two-dimensional representational drawings moved into geometric design layouts, and then again were reborn into abstracted three-dimensional forms.

There is a comic aesthetic quality in these images that relates not to their humorous nature, but to their explicit, graphic quality, derived from the comic tradition. Solid colors and lines work to create clearly separate shapes. Their representational nature evokes a narrative quality, of beings caught in the moment of a larger act that extends in time before and after the described scene. The graphic descriptions create a close approximation between the intent to create illusionistic representations of objects and situations, and the viewers' interpretations of them. The images, in this manner are aggressive, providing an immediate impact to the viewer. These qualities are described well in David Carrier's book, *The Aesthetics of Comics*.

Another quality of Posadas's work related to this idea of comics or caricature, is that of exaggeration and deformation. Unlike some other types of representation which attempt to depict beauty in idyllic situations, these images describe figures in exaggerated manners in order to capture their characters, providing information on their interpretation of the forms' roles in their unfolding stories. These aspects of immediacy and narrative provide some of the images with an imminent quality; they appear on the verge of realizing a spectacle of importance. Or conversely, other images contain the quality of remains, as if they are scenes left over from a significant event.

In contrast, a traditional approach to architectural design receives its dictates from the logic of mathematics, a sense of order, and geometry. This is manifest in a wide variety of architectural forms and representations, from the Greek column, to the grid, diagram and blob. This method prioritizes rational thought while subsuming other ways of knowing. Jacqueline Lichtenstein in, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (1993), describes a seventeenth century reversal of

these priorities, where a discrediting of Plato's philosophical framework occurs, not through rigorous counter argument, but through a prioritizing of "good taste." This position is premised on the notion that one can sense "rightness" outside of logical reasoning, that capacities for knowing, such as intuition, and perceptive experience, can equally (or in this case, preferably) inform judgments. Posadas's work falls into this category. His design processes and aesthetic outcomes are informed by his own developed sense of "good taste" learned from the elements of the city itself.

What intrigued Posadas the most in his explorations of the city was the ordinary and unexpected elements that he encountered. The accumulation of these small experiences gave him a sense of a city full of excitement and energy. In *Stories about Buildings*, Posada captures these moments. The forms that he created were the result of imagined architectural scenarios that responded to ordinary, everyday mundane experiences.

An example of this is his design entitled, *Casa para el Taquero* (house for the taco maker), which is composed of seven spatial layers, each with a distinct character (fig. 17). Together the layers form a type of kaleidoscopic architectural expression, giving the impression of a dynamic accordion. The building is actually a combination of a portable restaurant and a house. The main influence or inspiration for the building was the ubiquitous taco trucks or *loncheras* that ride all over the city. The main façade of the building is made out of metal. The building has a painting covering part of it (with some tridimensional elements) that resembles an actual taco truck. The painting is in the style used in lowriders, with painting effects ranging from iridescent, to pearl and flake. These



Figure 17. Posadas, Refugio. *Casa para el Taquero*, painting, 1993

are painting effects that give the impression of saturation and endless depth to the surface. The image is painted in the style of a mural, projecting a certain literalness that serves to give some theatricality to the building by establishing a temporal and uneasy connection to “the customers” of the taco truck. The mural’s iconography is variant and straight forward, almost in a narrative style. In the bottom of the building above the tires, it contains fragments of pre-Columbian pyramids. At the center is a painting of an oversized shrimp and a fish flying in the sky surrounding a large glass cup. There are also other surreal motifs such as a pre-Columbian snake, skulls, hearts, and superhero carrying an image of a big eye. The building is elevated from the ground and supported by a conglomerate of gold branches. The overall impression is that of a building with wings trying to fly but held down instead by the gold branches.

In Posadas’ translation of the everyday and the subjective into architectural form, one could situate his work within the conceptual framework of a ‘fictional’ world, in which indications of local places are sometimes those of others, including places very

different in assumptions – often non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation. In this trajectory, Posadas primary narrative investment combines myths, legends, and rituals. As such, his images, his ‘paper’ architecture, is maximalist. Maximalism can be understood as a design strategy that counters minimalist sensibilities (“Less is More”) and favors a strategic style that is plural, complex, eclectic, and diverse.

Another lens through which to view his work and his exploration of form is through the concept of *magical realism*. It is a mode suited to exploring and transgressing boundaries, including ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, and systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among those worlds –in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism. Thus, magical realism may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation, at the same time that it resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism. Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female; these are boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned.

Beyond translating the elements of the city and ideas from literature and other domains into architectural drawings, Posadas experiments with a variety of other

translations, between figure and operational field, between interior and exterior, and between surface and form. As Deleuze describes in his book, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2005), in recent painting there has existed a concerted effort to break away from narrative representations. One strategy to accomplish this severing is to isolate the figure into separate operative fields distinct from the rest of the painting. Figures become isolated and so no story can be interpreted out of their implied interactions. While in Posadas' architectural paintings often include a narrative, he also establishes a figure to operative field relationship, he inverts the relationship by placing all the figures together within the field.

This can be seen in the painting, *City with Two Faces* (fig. 15). This architectural design also shows how multiple cultural identities inscribed in one individual can serve the purpose of generating exciting architectural forms and experiences. The image is the result of diverse urban layers in combination with popular myths and narratives. In general, the image is composed of a site/floor plan and two side elevations. The design is comprised of one architectural complex with four interconnected and very different buildings. The function or program is not clear, but what is clear is the relation between the outdoor areas within the complex, the semi-private areas around the individual buildings, and the more intimate areas inside the buildings which are dynamically connected and overlapped. The private/public spatial relation is in a constant state of shifting, where boundaries between what spaces begin and end is unclear and liminal. The *City with Two Faces* image is based on Posadas' grandmother *Totonacan*¹⁹ recipe

¹⁹ Totonacan is a Mexican indigenous group from Mexico that lives in the central part of the states of Puebla and Veracruz.

for a tropical drink called *tepache*. Tepache is made of the pineapple ring that is fermented in a clay pot for a few days. To make the drink, one adds fresh water and sugar. The result is very delicious and refreshing, perfect for the hot summers in the south of Mexico. The second consideration is based in the idea of projecting a building that has multiple “faces,” each showing a different dimension of the experiences a person might have in the inside of the building complex as a whole and in the individual buildings specifically. The entire complex uses primarily two materials: lava rock and various types of metals. The surface of the south façade is variations of the color gold with some touches of red. The surface seen in the north elevation is silver, created with materials such as titanium. The gold/silver relation is based on the symbolism given to such metals on pre-Columbian times. The dual, simultaneous experiences of the facades as represented in the elevations give the impression of being inside of a double-sided mirror, with each side presenting a different experience of the same reality. The arrangement of the individual buildings within a contained space follow the planning principles of pre-Columbian cities such as Tenochtitlan, Teotihuacan and Chichen Itza, where symbolic axis, cosmological order, and the force materiality give the symbolic and physical a special phenomenological character and presence.

In this image of paper architecture, other aesthetic principles become apparent, aesthetics which are clear in the representation but may or may not be present in a translation to an actual three-dimensional structure. Specifically, this is the similarity that exists between the floor plan or site view and the feel of graffiti. The floor plan is rendered in stark contrasting hues of black and silver with strong heavy shapes and lines.

The shapes themselves in conjunction with the shaded spaces between them look like the bold lettering on graffitied walls with their rounded, linked forms.

While the above described processes may appear chaotic, and the results haphazard there is an underlying logic to the confusion. This could be described as the poetics of confusion, gained from the tension between control and release. The word confused came to English in the XIX century, and is derived from the same Latin root of the word confound (mix together): *confundare*, literally meaning “to pour together.”

So, looking at the idea of pouring and mixing, when pouring various ingredients from one container to the next, there exists a certain level of predictability, yet without measuring, the success of the final concoction depends on the perfection of skill through practice. This is highly evident in Posadas's work, which each design carefully balances calculated processes with random chance.

The work of Refugio Posadas clearly presents a unique process that has at its center the production of new cultural hybrids. By recombining popular and high culture, the everyday, myths and fantasy, imagination and intuition, he synthesizes the formal and the aesthetic within a Spanglish Turn framework. That is to say, Posadas's work (re)presents a new synthesized hybridity that by its own nature responds in a direct manner to Spanglish Turn dynamics. The work of Refugio Posadas emerges from a productive space that is hybrid and dialectical, this space is the result of the juxtaposition between art and architecture, intermittently artists and architects have look into each other territories for inspiration for their work. We can think of the work of Gordon Matta-Clark which took the literalness and materiality of architecture as a medium to produce his installations, performances and videos. In architecture, a good

example of working within the interstices of art and architecture is the early work of Diller and Scofidio which combined architecture with visual and performing arts. Refugio Posadas's work opens new possibilities for architectural design by delineating novel and fresh approaches that prioritize an intuitive and perceptual process over the rules of logic and rationality.

Chapter 4. From Mexico City to Mexican Immigrant: Community Cultures

4.1 Popular and Material Culture and the Spanglish Turn.

The following case studies address the spatial and formal effects of the Spanglish Turn upon material and popular culture. By analyzing material culture— Lowriders and Taco Trucks of Los Angeles—we unveil the mysterious processes and hidden elements of cultural phenomena that are difficult to discern through more traditional modes of looking, such as literary or historical analysis. We consider The Day of the Dead as popular culture, looking at the rituals and myths of this commemorative event to explore aspects of culture revealed only under special circumstances.

4.1.1. Case Study # 4: Day of the Dead/*Día de Muertos*

The study of The Day of the Dead is highly relevant to this inquiry because of its capacity to illuminate unique, transient and enveloping environments. These are ones that have been adopted into Chicano culture from Mexico and are distinguished in their aesthetic, spatial, temporal, and experiential production. The Day of the Dead is a hybrid cultural experience per excellence, originally a fusion of Spanish and Mesoamerican Indian traditions the celebration has evolved over time incorporating distinct popular

expressions from both sides of the border. Within the Spanglish Turn framework the Day of the Dead presents an incredible capacity for adaptation, transformation, synthesis, collaboration, and an openness to evolve into something entirely new.

Celebrations to commemorate the deceased are not unique to Mexico or even to Latin America. They have existed and still exist in many parts of the world, including Spain, Italy, Peru, Ecuador, and Guatemala. Each country's celebrations have their own particularities and characteristics but there are some commonalities. Celebrating the deceased is a tradition that goes back to pre-Columbian times as well as early Christianity in Europe. In some small towns in Europe and particularly in Spain people celebrate the dead on November 1st, All Souls Day. In Mexico, there is much evidence that suggest that today's celebrations have their roots in both pre-Columbian and Spanish traditions (Carmichael and Sayer, 1992).

In the worldviews of the Maya, Mexica, Mixtecs, Aymara, Quechua, and other indigenous peoples of Latin America, maintaining harmony between the worlds of the living and the dead is of crucial importance. For this purpose, festivals to honor the dead are conducted throughout the calendar year. Considering this belief system in relation to personal space and identity, the worldviews of Latin American indigenous communities tend to be communally oriented, in contrast to the pervasiveness of highly individualistic attitudes in the west. This creates a condition where maintaining extensive social networks is very important for physical and psychological needs. Rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations are a primary vehicle for maintaining these networks, networks which ultimately support many aspects of life for contemporary indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. The *Dia de Muertos* or Day of the Dead celebration in Mexico has

historically been the most complicated, politicized, and formally extravagant celebration honoring the dead in Latin America, particularly in Mexico. The structure of Day of the Dead, that is, its function in establishing and shoring up community and networking bonds, and the content of Day of the Dead, including its material, aesthetic, and procedural components, seep into other areas of contemporary life in Mexico and Los Angeles.

The Dia de Muertos celebration is a visually spectacular event celebrated throughout Mexico on November 2nd of each year to honor the dead. This practice is especially prominent in Mexico's more indigenous south. It is considered the most ancient of the Mexican holidays and perhaps is the most mysterious and enigmatic. Like most celebratory forms and rituals in Mexico, it references a catholic framework while having a pre-Columbian indigenous tradition at its center. In this case, the core of the celebration is a type of ancestor worship within the framework of a complex view of death. To note, the Aztec pre-Columbian society was structured around the Nahuatl cosmological system which contained an important myth of a continuous duel between the divine forces of the two gods, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, the results of which were always unpredictable and often led to catastrophic results. With this worldview, people believe(d) there was no escape from the predestined events that resulted from the tension between these two great powers. As part of this belief system, people also viewed life as temporarily given and existing in different times-spaces: the present material reality, the time of religious celebrations, and the time of the dead. The concept of simultaneity, or of compressed time-space, is central to this concept of life and death's co-existence. Death does not mark the end of life, but is the entrance to another

compressed time-space. The Aztecs did not believe in a linear progression of life but instead in an introverted journey to a parallel world that reflected our everyday experience.

During the Day of the Dead celebration, the perception is that time and space get sustained or held still, and a collective introspective celebration takes place. Those who are both dead and alive talk to each other, eat and drink together, cry and laugh, and



Figure 18. *Day of the Dead Celebration at the Cemetery, 2015. Oaxaca, Mexico*
(<https://taniarodriguez26.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/tzintuntzan452qa4.jpg>)

remember and forget. Bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, patios, streets, plazas and the cemetery (fig. 18) are transformed to make this encounter both intimate and public at the same time.

These environments become decorated and redesigned in such a way as to affect the performativity of the spaces and the experiential sensations of the participants. The

Day of the Dead is characterized by an ambivalent tension between subdued collective private and public behavior and an intensity of emotions, explosive colors and smells, and gaudy forms used in food, candy, toys, and altars.

The Day of the Dead is a celebration composed of various substantial elements, such as *ofrendas* (offerings), *altares* (altars), *arcos* (arches), *calaberas* (skulls), and vigils. Of all of these, the ofrenda is considered the most important. Ofrendas are special offerings made out of different items that the deceased liked when they were alive.

These can consist of favorite foods, such as tamales, mole, special bread: *pan de muerto*, drinks like tequila or chocolate, and sugar candy in the form of *calaberas*. Normally each family erects two ofrendas. One is in the home and contains candles, flowers, copal, photographs of the departed, mementos, and any other object of symbolic importance for the family. The other ofrenda is a small and simple one; this is placed in the cemetery and contains fewer items. Its primary role is to serve as a symbolic offering during the vigil, an all-night celebration where people pray, eat, drink, and celebrate at the cemetery.

Altars vary in size and elaboration; they can be very humble and small with only the basic elements: flowers, candles, food and drinks, while others can be much more elaborate and of a larger size. Usually altars are made with a medium size table, a table cloth, and *arco* in the background (literally an arch made out of banana or palm leaves decorated with flowers), the typical flower used is called *cempazuchitl*, or marigold, and the ofrenda (fig. 19). The experience of being inside a room with an altar and ofrendas can be overwhelmingly for any viewer. The intensity of smells from the candles, flowers, food, and *copal* (a pre-Columbian incense), and the exuberance of the visual display of the altars with the gaudy decorations and arrangements of objects provokes an

unequal but profound experience. In this environment, the senses go through a whirlwind of intense stimulation. The sense of time slowing down is palpable and transformative, creating a tension between calmness and excitement. It is an experience that can only be perceived by those enclosed in the room, where each person becomes a direct participant in the ritual-event.



Figure 19. *Day of the Dead Altar*. 2015. Mexico City

(<https://cruzdominguez.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/altar.jpg>)

In small towns near Mexico City, where tourists come to see the celebrations, visitors are permitted to attend the outdoor celebration and visit the altars at homes if they provide a small donation. Children from the town guide the tourist to their homes to see the altars and admire the ofrendas. With the donations to help for the expense of the celebration, the household heads offer tamales, *atole*, a shot of tequila or pulque, and

sometimes mole and tortillas. If the donation was respectable, the family invites the visitor to return the following year.

Since the 1970s, the government of Mexico has created a spectacle around the Day of the Dead with the purpose of presenting the celebration as a central part of Mexican identity and as an important component of the notion of *Mexicaness* (Brandes, 2006). This is reinforced by media, films and the famous essay, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, by Nobel laureate, Octavio Paz. In his seminal essay, he proclaimed that Mexicans are not afraid of death; on the contrary, they befriend and drink together with death on November 2nd. Paz's essay has caused a great deal of concern for many scholars in part because of its broad generalization and simplification regarding Mexican attitudes and beliefs. Prominent Mexican cultural and social critic Carlos Monsivais states that the presentation of this singular Mexican attitude towards death was a concerted invention by the Mexican government. He argues "that this theme [laugh at *la muerte*] is a modern construct that arose in the popular imagination during the Mexican Revolution, when the stoicism of revolutionary soldiers facing government firing squads was widely publicized in newspapers, oral stories, and folk songs [*corridos*]" (quoted in Marchi, 2009). The soldiers' attitudes, he asserts, were not related to Aztec philosophies, but instead were typical reactions of captured soldiers trying not to display fear to their enemies. While the truth of how the Mexican people feel about death is not homogeneous, the pervasive conceptual and real presence of death in everyday life continues to be an ongoing phenomenon in Mexico.

The Day of the Dead celebration has gone through many changes over time, influenced by different forces such as state political agendas, tourism, the United States,

and influences from other traditions. During the Colonial times and in the last few decades, the Day of the Dead has taken on political overtones. Its recent increase in popularity (in Mexico and the U.S.), is due in part to interventions from the government's department of tourism. In the last few decades the government of Mexico has sponsored a series of events around the celebration of Day of the Dead, from plays with themes of death, resurrection, and the afterlife, to parades in the streets and traditional music festivals. Some of these events are nationally televised. In some parts of Mexico, the celebrations have become large public spectacles where tours for tourists are organized by the Ministry of Tourism. This influence from the Ministry of Tourism has had a marked effect on changing the nature of many of these celebrations. Other towns that celebrate the Day of the Dead in traditional ways find themselves struggling to keep up with the usual customs and traditions. This has been made more difficult by the influence of outside practices such as Halloween, brought to many towns by young people returning from the United States.

Up until the mid-twentieth century, the Day of the Dead was virtually unknown to Mexican Americans. Nonetheless, the cultural importance of remembering the dead, whether through cemetery visits, home shrines, family dinners, or prayer, was familiar to nearly all Mexican Americans. The similar belief systems between Mexicans and Mexican Americans made it possible for Chicanos to quickly connect with the Dia de Muertos celebrations.

Beginning in the 1970s, Chicana/os began to look to Mexico as a source of cultural and artistic forms to help them express their identity and better understand their cultural heritage. They were especially interested in learning about indigenous history,

culture and traditions. Of great importance to them was the display of Mesoamerican sacred rituals, religious symbols, and spiritual beliefs. According to scholar Teresa Romo, “The Dia de Muertos observance, including its indigenous philosophy, ofrendas, popular art, and foods, became a focal point in this reclamation process and helped establish direct ties back to Mexican ancestors, both familial and historical.” For many Chicanos, this immersion into, and claiming of, Mexican culture was the first time they saw themselves as having an identity and community distinct from the dominant Eurocentric one which was often imposed upon them.

As a form of rejection of dominant cultural views in the U.S., working class Chicanos adopted and adapted the Day of the Dead celebration as a form of resistance and cultural affirmation. This complex process of identity and place has strongly manifested in the larger model of *Chicanismo* where the integration of culture, art, and politics has merged with the larger goal of building community and creating a progressive political space. As Romo further explains, “In visualizing this new identity, artists became part of a cultural reclamation process to reintroduce Mexican art and history, revitalize popular artistic expression, and support community cultural activities,” (2000). As such, Chicano artists and activists have sought for the last several decades to create a cohesive and culturally distinct community identity that expresses a collective history, distinct forms of creativity, and idealism.

The celebration of the Day of the Dead in Los Angeles has continued many of the traditions practiced in Mexico. As mentioned earlier, the celebrations of Dia de Muertos in Mexico vary depending upon the region, culture, ethnic group, and socio-economic class of the people participating in the celebrations. As such, immigrants have

also transported these various customs and traditions to new environments in the U.S. where they have replicated and transformed them. The states that have provided the greatest infusion of Day of the Dead practices into the U.S. include Oaxaca, Michoacan, Mexico, Veracruz, Chiapas, Jalisco, and Puebla.

A marked difference between the traditional celebrations in Mexico and those in the U.S. is in the public display of ofrendas, or altars in the cemetery, a practice that is not regularly included in the celebration in the U.S. Instead, practices are confined to the interior of peoples' homes or in semi-public spaces such as commercial stores, cultural centers, or shopping malls. Other than this, the overall Day of the Dead practices are generally in keeping with the traditional forms from Mexico. These include having altars, special bread (pan de muertos) and food such as tamales, *champurrado*, and mole. Traditions brought by recent immigrants blend with the already existing Chicano traditions for celebrating the Day of the Dead, and as such, create a new hybrid fusion that generates special forms to the Day of the Dead. The continuous input from new immigrants is essential for sustaining the dynamic ritual practiced by both Mexicans and Chicanos in Los Angeles. Kertzer claims that, "Ritual action is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups," (1989). As such, ritual celebrations help to organize chaotic human experiences into systematic engagements.

In Los Angeles, the various forms of celebration are enacted traditionally as well as creatively and artistically. In East Los Angeles, the celebrations are carried out with especially exuberant displays, both in terms of material culture and human performance. For the last few decades there has been a "parade" for Day of the Dead that goes through

various streets ending in the well-known arts and cultural center, Self Help Graphics and Art. The parade has become so popular that thousands of people participate each year, making it one of the main events in the Mexican/Chicano community. A distinct aspect of this celebration is the application of white and black make-up to people's faces that resemble the dead or the calavera. Communal altars are becoming common in East Los Angeles and other parts of Los Angeles with large Mexican population. These types of altars tend to "celebrate" popular people from the community, from politicians and community leaders to regular, everyday people that are very well respected.

The celebration of the Day of the Dead resembles the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque. Although it may seem a stretch to think of the Day of the Dead as carnivalesque there are characteristics that reflect the Bakhtinian notion such as the events' evanescence and the presence and materiality of the body. Although the original notion of the carnivalesque was conceived by Bakhtin for literary analysis, currently, it is a system of analysis that has been applied to cultural phenomena. In general terms, the carnivalesque is "the aesthetic that celebrates the anarchic, body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture; and seeks to mobilize them against the humorless seriousness of official culture" (Dentith, 1995). The carnivalesque principle subverts and liberates the dominant attributes or conditions of oppression exercised by the people in power. The carnivalesque abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and create another life free from conventional rules and restrictions. "Common to the carnival forms is an attitude in which the high, the elevated, the official, even the sacred, is degraded and debased, but as a condition of popular renewal and regeneration" (Dentith, 1995). The carnivalesque does not have one universal social or political meaning, but it provides a

malleable space in which activities and symbols can be inflected in different hybrid directions. Carnival becomes a time outside time, a second life of the people, who for a time enter the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance made possible by the exceptional aesthetic environments.

Understanding the carnivalesque in this way it is easier to make a connection between it and the celebration of the Day of the Dead, especially considering its gaudy decorations, highly decorated altars, and the festive mood of the people. Even within the context of subdued personal pain, people go to the cemetery for all night vigils where they pray, sing, eat, and drink closely together with their ancestors. For two days, time stops and space become malleable. Everything reverses for a moment and the dead is 'alive' for the participants. Bakhtin's carnivalesque relates to the Day of the Dead celebrations, not for its condition of reversing social roles and mocking authority, but for its potential to create a new evanescent space for connecting with one another through highly symbolic rituals within affective environments.

For Chicanos, the Day of the Dead has become a symbol of pride and affirmation, in other words, it constituted a political position. With its elaborated rituals and public processions, it defies the norms of the dominant culture. In dominant culture, death is an awkward subject, when someone dies, that person is frequently referred to as "passing away." When a pet dies, one may say "we put it to sleep." The words death or dead are seldom used in public conversations when referring to someone that has died. After the death of a loved one, there are no cultural mechanisms to remember and celebrate that person in mainstream culture in the U.S. This (spiritual) void that results from this lapse in social/cultural systems in the U.S. tries to find venues to express the

need to connect with ancestors and other meaningful people who have died. It is then not surprising that the Day of the Dead celebration is not restricted to Mexicans or Latinos only, but is enthusiastically engaged by non-Latinos, who can make up as many as half or more of the participants at exhibits, processions, and other Day of the Dead public events.

The Day of the Dead serves as a popular system of cultural transmission and cross-cultural engagement. It creates a space that allows for passing or sharing cultural traditions in multiple directions and as a result of this cross-cultural interaction new hybrid cultural forms are created. Hybridity has existed in the Day of the Dead celebrations since the early beginnings in Mexico, between Indigenous and Spanish cultural and religious traditions. Over time the celebration of the Day of the Dead has been in constant evolution, integrating, adopting and adapting new forms that enrich the celebration. In the U.S. this hybridization process has been intensified by the nature of it being a multicultural society, where traditions brought by new immigrants can mix with those of existing cultural groups, such as Mexican Americans and Chicanos.

The Day of the Dead is a hybrid cultural practice celebrated since pre-Columbian times. Since its roots, Spanish and Mesoamerican Indian celebrations to commemorate the dead were practiced in pre-Columbian societies. This old tradition has evolved over time adopting and adapting new traditions, this process of cultural evolution has resulted in a practice that is hybrid and dynamic. In Los Angeles, the celebration of the Day of the Dead takes into another dimension of hybridity, by appropriating different cultural fragments from other cultural groups. The performative and exuberant aspects of the celebrations, as well as the evanescence form, relate to Spanglish Turn principles.

Within the Spanglish Turn framework, we can see that the formal and aesthetic expressions of the Day of the Dead (evanescence, exuberance, affectivity, performative, etc.) get expressed in intense and exciting forms.

4.1.2. Case Study #5: Lowriders

The most common representation of lowriders and its culture has been through magazines, especially with Lowrider Magazine being the most important and with the largest distribution. In the other hand, the academic study of lowriders has been sporadic and insular. There are various studies of lowriders within academia that focus on distinct aspects of lowrider culture. My focus lies in four outstanding writings about lowriders that take different approaches to the subject. Denis Michelle Sandoval's *Bajito y Suavesito/Low and Slow: Cruising Through Lowrider Culture* (2003) makes an in-depth analysis of how lowriders work and the social dynamics around the culture of lowriders. Ben Chapell's *Low Riding Cruising Spaces* (2002) analyses the production of social spaces of resistance by lowrider culture; the seminal doctoral thesis by Brenda Jo Bright's *Mexican American Lowriders: An Anthropological Approach to Popular Culture* (1994) where she analyses the implications of lowrider culture in Houston, Nuevo Mexico and Los Angeles with the social and political dynamics of Chicano culture in General, and Charles M. Tatum's *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show* (2011) where he analyzes lowriders within the largest context of Chicano culture such as music, art and media representations. My approach differs from the previously mentioned writings in that its primary focus lies in the formal and the aesthetic qualities, and how these dimensions can illuminate various social and cultural

dynamics of lowrider art and culture in Los Angeles. In addition, my primary interest in lowriders lie in how this popular cultural phenomenon relates to the production of cultural hybridity and its implications to art and architecture.

Lowriders have had a significant impact on a variety of creative disciplines and a range that is global. Due to these factors, lowriders hold tremendous potential for the field of architecture in terms of both aesthetics and design principles.

There is a general conception that lowriders originated in northern California, more specifically in Sacramento. Lowriders have existed since the 1930s. They developed into a more elaborate form with the surge in Mexican community populations in the 1950s. The creation of lowriders has always been an activity of working class youth to make cars unique by customizing them. Currently, lowrider customization is practiced all over the Southwest and beyond (such as Miami, Chicago, and parts of the Mid West). The fountain head of lowriders creation is still California, specifically Los Angeles, which has the largest number of Lowrider car clubs, as well as shops for customizing and decorating them.

The current success and diffusion of lowrider events is in large part due to the Lowrider magazine. The magazine has been responsible for the promotion of all things related to lowriders, including car shows, technical information, displays of famous lowrider cars, auto shops, hydraulics and painting information. The magazine has been a great medium, not just for distributing information but for forming a network of connections between the different car aficionados.

Lowriders are at their core, performative. This performance occurs in three separate ways. The concept of performance in lowriders refers to the possible set of

special maneuvers that can be accomplished with the customized cars. These include the actual process of creating them; the action of driving them ‘low and slow;’ and the displaying of tricks in the different types of competitions, (dancing, jumping, hooping, etc.).

Driving a lowrider is not about speed or power but about showing style. The motto “Low and Slow” (*bajito y despasito*) describes driving very slowly to show off the cars to onlookers. Performance in this sense is not about how powerful the engine is or how fast can the car run, but the opposite. Lowriders are precious objects that are meant to be seen and admired. They are a type of movable artwork. The performance of driving is at the street level, where cars go cruising through various L.A. boulevards. In this way, the performance seems like a form of courtship with the other cars and people. These acts of public performative display, adoration and courtship recall the experiences of Banham in regard to his Autopia ecology, where the love of cars, motorways, and movement were at the heart of his ecology. Additionally, as Brenda Jo Bright states, “The presence of such a cultural alternative allows for the reworking of the limitations of mobility placed on racialized cultures in the United States, especially in a city such as Los Angeles with the legacy of surveillance and conflicts between racial minorities and the police, (1994).”

The performativity of these elaborately designed and engineered cars can be seen as the result of a complex process of collaborative arrangements. These collaborations include: auto body and suspension work, upholstery, and painting. Because of this, lowriders are strong anchors for building community solidarity. The slow laborious process of making them (akin to the *quema de judas*, *quema de castillos*, and the *piñata*),

getting ready for displaying, showing, and maintaining them demands great effort and the participation of entire families and members of immediate communities.

The rhythms of these popular culture processes have distinct indigenous roots. Just like the Totonacan fliers (*Voladores de Papantla*) (fig. 20), each of them is similar in the careful slowness of their preparation and the culmination of their efforts in a spectacular short lived performance. In this sense, ritual, aesthetics, and meaning become interwoven. Through this mechanism, rituals provide an emotional groundedness for both individuals and social groups, complicating the relationship between culture/creativity and the forces of commodification, providing a necessary antidote to the forces of depersonalization. According to Bright "...for lowriders, the automobile is the center of a constellation of cultural practices, a mobile canvas for cultural



Figure 20. *Voladores de Papantla*/Totonacan fliers. 2014. Papantla, Veracruz, Mexico

(<http://www.lapolitica.mx/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/tus-hijos-volan.jpg>)

representation and critique...lowrider car culture has created an alternative cultural space for performance, participation and interpretation (1994).”

Lowriders have become a global activity. Many of the parts, such as hydraulics, are fabricated in other parts of the world, making the entire enterprise a global activity. In an article in *Lowrider* magazine describing the fabrication of the winning bicycle, *Natural Born Killa*, (fig. 21), the owner mentioned that the frame of the bicycle was fabricated in the Philippines by a master framer, the metal work was done in Texas and California, and the painting details were completed in Los Angeles. This process of international transactions and contacts is a trademark of the new hybridization processes, one that indicate the presence of a different emerging cosmopolitanism in art, popular culture, and architecture.



Figure 21. “Natural Born Killa.” *Lowrider Magazine* (on-line). March 5, 2010

<http://www.lowrider.com/features/1004-lrmp-natural-born-kill-a-custom-lowrider-bike/#>

According to Bruce Robins "...cosmopolitanism is there –not merely an abstract ideal, like loving one's neighbor as oneself, but habits of thought and feeling that have already shaped and been shaped by particular collectivities, that are socially and geographically situated, hence both limited and empowered (1998)." This is situated cosmopolitanism. This definition fits well with lowrider culture.

These collaborative arrangements resemble some of the new directions in innovative, contemporary L.A.'s architectural practices where multiple systems and purposes are integrated into larger wholes to create performative structures that move and change based on need and whim. This collaborative model additionally speaks to the new importance of collaboration in architectural practices, which can occur from the design level (e.g., with other disciplines) to the construction and management levels. This is change related to a change in the process of city making. It is more akin to the process of conversation, to give and take becoming a new model.

Lowriders are unique objects in that they are formally sophisticated and visually smashing. They are considered by their users and owners as objects of love and pleasure. There are many ways that lowriders can express cultural value, but at the center of its value system is the aesthetic dimension. The two most impressive values have to do with form and performance. Form in this case is essential to the signification of the object; form rules the object, and it is through the sophistication of the formal aesthetic qualities that a lowrider obtains its value. Line, color, and painting affects all combine to form a distinct object charged with aesthetic ingenuity.

The display of the lowriders in Los Angeles is a spectacular public event. This appropriation of public space for community usage is crucial for understanding the

politics of everyday life and dynamics of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin) in marginalized communities where customization is wildly applied to different type of objects without discrimination. As Tomas Ybarra-Frausto states, “lowriders reverse the mania for speed by recycling car models of the past, customizing them, and driving them ‘slow and low.’” Through such strategies of appropriation, reversal, and inversion, Chicano youth cultures negate dominant models and values (1990).” This act of invention and transformation is one marker of hybridity.

Lowriders can claim space in various forms with various consequences. This statement takes as a point of departure that lowrider is a “space-making process.” lowriders call attention, due to their paint job or murals, hydraulic suspensions, decorative elements, and the dressing of the people who drive them. This combination gives lowriders an original style. The question of aesthetics comes (literally) to the surface here, although marginalized and a product of subcultural groups, lowriders have been able to create, sustain and evolve a distinct sense of aesthetics and style. This hybrid baroque aesthetics, that combine high and low notions of art, craft and art per se, decoration and ornamentation and design, are the product of long elaborated process of meticulous customization that has developed over many decades. Style comes with a political dimension, especially when it represents a specific cultural community or segment of it. Chicano lowrider style defies the conventions of normal car aesthetics, with its own defying flamboyance, they often find themselves the target of police harassment or surveillance. Style in lowriders have specific functions, first the main purpose is to be seen, to be noticed in a public space, second it tends to defy normalcy and conventionality by driving low and slow on the city streets. This also gives the

barrio or community a marked identity, a sense of belonging to a special group. In other words, style is very important in Chicano aesthetics in general, and with lowriders in particular. The concept of surface is also important in relation to Chicano aesthetics and lowriders. In Chicano fashion, in lowriders and in some visual arts, the content resides on the surface of the object. The surface is not a flat empty entity but a charged hybrid field. Surfaces are saturated with unique painting effects, decorative elements, ornamentation, design and patterns, and calligraphy. Together, they provoke spectacular special visual effects, making lowriders an original and unique mobile aesthetic object, or what has been stated as a “canvas in motion.”

Central to the logic of lowriders is that of customization. This is a complex and elaborate process that result in very original and unique objects. Normally, the process starts by choosing an old used car that need repair and auto body work, like a Chevy from the 70 's are highly valued, but other model can work too, including pickup trucks, which they belong to a different category than cars. Then the actual customization begins, this can be divided on four main parts: 1) the auto-body work is the most laborious activity of the process of customizing. Here is where the car starts to take its lowrider shape. This usually consist of striping away all the external fixtures such as door handles, side mirrors, external decorations, etc. 2) The next step (sometimes parallel with the auto-body work) is fixing (or sometimes changing) the engine and decorating it usually with chrome or gold finishes to make it look shiny and glittering, aesthetic expressions highly value within lowriders. 3) the hydraulic system is one of the most important components of lowriders, this includes the pumping system, tires, and suspension system. Hydraulics gives the car the possibility to make “tricks” such as

hooping and dancing. In most car shows hydraulics competition are highly popular and exist several categories for different type of cars and for different type of trick. It is important to mention that most hydraulic systems are imported, making it an international transaction that cross borders. 4) The painting job perhaps is the most important part of the customization process. This will give the “appearance and style” to the lowrider car, making it unique among others. The process of painting is a very complex system of mixing and combining different sophisticated painting techniques. Some of the most popular techniques are pearl which is applied on top of solid colors to give a shimmering effect. Another popular painting effects are called candy and flakes, as pearl the purpose is to convey a shiny and glittering effect on the car but with a different visual effect. In addition, another painting style is called “murals,” these are elaborate airbrush painting narratives telling stories about life in the neighborhood, family, old Mexican towns, or devotion to the virgin of Guadalupe. Although customization of cars exists in other car cultures such hotrods and monster trucks, it is unquestionable that it is within Chicano lowrider culture that customization has taken in whole new dimension. A hybrid of craft and art lowriders are objects of unique aesthetic value for the community as well as lowrider culture function as a social and situational important anchor for the Chicano community in Los Angeles.

This trend towards customization has expanded beyond the domain of the lowrider and entered that of the mainstream automobile, yet in this context, in the ownership of celebrities and other wealthy and high-profile customers. It has become common place with this demographic to buy expensive cars and then get special paint jobs, chromed grills, extravagant hubcaps, tinted windows, removed name brand logos,

and other types of customization, all inspired by the lowrider. In fact, the majority of people who do the body work on these cars are lowrider artists. This is all for the purpose of making the cars one-of-a-kind originals. Even the small and mid-size cars that have come out in 2016 and are purchased by the general public have taken a hint from the success of lowriders have more bold paint colors with various effects.

Ybarra-Frausto states that, “to be rasquache is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness, to seek to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down. It is a witty, irreverent, and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries (1991).” Rasquachismo, a potent concept, can inform the analysis of current lowrider aesthetics. From rasquachismo we can discern the principles of recycling, making do, going for broke, and spectacular presentation. It is also important to note that the aesthetics of contemporary lowriders go beyond the notion of aesthetics presented by rasquachismo. As mentioned earlier, the aesthetics of today’s lowriders can be defined as a type of baroque, or better, neo-baroque.

The aesthetic quality of a historical Baroque artwork features an address to the mind (or, at the time the work was made, the “soul”) of the viewer through an appeal to the body -- via intense sensory experience. Similar qualities are attributable to what have come to be called neo-baroque works in contemporary art: mobilizing hyperbolic visual effects, or through intensified engagements with material and aesthetic practices, they attain qualities that exaggerate reality in order to draw attention both toward and away from the subject of ostensible inquiry.

Regarding other significant manifestations of the neo-baroque in recent art, the exhibition “Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art,” 2000, is an obvious

landmark. In a catalogue essay that accompanied the show, curator Elizabeth Armstrong acknowledged that with the American neo-baroque: "...part of the complexity lies in the inextricable link between the baroque as a style and a period, and the (effect of) the aftermath and legacy of the colonization of the Americas."²⁰ Armstrong further argued that contemporary manifestations of the baroque allow viewers to "understand and analyze the processes of transculturation and hybridity that globalization has highlighted." This condition can also be observed in numerous other recent contemporary art projects as well, albeit to further demonstrate divergent responses to shifting notions of identity and nation, and to foreground renewed ideas concerning the body, especially within entertainment-oriented and media-charged cultural environments. It can also be argued that new baroque attitudes in art demonstrate a charged reconsideration of modern aesthetic preoccupations through strategies inflected by postmodern discourses, including those focused on postcoloniality, gender, and contemporary media.

Neo-Baroque in contemporary art offers a complex yet surprisingly unified engagement with contemporary art projects that are linked according their intense visuality and in their highly charged address to contemporary experience -- whether through the body, in time or in space -- in the twenty-first century.

In this vein, Chicano material culture such as the lowrider functions as a medium to create 'place out of space'. That is, urban transformation from an abstract spatial configuration to a very specific urban milieu. In Chicano material culture, we can find

²⁰ Armstrong, E. *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, exhibition catalogue. Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2000.

the emotional expressions and feelings of a specific group or community. Chicano material culture is charged with emotive and affective qualities that reveal a sense of belonging and pleasure.

The question of pleasure in relation to material culture and style is a complicated one. Pleasure is a difficult concept to define. For a long time, philosophers (since Plato and Aristotle), neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists, and cultural anthropologists have been wrestling with this issue. Recently, brain scientists have made head way in developing a new model of how and where pleasure is registered in the brain. As neuroscientist writer Helen Phillips explains, “The basic idea that pleasure is a reward for doing something that promotes survival remains important, but pleasure is turning out to play a much wider role. It seems to be involved in all types of decision making, from choosing food to solving mathematical problems. Pleasure helps us plan our movements and allows our brains to filter and sort the mass of smells, sights, sounds and other information that bombard our senses. It may have been the origin of all our emotions. Perhaps even consciousness itself evolved from the simple sensing of pleasure and displeasure.”²¹ With this in mind, it becomes clear that the ultimate purpose of lowrider’s style is to convey a sense of pleasure. While style itself is a significant force that defines and gives character to lowriders, pleasure is the number one principle driving the making of lowriders and other Chicano objects. Humor, laughing, joy and gladness are human expressions that can serve as an antidote to the negative forces and

²¹ Phillips, H. *Emotion: Pain and Pleasure in the Brain*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014.

hardships of life. In the Chicano community humor plays a major part in the community's character and culture.

This can be seen in the winning lowrider car called *Guilty Pleasures*. Guilty Pleasures is a classic 1964 Chevy Impala own by JR Garcia of the Imperial Car Club from Los Angeles. The car has been extensively customized, from the interior, to the engine, the body, and all related details. Guilty Pleasures won best lowrider car in the Las Vegas super show in 2009. The Las Vegas super show is considered the most prestigious and largest of lowrider competitions; the super bowl of lowrider culture. Guilty Pleasures is painted on a monochromatic scheme of different hues of, from yellowish green to bluish green. This is combined with a heavy used of chrome and gold. The car also contains fragments of mural paintings applied on special places over the car. What makes the car special, beyond the exquisite attention to detail, is the majestic theatricality of its presentation. Its surface is electric and dynamic, but also through the special effects of the painted surface, it can give a sense of calmness and contemplation.

These dual opposite experiences are a great quality that Guilty Pleasures possesses. Its surface is not just beautiful and exceptional but also mysterious and enigmatic. In addition, the entire area around a lowrider becomes charged and activated when the different components are experienced together. Also, the story of Guilty Pleasures is one of dedication and perseverance. The fabrication with its complex customization took almost a decade and tens of thousands of dollars. The owner and his family made many sacrifices with the sole purpose to create a winning car. This goal

was realized at the 2009 Las Vegas Super show when Guilty Pleasures became part of the pantheon of winning lowriders, a privilege restricted to only a few elite cars.

There are a few examples of contemporary architects using lowriders as an inspiration in their work. One is Robert Stone, an L.A. architect, who designed a hand full of residences in Joshua Tree with names such as *Acido Dorado* (Golden Acid) (<http://www.robertstonedesign.com/projects01.html>) (Fig. 22) and *Rosa Muerta* (Dead Rose) (<http://www.robertstonedesign.com/projects11.html>) (Fig. 23). He cites Lowrider Baroque as an influence in his designs which can be seen in the rich gold used in the surface treatment of the Acido Dorado home. The decorative metal work used in his designs also speaks to the more general Latino influences in his work. Another example is eco-home design “Low Rider,” a case study house of passive ecological design in Greensburg Kansas. It has surfaces that can be changed in and out and a flexible design structure that can be adjusted as needed. It is designed by L.A. architectural firm, XP & Architecture: performance driven design & cultural ecologies. While Robert Stone used the aesthetics of lowriders as an inspiration, XP & Architects used the principles of flexibility and motion as its influence. Lowriders present great opportunities for design and architecture. By using customized systems, aesthetic surfaces, and performative formal expressions lowriders open up a space for the production of highly hybridized forms and translocal cultural expressions. Almost every single aspect of lowriders is hybrid and performative. From the actual customizing of the car, to the painting of the surface to convey special effects, to the highly performative presence in the street and in competitions, lowriders become hybrid jewels on wheels that defy the normal aesthetic and formal codes, creating a distinct aesthetic system based on pleasure and delight. The



Figure 22. Stone, Robert. *Acido Dorado*. 2009. Joshua Tree, California

<http://images.adsttc.com/media/images/5008/d815/28ba/0d27/a700/0734/slideshow/stringio.jpg?1414087>

[676](#))



Figure 23. Stone, Robert. *Rosa Muerta*. 2009. Joshua Tree, California

<http://images.adsttc.com/media/images/5012/300d/28ba/0d3d/ae00/00c7/slideshow/stringio.jpg?1414282>

[057](#))

Spanglish Turn works well within this aesthetic principle. In fact, we can assert that customization and hybridization in lowriders are central characteristics of the Spanglish Turn framework.

4.1.3. Case Study # 6. Taco Trucks

Los Angeles is a city that was made on wheels. Since the early decades of the past century Los Angeles began to forge its identity in relationship to the automobile. Particularly in the decades after World War 2, together with the film industry (Hollywood), the automobile became the primary icons of the city. Southern California has been a mecca for all kinds of car culture related activities (from hotrods, to monster trucks, to lowriders), and works on the logic that most things can be made better by attaching wheels and being made mobile. Mobility is everything in Los Angeles, a city in which horizontality demarcates its urban physiognomy and distance is a major factor in determining access and types of communication and contact. In this way, the automobile, by providing mobility has been an instrument of creating a sense of “freedom” and agency. Besides the negative effects of the automobile on the environment and high gas prices, it is still a very important element and symbol of the image of Los Angeles.

Public image and car culture developed an intimate relationship in Los Angeles, and has had a long-term effect in the local economy. Economics and the automobile became intertwined in Los Angeles in part due to the necessity of transportation to travel the long distances inherent in a city of L.A.’s scale. The freeway promoted this dependency, as opposed to the use and development of public transportation.

Los Angeles's most marked form is its special relationship to movement and motion. It is a city whose character is formed by the access its residents have to mobility and the action of movement itself. It is a city in constant motion facilitated by its very elaborate and large infrastructure, including freeways, avenues, and boulevards. Its geographic structure (and corporate automobile interests) have instilled the automobile, and any other type of vehicle, as an essential part of its cultural landscape. Los Angeles's urban fabric resembles that of an endless dynamic horizontal blanket. This huge dynamic flat surface, that seems to be alive, makes the act of mobility vital for survival in the city. It also uses the automobile as the medium that sustains its dynamic nature (although this is slowly changing due to the increase in other forms of transportation). There is no question that the automobile has become part of the identity of Los Angeles and has given a special character to the city's dynamic urban physiognomy. The idea of a benign and intriguing intimate relationship between the city and cars has in part largely been romanticized in media, especially by Hollywood films. Films have created an effective and sophisticated apparatus to present and represent an image of the city beautifully and intimately connected to the automobile. This paradox between the practical need of the car for transportation and the artificial set of idealized representations does not change the fact that L.A. is still a city based on a culture of mobility, in other words a city in constant motion. This dynamic culture of contemporary L.A. allows for a unique condition of urban evolution. Creativity and imagination become the trademarks of such evolution, producing the diverse cultural phenomenon of today's taco mobiles. As we have seen lowriders in Los Angeles provide a unique urban and spatial dynamic based in motion and performativity. Taco

trucks reflect a similar condition, where their mobility creates a popular art in motion and their movement from place to place and the congregation of various food mobiles perform in a distinct formal and aesthetic way.

It is unclear exactly when the taco mobiles started in Los Angeles. There are some accounts that there were taco trucks in Los Angeles -commonly call *loncheras* in Spanish- since the 70s (fig. 24).

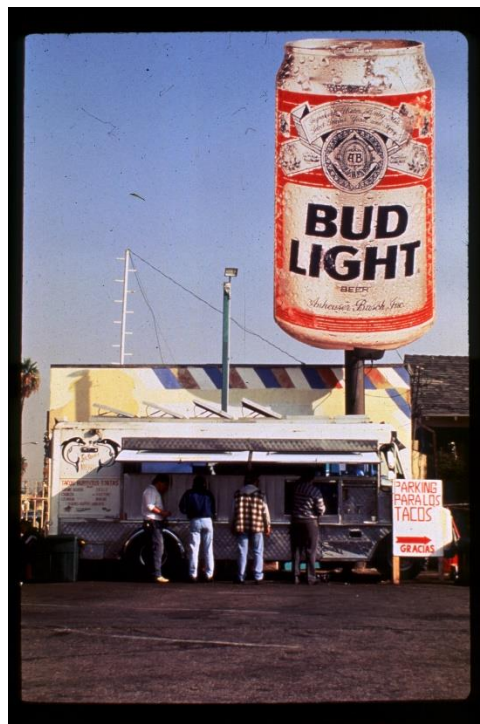


Figure 24. *Lonchera*. 2006. Los Angeles, California

Loncheras are customized old service trucks that have as their main function to serve food, fast and cheap. They serve various types of food from the different regions of Mexico (Oaxaca, Jalisco, Michoacán, Mexico City, etc.) and each truck is decorated

responding to the owner wishes and to the region where it comes from. They tend to be decorated with narrative murals, signage, and sometimes neon lights. Decoration functions to call attention to the potential clientele and as a form of self-expression on wheels. In this case, this expression is not fixed to a specific place (the barrio) but leaves the barrio and travels to many different parts of the city.

The taco trucks started in the Mexican barrios of Los Angeles and have been an integral part of a semi-formal economy there, one originated by Mexican immigrants. Their primary clientele have historically been working class Latino immigrants. Slowly the small group of loncheras grew in number as a result of the increase in the number of immigrants coming to the city in the 1980s and 1990s. This growth had, and is still having, profound effects on the urban spaces of the city. Originally taco trucks were confined to Latino areas of the city. Today the conglomerate of loncheras resembles that of a complex network in constant motion over L.A. The trucks have long provided food for workers where no other food for purchase is readily available. This has made taco trucks ubiquitous in residential neighborhood where construction occurs as well as commercial centers. The clientele of the trucks now includes people from a variety of backgrounds and lifestyles.

Mobility allows to loncheras to claim different spaces of the city and imprint them with their presence for a short period of time. This ephemeral claiming of space and presence is important to understand the contemporary nature of Los Angeles, where temporality, ephemerality, and non-permanence are central characteristics of the city's contemporary urban spaces. A symbiotic relationship has born out of this relationship

between the city and taco trucks, a relationship that is growing stronger by the increase in number and diversification of the taco mobiles.

In the last decade, there has been a rapid increase in the numbers and diversity of food trucks, and they are now perceived as part of the main stream fast food culture of Los Angeles. With the acceptance of taco trucks as a product of contemporary consumer society, they have set the path for other types of food to be integrated in the taco truck paradigm. Particularly, just in the last few years there has been an explosion of the diversification of the types of food and the type of decoration of the truck, from very minimalistic, to whimsical design with elaborate typography, to high design, such as the Koolhaas ice cream truck, and the lowrider ice cream truck.

The food available now in mobile food trucks is almost unlimited and includes for example, Korean tacos, Italian food, Chinese food, barbeque and ribs. It is impossible now to travel to any part of the city without encountering food trucks (the updated term for diversified taco trucks). They have become ubiquitous elements of the contemporary urban landscape of Los Angeles. With some caution, we can discern that food trucks now have a significance presence in the Los Angeles urban landscape, similarly to the automobile in the 1960s and 1970s.

Today, there exist thousands of food trucks offering distinct types of food. The trucks themselves have been going through a radical transformation in relation to their appearance. The traditional Mexican truck with painted murals on the side of the truck often depicting traditional themes of old Mexican towns, the pre-Columbian legend of the two volcanoes: Popocatepetl and Ixtazihuatl, barrio life, or just simply decorated with graphics and large paintings of the food they offer. Other trucks offering different

types of food are also painted and decorated in a distinct manner, from minimalist graphics and bold colors, to more intricate patterns and motifs. Some are decorated with obsessive attention to details other are designed more “architectural.” The fact is that Los Angeles is now inundated with iconic food trucks all over the city. Through their movement they’ve dynamized the city with a new twist.

Due to its decentralized nature, Los Angeles has always faced a challenge when it comes to facilitating the gathering of people in public spaces. There are very few public spaces where people from all parts of the city can come together and “hang out.” We can say that L.A. lacks a rich culture of the public sphere. Perhaps it exists minimally in small pockets over the city, such in art galleries, cultural centers, museums and some public parks, but this still does not contribute to the coming together of people from different communities. At the same time, Los Angeles is a very open place for radically innovative cultural and social forms, and as such, a new social phenomenon and form of public space has been brewing in the city around food trucks.

Through their frequent gatherings (broadcast over Twitter and Facebook) and the subsequent gathering of people to purchase food, they create “mini” temporal environments and communities. These events or happenings generate the interaction of people from all walks of life, adding an additional component to the city’s capacity for emergent development. Thanks to Facebook and Twitter, people find the places where the trucks are going to gather. Trucks gather in specific locations, sometimes forming a “caravan” style arrangement.

Hundreds of people gather late at night to eat, but it seems that the primary objective is to come in contact and socialize. This type of new crowd is culturally very diverse and

seems to come from different socio-economic groups.

Crowds present multiple opportunities for diverse types of interactions. They tend to be democratic by nature, and self-organizing, with the great potential for possible political activities (e.g., green movement, eco-bicycle movement). They can function to break the separateness of the different neighborhoods in Los Angeles. According to Schnapp and Tiews, addressing the issue of crowd dynamics, they state that “Despite their purported ties to a primal scene associated with premodern and even prehistoric predecessors, modern crowds are not reducible to updated tribes or clans. While, heterogeneous and unstable, they arise as a result of the promiscuous intermingling and physical massing of social classes, age groups, races, nationalities, and genders along the boulevards of the industrial metropolis.”²²

The concept of the public sphere has been significantly addressed in political and social theory for the last few decades. An influential author of the public sphere is Jurgen Habermas. In his highly influential book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* he presented a theory of the public sphere as one in which individuals can gather together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. Habermas’ public sphere can be seen as a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. But this definition feels incomplete and forced in its effort to define the social dynamic of the new crowd. Political theorist Nancy Fraser offered another definition that is more open and inclusive, that of the counter-public. She addressed the lack of inclusivity in

²² Schnapp, J.T. and M. Tiews. *Crowds*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Habermas' public sphere (based in a universal bourgeois public) which excludes certain marginalized groups such as minorities, women, and the lower classes. Also, there is the concept presented by Gerard Hauser which proposes a different direction. Instead of identifying the group by its identity, the group is defined by the issues it addresses. He refers to this as a rhetorical public sphere. I would suggest that this notion of the rhetorical public sphere is the one that get close to the notion of the new crowd. People in the new crowd gather to talk, exchange ideas, and chat, all under the pretext of (fast) food dispensed in a public space. In these new type of organic social gatherings there are not prescribed (political) agendas; the conversations and exchanges are of multiple subjects, but there is always the potential to galvanize the crowd and mobilize it for political action if this is collectively desired. There is a new grass roots tendency to explore different forms of public gathering in public spaces. We can see it in the large eco-bikes groups that roam the city from one place to another and dynamize them with all kinds of performative and group activities.

In addition to recent scholarly attention, the dynamics and structure of the crowd has been the focus of the study of the psychology of gathering since the XIX century. Crowds are complex to define. Traditionally the idea of the crowd was seen with negative eyes, the crowd were uncontrollable, violent, ignorant, low (working) class, undemocratic, and without direction. One of the main influential proponents of this view was the social psychologist Gustav Le Bon, through his highly influential book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, originally published in 1897. Even today, many of the contemporary theories about crowd dynamics and structure are influenced by his views. One could argue though that the new crowd responds to different social and

cultural dynamics. The crowd that is formed around food trucks present intriguing social, cultural and ethnic dynamics. This new type of crowd tends to be almost wholly 'emergent' and/or spontaneous. The new crowd cannot be simply equated with other types of groups as these crowd events do not unfold as part of a routine. They are characteristically marked by a high degree of novelty and ambiguity. In other words, the new crowd responds to the principles of self-organizing entities. According to Reicher, S.D., in social theory, "the self-organization theory proposes that self-stereotyping in terms of a social category gives rise to a process of social influence, which has been termed 'referent informational influence.' This process is especially relevant to the problem of how the ideological content of an identity is translated into collective behavior."²³

The cacophony of colors, graphics, designs, and motifs are reinforced by the sounds of the people chatting and the background music, creating a special atmosphere of excitement, camaraderie, and creativity. The resulting aesthetics of the collective environment are dynamic and changeable. The look and feel conveyed by the gathering of the collective trucks and the crowd are characterized by its temporality, impermanence, and flexibility. They can change from situation to situation depending on location, time of the day, and the crowd's dynamics. This is important in a city that tends to be characterized by social and cultural segregation and alienation. This new informal crowd, part of the Spanglish Turn, stimulates a new cultural and social

²³ Reicher, S.D. "The Psychology of Crowd Dynamics." In *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, eds. M.A. Hogg and R.S. Tindale. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001.

dimension that functions as an antidote for the limitations of a reified public sphere in Los Angeles.

Food trucks, either individually or collectively, give the city a unique fluid structure, including temporal urban mini-markets for social and cultural exchange and interaction. With the trucks being decorated in multiple forms, they add an aesthetic dimension to the streets of the city. This aesthetic dimension is very important for the formulation of the city, where multiplicity, difference, and ephemerality are aesthetic trademarks of a new contemporary urban condition.

In terms of architecture, there is one contemporary L.A. design that uses a similar logic and framework as the food trucks. This is the proposal by architect Rem Koolhaas and artist John Baldessari for the Caltrans building design competition in Los Angeles. The design scheme consisted of covering the building ceilings with photographs of freeway interchange signs and the floors with images of surrealist Magritte' clouds. But the most extraordinary part of their proposal consisted of painting all the Caltrans trucks with different, coordinating colors (fig. 25). The idea was that every morning the trucks would travel all over the city becoming "animated points" that would invade Los Angeles. This cacophony of bright colors moving and crossing the city would produce a unique urban experience. Sylvia Lavin describes it as, "Each day, then the city would leech the building of its hue, briefly expanding its effects across and entire region" (Lavin, 2011).

The food trucks have a similar rhythm to those of the Caltrans project and function from a similar premise. Each of the food trucks is alike in structure, have aesthetically designed surfaces, and move in coordination with one another throughout the city.

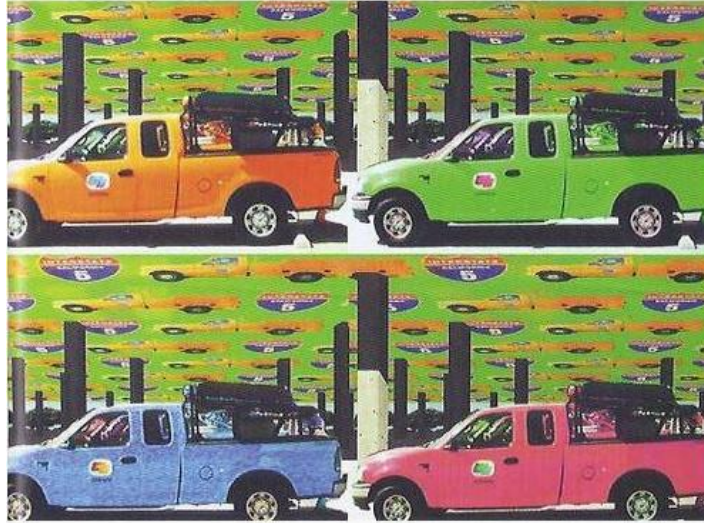


Figure 25. Koolhaas, Rem and John Baldessari. Design proposal for Caltrans Building, 2001. Los Angeles, California

<http://images.oma.eu/20150803203307-1343-120w/1000.jpg>

While they do not have a specific building from which they collectively ebb and flow, they do also travel through the city during the day and retreat to rest at some point during the night. They represent a future trend in the manner in which people both use and experience the city, including interacting regularly with its increasingly modular and movable parts.

4.2. Synthesis

These six case studies demonstrate evidence of potent, cultural hybridities occurring in Los Angeles' contemporary visual arts, popular culture and architecture. We see The Spanglish Turn operating in two ways: as a system that creates opportunities for innovative and expressive cultural and aesthetic forms, and as a critical process for

translating particular aspects of cultural hybridity into the realms of the visual arts and architecture.

Each of the case studies were analyzed in depth and through the particular conceptual lens of the Spanglish Turn. Together, the research findings demonstrate how hybrid cultural conditions are engendered in a particular place and time, and how they are the by-product of globalization's social and spatial changes. Each case demonstrates how the Spanglish Turn is expressed in unique forms of affect, ephemerality, performativity, theatricality, and an exuberant neo-baroque aesthetic. Individually, each case study contributes to the advancement of the production of hybridity by analyzing closely the cultural and artistic processes that produce their formal and aesthetic characteristics.

Strongly exemplifying this paradigm shift is the immigrant artist, Refugio Posadas. His architecture responds to intuition, instinct, and imagination; the Spanglish Turn principles of adulteration, sedation and deceleration are embedded in his view of architecture. He proposes to locate architecture within a conceptual space between art/architecture, reality/ imagination, present/past, and history/geography. While his 'paper architecture' attempts to recuperate a critical cultural perspective of architecture through an intuitive design process, he expresses his ideas within the conceptual framework of hybridity. His design process is not merely based on pure rationality, positivistic logic or mathematics but primarily in affect, feelings, and perceptual knowledge. This contrasts greatly from the dominant approach favored today, an approach that locates the design process within software design technologies, replacing intuition with technical knowledge. For architectural education and practice, this means

an emphasis on pragmatic and utilitarian knowledge that tends to eschew other alternative more open types of knowledge. Instead, Posadas' design process offers many possibilities for new combinations of hybridity (such as the combinations of contemporary popular culture with pre-Columbian poetry and myths) reflecting how Spanglish Turn dynamics contribute towards an openness in artistic and design practices that foster an architecture of affect and exuberance. Posadas' architecture is guided by the combination of the principles of densification (different parts close together), sedation (relaxed forms and elements), and deceleration (slowing down).

Hybridity is addressed directly in Ruben Ortiz-Torres's artwork. His creative approach to art, based in lowriders aesthetic sensibilities, is that of extreme hybridization and customization. The Spanglish Turn principles of adulteration, densification, aggression and acceleration inform his artwork. Humor and delight pervade Ortiz-Torres's work—his ironic sculptures and eccentric paintings serve as tools to provoke manifold sensorial experiences or that of multiple feelings at the same time, overwhelming the viewer in a dramatic whirlwind of extreme visual and spatial effects. The foundation of his artistic concepts and ideas are spanglish terms (mixing Spanish and English), shaping the hybrid nature of his work through language. The Spanglish Turn resides here through highly complex cultural interactions marked by social, political and physical context. His mobile sculptures and paintings are the result of an extreme hybridization process, in which disparate elements derived from both popular culture and fine art are tactically mixed creating novel and luxuriant new forms. His artwork stems from charged field principles such as aggression, acceleration, sedation, etc. For example, in his kinetic sculpture *Alien Toy* the principles of aggression and

acceleration are at play, as shown by “cutting” the car in half and by the wild spinning of the car doors that seem about to shoot off into the sky. In the other hand, his paintings reflect qualities of densification (compacted layers of paint of different colors), sedation (the use of basic geometric shapes: squares and rectangles), and deceleration by the slowing down of the visual stimuli.

The work of Salomón Huerta represents a new direction within the Chicano art movement. A major distinction between his and other Chicano art is a complex exploration of the relation between figure/ground, positive/negative space, subject/object, and identity/context. His dramatic paintings are bold—graphic and strong in color, line and form. However, meaning tends to be flexible; the artist invites the viewer to interpret the meaning of his work primarily through color, form and composition of the painting. The surface of the painting becomes the place where signification resides rather than in the content’s depth; It is where the meaning shifts. Huerta’s work strategically synthesizes the cultural mixing process characteristic of contemporary Los Angeles. In addition, in his paintings the Spanglish Turn principles of aggression, densification and deceleration are conveyed with poetic gestures.

All three artists’ work directly respond to the metafunctions of adulteration (stretching the figure), aggression (forceful action), and sedation (calm, unhurried), qualities that activate and make dynamic the figure/ground relationship. Also, these cases have as a central concern a search for new forms and innovative aesthetics that favor strategic mixing and juxtapositions.

The following three case studies—Day of the Dead, lowriders, and taco trucks—address intricacies of public and private space within the Spanglish framework. Each

demonstrates how the dynamics of public and private space configure within Los Angeles, and how place forms from space. In other words, several spatial and aesthetic forces guide the dynamics of public space affected by the Spanglish Turn; they are conducive to new types of hybrid urbanisms and architectures.

Lowriders are potent material objects of study in that they are charged with multiple types of significations, formal complexities, and powerful aesthetic expressions. Lowriders are hybrid objects per excellence; principles of recycling, customization and hybridization processes lay at the center of these elaborate constructions. Lowriders are another spatial practice of Mexican/Chicano culture in Los Angeles. Artistic processes that give unique aesthetic and formal qualities to the lowrider include the gaudy painting of the surface, the baroque upholstery, and extreme hydraulic system. Lowriders are performative objects that convey a strong sense of theatricality and style on the cars' surface. Style here is defined as a subversively sophisticated form of appearance, valued in lowrider culture and Chicano culture in general because it resists mass consumer culture' status quo. Lowrider style acts as cultural agency within Chicano culture because it is a creative expression of cultural affirmation and resistance. Within the Spanglish Turn framework, lowriders' hybridity is achieved on many levels—mixing old and new forms, Spanish and English language, Mexican and American culture, and art and artifact. Hybridity extends to architecture here—lowriders represent material elements necessary for the production of a new type of architecture that may respond to particular conditions of recycling and customization. Within the Spanglish Turn, lowriders are reframed of as elaborate, innovative and exciting forms of architecture that tend towards the eccentric, flamboyant, and

exuberant, which is important because such qualities are reconfiguring the private/public spatial dynamics of contemporary Los Angeles.

The Day of the Dead is another spatial practice that has several cultural layers of hybridity. At its center lays a condition of cultural mixing called *mestizaje*, which means the mixing of different races, particularly European and Native American, this allows cultural hybridity to occur in time. As such, Day of the Dead rituals slows down time, making space more malleable, the intensity of the personal and collective emotions permeates time with a deep sense of introspection, and contributing toward making place more connective and intimate for the rituals to take place in their full aesthetic expression. The event is a powerful emotional experience, full of drama. Grief, gratitude, and love are compressed together to create communal cohesion and a renewed sense of hope for the future. In the United States, Day of the Dead celebrations often include a political dimension through uncodified public processions that defy norms and rules of dominant U.S. culture. Political messages are conveyed through creative means and signified actions as well. As mixing with other cultural traditions increases, the Day of the Dead becomes more elaborate and complex in its expressive forms, such as altars and processions. The intensity of bright colors, the cacophony of shapes and elements, and the contrast between dark and light spaces create a unique aesthetic complexity characteristic only of the Day of the Death rituals. This hybridity generates performative, theatrical, evanescent, and temporal expressions; keen qualities of Spanglish Turn dynamics.

Taco trucks, also called food mobiles, food trucks, or *loncheras* in Spanish, represent a dynamic dimension of Los Angeles' landscape, defined by constant motion

and mobility. Taco trucks are mobile, urban entities that create ephemeral, social spaces that give energy to the city. Evolving rapidly in scale and diversity over the last few decades, taco trucks have exploded into public spaces of the city, creating unique urban phenomena across the metropolitan terrain. The people gathering around taco mobiles form a new type of crowd characterized by hybridity and self-organizing principles. Without any specific agenda, the impromptu public space that forms always contain potent energy for social organization that defies cultural norms. The crowd tends to represent cultural groups from far and wide across the city, bringing together individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ages. The mixing that occurs here—around the taco trucks—is becoming the cultural trademark of Los Angeles. Not only providing a service to the people of Los Angeles, food trucks are hybrid objects transformed into flamboyant, customized vehicles; effectively transforming the city’s physiognomy in the process.

Chapter 5. Modernist Architecture and Resistance to the Spanglish Turn

5.1. The Spanglish Turn in Architecture Until Now

As we have seen, the effects of the Spanglish Turn extend into diverse cultural spheres, infusing these areas with energy to produce exciting and enduring spatial and formal properties. The last six case studies demonstrate the susceptibility and receptivity of cultural forms to the Spanglish Turn. As mentioned in Chapter two, different levels of hybridity exist, from ‘deep’ hybridity to ‘light’ hybridity to the rejection of any kind of hybridity at all. In addition, the absorption or rejection of hybridity is conditional upon temporal and spatial elements. Each cultural sphere, field or material object is

susceptible to the particularities of time and place.

To understand the limits of hybridity, the following case study analyzes a situation in which mid-century modernist architectural design resists the Spanglish Turn altogether. In this particular instance, the result is a rejection/negation of the Spanglish Turn condition, allowing for non-hybrid spaces to exist in the contemporary city that remain untouched by the dynamics of cultural change.

In principle, common sense dictates that good quality housing design can be a positive force for increasing the quality of life for residents. Conversely, housing design may also be complicit in enforcing dominant politics of space use, often constricting neighborhood representations as well as rejecting new cultural trends. This case study considers the twofold nature of the Mar Vista Tract. On the one hand, the housing development's design and neighborhood layout creates an engaged, public space, 'neighborhood spatial effects,' such as the repetition of similar housing structures, blurs boundaries between public and private spaces while extensive viewing across property lines provides opportunities for communication. A heightened sense of community amongst district residents exists partly because of the original design; however, resistance to translation from the as-built architectural style (1948) to any contemporary cultural hybrid forms of the present day presents negative consequences as well. These include an intensity of ideological positions among residents along with a profound sense of exclusion by those who do not live in the Mar Vista Tract. This dichotomy has created unique resident's interactions with the architecture and complicated neighborhood dynamics.

5.2. Case study # 7. Mar Vista Tract Housing

The Gregory Ain tract housing development, completed in 1948 was a high design experiment for the working class, and part of the larger Post WW II housing boom in the U.S. It is representative of a then nascent utopian modernist movement. Ain, as a participant in this movement, posited that architecture could transform society for the better, and that good quality design in mass housing could dramatically influence the quality of neighborhood life. As part of a generation of socially minded architects, Gregory Ain was highly committed to architectural experimentation and to creating low cost good design for the middle and working-class populations. His architectural design concerns did not focus on creating viewing opportunities of architectural forms and scenes, but on creating theatrical zones of interactivity in which the architectural spaces would provide a context and stage for publicity (Gebhard, Von Breton, and Weiss, 1980). His collaborations with renowned landscape architect Garrett Eckbo in the Mar Vista tract homes proved to be instrumental in manifesting his philosophy. Eckbo was invested in the concept of creating gardens as common spaces for people, and felt that through their practical use and aesthetics, garden landscapes could have a positive effect on social engagement (Treib, 1997). Their work together in the Mar Vista track homes is a clear example of the experimental nature of creative practitioners in California during the twentieth century (fig. 26).

Outdoor Spaces – Public and Private.

Eckbo's landscape design incorporates conjoined lawns sprawling over adjacent front

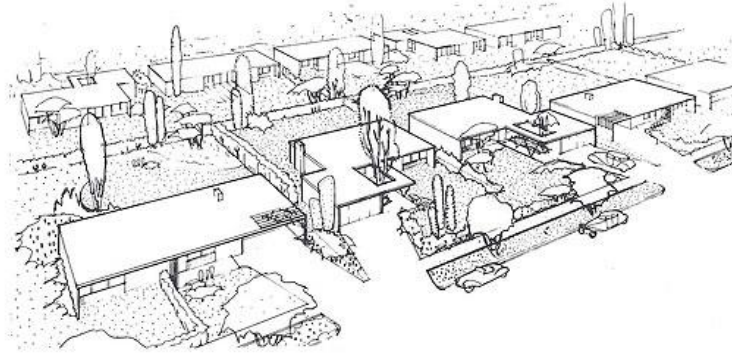


Figure 26. Ain, Gregory and Garret Eckbo. *Mar Vista Housing*. 1948. Los Angeles, California

<https://priceschool.usc.edu/files/documents/masters/research/journal/mpi1.jpg>

yards, evenly spaced repetitive shrubbery extending in curved lines across property demarcations, and smooth fenceless transitions between yards and the street. These attributes give the neighborhood a distinct feel of expansive public space (“public” here refers to the quality of being communally accessible to the local residents). This public quality has over time facilitated neighborhood interaction and a sense among many residents of expanded ownership and responsibility towards the neighborhood as a whole. The accessible public space of the front lawns provides neighbors with a neutral forum for gathering and exchanging ideas. These designs could also be considered precursors to minimalist aesthetic sensibilities, because their dominant feature is repetitive “non-artist made” forms, without a central convergence or symbolism. Like the architecture of the neighborhood itself, the landscaping avoids rational composition, and instead evokes the minimalist continuity of placing one thing after another (Krauss, 1997), (fig. 27).



Figure 27. *Mar Vista Housing Exterior Facade*. 2010. Los Angeles, California

At its most active, neighborhood interaction in the Mar Vista public space of the landscaped front yards and geometric city streets and sidewalks, is reminiscent of the ancient Greek polis, described by Jurgen Habermas as a sphere for free citizens to participate in the debates of the day, and in which inclusion was premised upon ownership and control over private (domestic) property (Habermas, 1991). This resemblance has become more evident since the preservation effort began, and one can witness residents frequently gathering on front lawns to discuss renewed interests in their homes' historical significance and their views on the neighborhood's evolution. This coalescence of human interaction, with its discourse centered on the aesthetics of its environment reflects the future minimalist concern with creating increased perceptual sensitivity in the participants of its environment. While Ain and Eckbo were not minimalist artists per se, their work in retrospect could be seen as fitting in with a minimalist framework.

Michael Fried, in his article, *Art and Objecthood*, denounces minimalist art for its theatrical dependency (Fried, 1967). Namely, that its value or meaning becomes activated only through proximity and perception of a viewer. Yet, in architecture, this theatricality has a more steadfast tradition. In architectural drawings by Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, he demonstrated the spatial integration of his designs through use of repetitive lines radiating out from the buildings, to show their impact on the environment, and integration into the environment as a whole (Wigley, 1998). Under these circumstances, these homes do relate to the Spanglish Turn dynamics, in the sense that a pressured interaction between the users and the space/place is extravagant, temporary, and theatrical, which are characteristics of both minimalist principles as well as Spanglish Turn dynamics.

By including the environmental space of the neighborhood as a contextual aspect of their architecture and landscape, Ain and Eckbo redefined the “frame” in which an audience can understand and participate in their work. Instead of each home and yard being evaluated and experienced individually, they are instead parts of a larger space to be experienced collectively. In the 1970’s, artists further explored this reframing process, by trying to escape institutional aesthetic containers. Artists such as Richard Long and Robert Smithson created artwork in relation to specific sites such as galleries, hillsides or suburbs. While predating this artistic movement, Ain and Eckbo’s landscape and architectural design based on notions of seriality and connectivity challenged similar notions as represented by property lines. This creation of architectural space in part explains residents’ desire today to preserve the tract as one entity and why it resists contemporary translation to the Spanglish Turn.

Interior Spaces – Public and Private.

The architecture of the homes themselves contributes to this sense of expanded public space by creating extensive opportunities for viewing from within the homes to the collective “middle ground” (e.g., the yards, sidewalks, parkways, and the street itself) which runs the length of the block between opposing homes.

Although Gregory Ain never explicitly referenced his design practice as socialist architecture, his ideas related to the role and value of architectural design, as well as his preoccupation with architectural projects designed for “the common man,” indicates a profound commitment to an ideological progressive design approach. These ideals were rooted in the optimistic conviction that technological advances in the new industrialized society could translate into architecture. Because Gregory Ain’s design philosophy prioritized function as a means to style instead of the other way around (Gebhard, 1980) his views of aesthetics were generally contrary to those of many of his designer peers.

*Architects must rediscover and restore the forgotten quality of meaning to our nation’s architecture...that architecture is a social art, and that its aesthetic power must be derived from a social ethos.*²⁴

Gregory Ain

These social ideas demonstrate a developmental stage in a long-term engagement between formal artistic and architectural ideas, and social and political concerns. The

²⁴ Quoted in Anthony Denzer’s book: “Gregory Ain, The Modern Home as a Social Commentary,” 2008.

minimalists, two decades later, were optimistic and somewhat utopian in their belief in the productive power of creative practice. Using similar strategies as Ain and Eckbo, they were invested in stimulating viewers' perceptual experience through their artwork, with the intension of increasing viewer's capacity to look and think deeply. Susan Sontag wrote in her influential essay *Against Interpretation*, "Ours is a culture based on excess...the result is a steady loss of sharpness on our sensory experience. Our task is to cut back on content so that we can see the thing at all, (2001)."²⁵ Artists such as Sol LeWitt and Eva Hesse, believed that to increase viewers visual experience, artists needed to provide them with reduced visual stimuli, contrasting the norm of commercial culture (Joselit, 2003). Ain's homes follow this formula in their geometric simplicity, demanding more output and interaction from the viewer, and in exchange giving them the opportunity to expand their subjective capacity. This has been effective to the extent that residents often experience a group subjectivity. This has led to the formation of subjectivities that are more conservative towards their environments than individual subjectivities often are.

Ain and Eckbo's concern with facilitating a sense of interactive space through their designs can also be seen as a desire to create a forum for an engaged public sphere. For Ain, this process began with repositioning traditional notions of human subjectivity to foreground the female experience, allowing formal architectural structuring to Facilitate men and women's equal access to participation in the public sphere of the

²⁵ Sontag, S. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Picador, 2001.



Figure 28. Kitchen

neighborhood (fig.28).

In Habermas' definition of the public sphere, he discusses its connection to the notion of human subjectivity as a prerequisite for access. The capacity for (rational) subjectivity was determined in Ancient Greece (at the inception of the public sphere) to be present in those who had control over a domestic sphere (Habermas, 1991).

Community Guidance and Discourse

HPOZ in Mar Vista began in the late 1990's by a few residents to preserve the entire Gregory Ain tract of homes through pursuit of HPOZ designation. The HPOZ (Historic Preservation Overlay Zone) is a designation given by the local governmental agencies under the guidelines of the federal government to protect and enhance areas considered unique and irreplaceable assets. At the initial stage of procuring HPOZ status, 92% of residents supported the effort through signing a petition. Many residents

shared the view that their quality of life was directly impacted by the overall neighborhood character and by maintenance of the original neighborhood layout.

Based on interviews and letters, three preservation areas seem to be common priorities among residents. These include the preservation of privacy through restricting two story additions; the preservation of shared green space through the restriction of building into the front yards; and the preservation of the neighborhood look and feel, through the maintenance of a modernist aesthetics on the front exteriors.

Among neighbors, there existed three groups supporting different positions in relation to the HPOZ. These groups could be labeled as “All Encompassing”, “Moderately Encompassing”, and “Opposed”. The all-encompassing view, which is the most totalizing, perceived the role of the HPOZ as enforcing the preservation of the neighborhood character as a whole using a strict overarching interpretation, including restricting any building upwards or forwards, maintenance of a green exterior (in a modernist Eckbo style), as well as keeping a modernist façade in the style of Gregory Ain, including materials, window size, color palette, style, and scale.

Other, moderately supporting residents, viewed the appropriate function of the HPOZ as limiting upwards and forward building (to various degrees) for all residents, while in terms of style, serving as more of an advisory service for residents as they attempt to maintain or alter their properties in a manner consistent with a modernist aesthetic. A third “Opposing” minority group considered the HPOZ to be a divisive element in the community, with potential destructive effects for the neighborhood’s future. Their primary concerns related to the diminishing of individual control over expressions of taste and style in one’s property, and the dominance of one cultural

sensibility over others.

This difficult situation appeared to be a combination affect between both the architectural design and the HPOZ. The design is complicit in this situation because of its very homogeneous character which brings like-residents together, providing them strength and ammunition, while allowing them to exclude others different than themselves. In part, the sense of sameness or seriality has created a type of *uber* domestic curation.²⁶ Residents, who may in other context have been satisfied to control the presentation and aesthetics of their own homes, have an enlarged sense of territory and domesticity, which in this context, includes the whole neighborhood. The design, along with the HPOZ, makes the neighborhood appear as one whole with many repeating parts that they feel need to be in order, for the single entity to function best. As one resident stated (to paraphrase), the homes are like the teeth in someone's mouth, they all have to be nearly the same for the mouth to work right.

The "all encompassing" residents' sense of home is related not so much to property boundaries, or to interior spaces, but to viewing potential. Anthony King, in his chapter, *The Politics of Vision*, discusses the cultural specificity of, "the relation of sight or vision to belief, of belief to knowledge, and of knowledge to authority."²⁷ Within the Gregory Ain homes, these people's sense of home includes everything which is stylistically consistent within their line of viewing. Within their sight (including the

²⁶ For more information on domestic curation, see Lavin, Sylvia. "The Temporary Contemporary," in *Perspecta 34*, 2003

²⁷ King, A. "The Politics of Vision." In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by P. Groth and Todd W. Bressi. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.

airspace) everything becomes a part of their own domestic environment (one could interpret this as an interesting if unfortunate side effect of the modernist integration of interiority and exteriority). A resident with this enlarged sense of home environment is inclined to curate the overall aesthetic environment, including other's facades, landscaping, and relationship with the environment (scale). The Ain design facilitates this expanded domesticity by creating a basis of repetitive sameness. These architectural factors are significant in the neighborhood's resistance towards the Spanglish Turn.

Looking at this phenomenon from a positive perspective, it is also this precise sense of "we are all a part of the same thing" that evokes a sense of shared responsibility and commonality. In considering this tendency in relation to the facilitation of a public sphere, this enforcement of sameness of the publicly visible arena could theoretically consolidate a sense of a common public space vs. aspects of individual private property. In Habermas' exploration of the concept of the "public", he discusses its manifestation within the context of the ancient Greek marketplace, where free citizens could congregate and discuss the issues of the day. In lieu of many such comparable spaces in contemporary Los Angeles, the Mar Vista homes' streets and front yards could be considered an important instance of the realization of the public sphere, serving as accessible arenas for "free citizens" (aka, residents) to congregate. Aaron Betsky elaborates on the modern (or more precisely postmodern) evolution of the public sphere in his article, *Nothing But Flowers: Against Public Space* where he claims that today's public spaces which contain the most active public dialogue are, "made by front lawns, driveways, turning radiuses, security perimeters, [and] lines of sight.... It is the unfenced

yard and the zone lit by television.”²⁸ He continues on to state that these unregulated spaces redefine traditional public discourse by embracing those historically excluded such as women, people of color, and gays and lesbians. Habermas’ clarifies though, that the public sphere represents not just occurrences in a specific locale, but a sphere that “was constituted in discussion” and implicitly, with the free exchange of ideas.

Resident with “moderately encompassing” views of the role of the HPOZ in residential regulation, frequently state that the shared green space is the most important aspect of the neighborhood to preserve. This idea is consistent with many residents’ explanations of what first drew them to the neighborhood, specifically, the integration of modest setback homes within a shared garden like setting. This enclosed sense of a common garden promotes the quality of the neighborhood as a unit. Interestingly, these residents consider the air space above their homes as much public space as that on the ground level. One could argue that this sense of peaceful enclosure provides isolation from the rest of the city, and as such, safety and special status. Many residents’ comments give the impression that they consider their neighborhood to be an oasis within the larger hostile urban environment. This in part would explain why residents show negligent concern over the affairs of the surrounding neighborhood beyond the “enclosed” three-block radius. This sense of common enclosure could also be a positive force promoting the development of the public sphere which is premised on its participants feeling safe to express their views. Many of the interviewed residents

²⁸ Betsky, A. “Nothing but Flowers: Against Public Space.” In *Where We Live Now: An Annotated Reader* edited by M. Stadler. Portland, OR: Verse Chorus Press, 2008.

responded that after living in the homes, they have developed positive, close relationships with many of their neighbors.²⁹

The two related ideas of preserving shared green space and restricting two story additions relate directly to community's quality of life. The third aspect of preservation is related to style and does not directly impact quality of life issues such as scale, access, or greenery. Ironically, this aspect is the most closely aligned with the HPOZ mission of preserving the character of important architectural buildings. This is because it is only through the determination of the neighborhood as representative of a valued architectural style that it achieves elevated status and provides added cultural capital for the city. It is also the preservation aspect most strongly endorsed by the "all encompassing" camp of residents and one which is the most contentious in this context. The importance of style is also consistent with a minimalist agenda, with a focus on exteriority and surface.

Habermas, in describing the vested authority of 18th century European nobility, claims that authority was both an outcome of, and prerequisite for, its public displays of style. The enactment of style became the mark of "good society," a fact which remains true today. Though not to the same exclusive degree, it often is a necessary precursor for access to realms of elite society. This symbolic passport may very well be a motivating factor for both residents and the city to preserve the neighborhood's modernist style, and an argument for why this quality takes precedent over other quality of life issues related

²⁹ This is evident in the following quote, "I do know that most people that live here will tell you that they know more of their neighbors in this neighborhood than in any other neighborhood that they've ever lived in. I think it might have something to do with both the architect and the landscape architect who designed this area, because they both had a strong sense of community...Gregory Ain was very much interested in community living and Garrett Eckbo really wanted to design landscaping as a park and a community... It's more than just living in a community where the houses are similar."

to everyday experience.³⁰ It also is evidence of the elevated status of modernist works in general and minimalist works in particular today, which have ironically slid easily into commodity culture.

The minimalist nature of the Ain and Eckbo housing design in Mar Vista has led to an interesting situation today where residents are often confused about how much to understand their neighborhood as a single entity, and how much to consider each home as individual, separate entities. While Ain and Eckbo's design efforts in Mar Vista predated the minimalist project by over a decade and are transdisciplinary in nature, their work fits into its sensibility and conceptual framework through its use of repetition of elements, its lack of a central "internal core", and its focus on exterior, and symbolic structures. In this way one can see how the boundaries of artistic movements, in truth, represent the critical mass of long terms trends which ebb and flow within and across disciplines.

The Mar Vista neighborhood provides an example of how the preservation zoning of neighborhoods has the powerful potential to position them within the frame of visual arts' space, and as such, as semi-static exhibitions instead of evolving living

³⁰ Conversely, "moderately encompassing" residents would like the HPOZ to serve mainly as a resource or guidance service, as seen in the following quotes: "My hope is that [the HPOZ] will become more of a repository for sound ideas and reasonable guidelines, than a dictatorial body that controls everything from building materials to personal taste in gardening styles...But everything should be open for discussion, and nothing should be universally condemned except second story additions."

In interviews, many residents made remarks about the HPOZ having a difficult beginning presence in the neighborhood. This seems to be both in terms of disagreements over what can be regulated and in terms of how and to what extent all residents are notified of upcoming HPOZ meetings. These difficulties have led to a contention between certain neighbors. In letters attained from residents where they express their concerns regarding the HPOZ, it is clear that there also exists a group of residents discontented with what they see as the "regressive" direction of the neighborhood. They are uncomfortable with the idea that other residents and the government will have a say through the HPOZ in what choices they can make regarding their homes.

environments. While display and performance can be important vehicles for enacting the public spheres of these neighborhoods, creating a balance between preserved space and lived space appears to be a challenge.

As HPOZ efforts potentially “harden” neighborhoods in time by increasing their fixity within specific cultural and temporal frameworks, residents can establish positive dialogue with one another regarding the direction of their neighborhoods and work to ensure that their domestic environments continue to meet their needs. The challenge is not to suppress diverse tastes and aesthetics in this process but to move towards the goal of promoting equal social connectivity, even at the expense of compromising artistic integrity. Residents in Mar Vista could remember in their current preservation zeal that Ain and Eckbo’s original design was informed by the belief in flexible uses of space, evolving notions of private and public, and responsiveness towards the temporary conditions of neighborhood life, all ideas consistent with the Spanglish Turn. Because the HPOZ process carries the risk of distancing neighborhood residents from their physical environment by diminishing their ability to mold it, residents in these communities would be served best by working together to build vibrant communities based on the creation of productive, inclusive public spheres.

PART 3: TOWARD A SPANGLISH ARCHITECTURE

Chapter 6. Functional Linguistics of the Spanglish Turn in Architecture

6.1. Spatial Analysis

In addition to conducting the case studies, the Spanglish Turn is uncovered through conducting a spatial analysis. This spatial analysis has two parts: 1) consideration of the city's Metafunctions of space, and 2) the city's Charged Fields. Drawing upon a theory of language called *Systemic Functional Linguistic Theory* (or functional grammar), we adapt this system of analysis to work within an architectural context.³¹ This theory asserts that form and meaning are interwoven, or in this case, form and spatial affect. In other words, there is no affect without the structure to create it. We use this system to provide the system of analysis for Spanglish spaces and to measure degrees of Chicano aesthetic influence upon architectural structures and spaces of the city. Functional grammar posits that all language is realized in a social context. The success of any lexical or organizational choice relates to its appropriateness for that given context—formal or informal, written or spoken. Within this framework, spoken language is viewed as a distinct mode of language that utilizes three components: one, the shared experience of participants—the manner in which gesture, prosody, and tone reference aspects of a shared environment; two, social interactiveness—the frequent back and forth exchange and the switching of roles between speaker and listener; and three, the complex “chaining” of specific ideas and linking between parts of a larger discourse. Analyzing architecture as a type of verbal exchange opens up many

³¹ Schleppegrell, Mary J., *The Language of Schooling: A Functional Linguistic Perspective*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. 2004

possibilities for the study of architecture and urbanism. From this perspective, we may view East L.A. as a type of informal verbal exchange, operating as a highly performative, dramatic, and ever changing temporal network. Architectural theorist, Robert Somol notes that the structure of gossip is the best format for guiding speculative architectural design.³²

Metafunctions are related to the macro conditions of the production of space and their resultant formal expressions, as well as the material and performative qualities of a given space or culture. Metafunctions are divided into three categories: Situatedness, Organization, and Elements. Each of these properties function as individual forces that together formulate a dialectical triad to convey a clear picture of the qualities of spatial form, in this case, of the Spanglish Turn. Metafunctions of space help to uncover the intricacies behind the informal, subconscious tenor of the city and its architectural spaces.

Charged Fields are a set of dualities that work symbiotically to define, at the micro level, the multiple opportunities that can be generated by the interaction of hybrid properties. Charged Fields also serve to reinforce the Metafunctions of space, illuminating spatial change and transformation.³³

The spatial analysis puts forward a theoretical framework to provide a system of analysis for: 1) understanding new hybrid forms, and 2) a way to measure the varying

³² Somol, Robert. "Pass it on..." in *Log 3: Observations on Architecture and the Contemporary City*, New York, Anyone Corporation, Fall 2004.

³³ The idea of the Charged Fields of the Spanglish Turn relates to the concept of the term, 'field condition' proposed by Stan Allen, whereby "internal regulations of the parts are decisive; [but] overall shape and extent are highly fluid." Allen, Stan. *Points + Lines: Diagrams and Projects of the City*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

degrees Chicano and Mexican aesthetic influences are present within various architectural structures and spaces in Los Angeles.

The application of this theory is like a lens where one can view the particularities of material culture, urban space and architecture. It is aimed at moving fast through the myriad of spoken words and spaces that make up the city. It focuses on explicit characterizations of space and form, inseparable from affect and architectural characteristics. More specifically, it sorts forms and processes by function, design, and affect, giving special attention to context to determine the significance of architectural characteristics.

This is a process-oriented approach based on studying fluid and informal interactions within specific conditions. It is intended to respond to constantly changing dynamics. This research utilizes an expanded definition of the term, *text*. Originating from Hypertext or Stretchtext, *text* is defined as an image, symbol, sound or movement. The flexibility of the term engenders complex plots or stories to be read from spatial or formal narratives. A text can be anything that has a “readable” organizational structure and is internally linked.³⁴

This theory uses three Metafunctions, which are attributes of performance, object, and structure. They are referred to respectively as Situatedness, Organization, and Elements. Situatedness relates to the theatricality of space or object, sensibilities, and the relationship between intention, the experience of space/object, and behavior within that space. It is also attuned to the tone or level of formality in urban contexts such as the ambiance of a building, space, object or process. The concept of

³⁴Bernstein, Mark. “On Hypertext Narrative.” ACM Hypertext Conference 2009, Torino, Italy, 2009

Organization refers to the nature of the placement, proximity, and size of various spatial elements within a given environment. It is also concerned with the manner in which elements are linked, such as the organization of space and an architectural program. The Metafunction of Elements refers to the basic concepts of line, color, movement and form. It also defines the architectural elements of space, from surface, volume, and boundaries, to openings, passageways, and interruptions over time.

In addition to the three categories listed above which are attributes of form, this analytical framework also contains sets of actions which define the nature of creative oppositional forces as they enact upon physical forms. These oppositional forces can be seen as ‘Charged Fields’, that is, spatial manifestations of the imagination arisen out of collective systems formed at the local level. These are the result of emergent systems that have come to dominate the look and feel of the landscape. They are “charged” in that they act as manifesting actions that express aesthetic and spatial sensibilities in customized ways and influence the manifestations of spatial Situatedness, Elements, and Organization.

The connected oppositional forces that constitute the Charged Fields are: 1) Adulteration – Densification, 2) Acceleration – Deceleration, and 3) Aggression – Sedation. Specific ways in which these processes affect form are numerous. For example, Adulteration can multiply, recycle, and stretch. Its opposite Densification can saturate, detail, and intensify. Acceleration may connect and blur while Deceleration may scatter and delineate. Aggression has the power to heat, make graphic, and embolden while Sedation can restrain, soften, become delicate, and disappear. The charged fields are tactical processes that resemble Bernard Tschumi’s notion of the

Space-Event in Architecture. Tschumi posits that the relationship between concept and context determines the process and production of new architectural forms. He sees form as a by-product of the complex interaction between an original idea (concept) and the specific conditions where the idea is projected (context). Tschumi defines this interaction the ‘in-between zone,’ which works as a negation of pure form or style. Together these processes result in a dynamic, local network of ‘interstitial spaces.’ Form becomes a derivative product of a critical idea in a particular context of place and time. Form is not universal; it is contingent to local conditions. In a similar manner to the Spanglish Turn, Tschumi advocates for strong context specificity and concrete locality for the projection of new architectural ideas that respond to the rhythms of today’s complex cities.³⁵

While these factors are specifically manifested in any object, environment or structure, the emphasis of one attribute or process over another, or the existence of simultaneous, contradictory influences, mark the hybrid logic of everyday Spanglish Turn aesthetics. By focusing on the formal and aesthetic properties of the material city, this spatial analysis attempts to delineate new cultural vectors that can inform future architectural forms and practices.

This analysis takes a ‘patchwork’ approach in terms of the various focuses of study in order to create a vision of a larger whole. It is not possible to look at all permutations of hybrid culture/space within the context of this dissertation, nor is data available in all situations. For example, to gain a better understanding of Situatedness, this dissertation analyzes popular culture and artwork. To better understand

³⁵ Tschumi, Bernard. *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005

Organization, this dissertation analyzes the built environment. For Elements, it analyzes both artwork and the built environment. This approach maximizes the use of available data in different contexts to provide an overarching picture of what is happening in L.A. today and where it is likely going in the future.

Under the influence of the Spanglish turn, an aesthetic spatial portrait emerges, seeping out into greater L.A., from today's Chicano/Mexican immigrant Los Angeles. These are, for example, of baroque style, dense surfaces, and adulterated space. In addition, aesthetic sensibilities have come to inform everyday interactiveness, non-permanence, moods juxtaposing aggression with sedation, and the speed of spatial production from "fast and furious" to "low and slow."

6.1.1. Metafunctions of Space

Situatedness: This is the theatricality of space, sensibility, and the relationship between intention, experience, and behavior. It is also attuned to the tone or level of formality in urban contexts such as the ambiance of a building, space, object or process.

Situated artwork. Artists frequently reference the interplay between the soft and hard cities, that is, between the structures of an environment (the hard city) and the interpretive, perceptual constructs present in the mind of urban dwellers (soft city) (Jonathan Raban, 1992). This can be seen in the piece, *La Alianza* (The Alliance), by Los Angeles-based artist Barbara Jones (fig. 29). She refers to it in the form of allusions to past memories from Mexico and the projection of hopes and dreams onto future generations in Los Angeles. In this artwork, there are several light boxes of different

rectangular sizes, put together architecturally to look like a geometric modernist puzzle. In the light boxes are photographs of the L.A.' shoreline



Figure 29. Jones, Barbara. *La Alianza*, mixed media, 2002

at sunset, a 100-year-old family land deed from Mexico, and images of the contemporary descendants of that land-owning family. Through these images, Jones provokes general questions about the interaction between transnational, place-based sensibilities which exist as invisible layers over the city, as well as more specific questions about intergeneration legacies and dreams, and the way in which these shape people's lives and environments to create new hybrid forms. As part of the Spanglish Turn, this reflective "soft" city is integrating with and evolving the existing 'hard' city of Los Angeles.

In this manner, Mexican immigrants are profoundly impacting the L.A.'s art community generally, and the Chicano art community specifically. Through this process, the cultural and aesthetic qualities introduced by Mexican immigrants have begun to join L.A.'s urban scene. This can be seen in the positive reception of influential Mexican immigrant artists' work within established circles of contemporary art criticism, including performance artist, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and visual artist Ruben Ortiz-Torres. Within art criticism circles, their work is often located within a theoretical framework of the 'borderlands' and hybridity. This conceptual and aesthetic position allows for their artistic ideas and practices to strategically move between Mexican, Chicano and other cultural identifications.³⁶

Within this fusion Chicano cultural production specifically, and L.A.'s cultural production more generally has increasingly adapted the immigrant-influenced working principle that there is no preciousness or monumentality attached to cultural form, and objects, ideas and structures can be adored, altered, shunned, and reused at the whim of individual and popular opinion. This sense of freedom has allowed many artists in L.A. to engage in greater experimentation and innovation. This perspective can be seen in the work of Gronk, Salomon Huerta, Shizu Saldamando, and Camille Rose Garcia in which each focuses on the formal qualities of color, line, movement and shape in their work with little or no concern for heavy meaning or sentimentality.

³⁶ Leclerc, Villa, and Dear, *Urban Latino Culture: La Vida Latina in L.A.* (Sage Publications, 1999). The seminal art exhibit "Phantom Sights: Art After the Chicano Movement" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2011, explored the amplitude and diversity of contemporary Chicano art aesthetic practices, presenting a liminal space where artistic sensibilities and identities could travel to different cultural spaces, or any cultural space desired by the artist.

Elements: This refers to the basic concepts of line, color, and form. It also defines the architectural elements of space, from surface, volume, and boundaries, to openings, passageways, and interruptions over time.

Form: The defining trope of residential architecture in the Spanglish Turn can be seen in the predominantly Mexican, East L.A. neighborhoods. It's what I define as *el cuarto*, an empirical concept that serves as a generative spatial system. El cuarto is a generic, non-descriptive, flexible room (a cube, so to speak) that works like a piece of a puzzle. Most houses in East Los Angeles contain at least one cuarto if not several. The conglomeration (chaining) of cuartos in a neighborhood gives the area special, experiential character. Cuartos can resemble phantom or pseudo rooms that appear as ghostly spaces, their presence shifting from significant to almost non-existing. Cuartos are so flexible that they can range from being completely open (without walls) or totally closed (a door and no windows). Generally, the space of el cuarto does not have a specific function but can accommodate any spatial needs. The imbued character and personality are the most important elements of el cuarto and define its programmatic function and spatial form. The surface of the cuarto and its relation/proximity to other cuartos is what gives it its personality. The degree of ornamentation and decoration of el cuarto varies depending on what it is used for.

The gardens, which are part of this cuarto system, are for growing flowers and food. The front yards frequently become the most social room of the house, where residents pass time and neighbors stop by to chat. It is not uncommon to see this practice coupled with a business enterprise, such as selling clothes, kitchen utensils, or food. These products are most often arranged in elaborate displays for the best visual effect;

fences become dense surfaces covered with carefully aligned rows of blouses, baby clothes, or colorful brooms. Walkways become lined with tables full of tamales, champurrado (a hot drink of chocolate and masa), and carefully cut fruit. These pseudo rooms are rapidly changeable in both appearance and function, transforming by the day or hour.³⁷

Line: Line has always had a major significance in the developmental history of cultures, from the origins of the founding of Rome (where the augur drew a diagram, a set of lines on the ground to demarcate his *templum*) or the mysterious immense landscape markings in the valley of Nasca, Peru. In Catherine Ingraham's *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity* (1998), she references the study of ethnologist Robert Ferris Thomson on Yoruba culture who states that since antiquity many cultures have adorned their bodies, tools, artworks, dwellings and cities with lines.

Within the Spanglish Turn, a dominant use of line is one that is heavy and black. Heavy black lines can be seen in the characteristic wrought iron fences of East L.A. and the bold, carefully delineated lip and eyeliner of Cholas and Cha-Chas.³⁸

This practice demonstrates how lines can be used to outline and highlight valued forms. In the paintings by Chicano artist Gronk, the heavy black lines function to define form and provide surface texture.

³⁷ An important investigation of the use of space in East Los Angeles is presented in the Master Thesis: *The Enacted Environment, The Creation of "Place" by Mexicans and Mexican Americans in East L.A.* by James Thomas Rojas, Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991.

³⁸ Chola is a term that refers to a teenage girl or young woman who associates closely with a gang of cholas/os or is the girlfriend of a cholo (Chicano gang member); Cha-Cha often refers to a highly stylized young urban Chicano woman.

Color: A predominant use of color within the context of the Spanglish Turn is the solid color field used to both manifest and define shape. This strategy can be seen in Salomón Huerta's paintings of individual homes where he uses solid geometrical color fields that encompass the subject, creating a very flat surface (fig. 30). This use of solid color fields can also be seen frequently on buildings where single or multiple walls are painted in distinguishing colors. The architecture of Luis Barragan incorporated this principle brilliantly, both aesthetically and as a way to connect an indigenous Mexico with Modernism.



Figure 30. Huerta, Salomon. *Pink House*, painting, 2009

Organization: This refers to the nature of the placement, proximity, and size of various spatial elements within a given environment (two or three dimensional). It is of space and an architectural program.

Flexible arrangements. Unlike many of homes on L.A. 's Westside that are less flexible in their presentation, in East L.A. it is acceptable to modify one 's home by quickly adding on a room if a relative or two comes to stay, or if the work moves to the home and a shop is needed. While these rooms are generally built with four walls and a roof, functionally speaking, they are joined by the invisible rooms made up of the yards. This refers to the organization of the cuartos discussed earlier. This adulterous practice provides an extra room for the residents of the house to work, play, and to pursue beauty.

Due to this addition of extra cuartos, including various sized rooms extending one after the other towards the back, the sides, or above, the organization of many homes in East L.A. have a haphazard look. The "chaining" of rooms resembles the "chaining" of clauses in sentences, the organizational structure that most obviously marks the distinctive quality of informal spoken language. This is a result of el cuarto "passing through" the charged field of "adulteration/densification." With an emphasis on adulteration, this charged field can multiply cuartos, chain them, stack them, and make them invisible. Densification can also influence el cuarto by thickening its surfaces and filling its spaces, e.g., adding eclectic patterning to interior surfaces. The diagram below shows how charged fields operate and affect the *cuarto* system. The basic function and form of the cuarto are articulated by the different competing spatial and aesthetic forces of physical and cultural context. The cuarto, defined as "passing through" context over time, becomes permeated with the qualities of the Charged Fields, such as sedation, adulteration, acceleration and aggression (fig. 31).

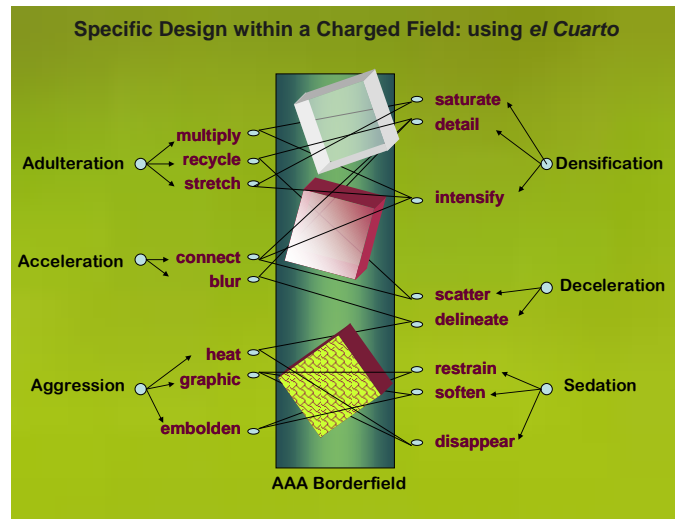


Figure 31. *El Cuarto* and Charge Fields Diagram

6.1.2. Charged Fields

Currently in East L.A. one can see a predominance of particular manifestations of ‘charged fields’ that provoke the specific hybrid forms of the Spanglish Turn characteristic of this time and place. As mentioned earlier, charged fields are made up of oppositional forces that customize form (including the features of Situatedness, Organization, and Elements) and express aesthetic and spatial sensibilities. These Charged Fields of the Spanglish Turn often influence the creation of objects, scenarios, and spaces by the co-presence of the fields’ oppositional forces. The contemporary urban condition in L.A. is marked by these juxtapositions that cause overlapping, resistance and friction. Historic Chicano neighborhoods such as East L.A., are frequently characterized by juxtapositions that are easygoing, and without contentions or agendas. Artists who incorporate this sensibility in their work use disparate materials,

objects and aesthetics, just as they are frequently found together in L.A., facilitating both function and style.

In the art installation piece by Joe Lewis, *don't look back, why?* (fig. 32), he juxtaposes materials with new uncomfortable meanings by using impermanent everyday foods of sustenance as soft symbols of boundary and war. He recreates the border fence made purely of various kinds of rough salt blocks while the army canopies that generally mark the border are made of repeating lime slices dipped in chili powder. While this piece relates to the border specifically, it also demonstrates the manner in which material forms are frequently organized in Southern California to create aggressive affective environments of the Spanglish Turn.



Figure 32. Lewis, Joe. *don't look back, why?* mixed media, 2003

As such, one of the charged forces is that of bold aggression, aggression which affects the region's environmental mood. Beyond organization and juxtaposition, aggressive design can be manifest as graphic display. For example, the ubiquitous metal bars in East Los Angeles can be aggressive in their repetitive, precise, and graphic linearity. For a viewer or urban dweller, these qualities can provide the affective experience of feeling a sense of danger, being pushed away, intimidated, challenged, and/or warned. This use of aggressive lines and its message can be seen in an image of a ghostly city created by Raymond Pettibon from the mid-1990s where one senses, through the artist use of high contrast and black line, the message that the buildings of Los Angeles are no longer safe.

Conversely, when these bars are under the influence of sedation, (the opposite force of aggression), they can have a more inviting and soothing affect or one of slack and entanglement. To be sedate refers to the state of being calm and unhurried. The design effect of sedation is to create a cooled down, restrained, or softened ambiance, where unobtrusive aspects seem nearly to disappear.

These qualities can create features of an architectural space that are welcoming instead of warning. For example, when used this way, bars can exhibit a baroque style, show elaborate ornateness, and/or display delicate designs, such as in the case of many of the beautiful and carefully crafted fences and screen doors encasing East L.A. homes. In this manner, the affect and the bars are transformed through sedation. With this charged field (aggression-sedation) which ranges from challenging to inviting, the inherent push and pull factor within it is evident. The range of this field is present in both the maze of telephone/electric lines spreading over the streets of East Los Angeles

and over the flat roofs (*azoteas*) of Mexico City. These intertwining and often curving lines give the impression of their being a webbed layer above the city, a type of nest turned upside-down.

The piece, *Nallekaghnituten: Man who throws rocks (An event for an A-Moralist as parrhesiates)*, (fig. 33), by Daniel J. Martinez also expresses the full range of this field. The aggressive force of this charged field is demonstrated by a sculpture of a man poised to throw a large rock over his head. Yet Martinez also provides an ironic twist to this aggression in that his (self-portrait) sculpture is only about 18 inches tall, undermining any real physical threat it may pose. In this way, Martinez has successfully included the full range of the field of aggression and sedation in this piece. Aggression first by having the figure lean back, posed to throw the rock, and then sedated as it



Figure 33. Martinez, Daniel J. *Nallekaghnituten: Man who throws rocks (An event for an A-Moralist as parrhesiates)*, sculpture, 2002

laughs out loud, rightness itself up, and does not release it. It also shows the sense of playfulness and irony that is characteristic of the Spanglish Turn.

Another frequent expression of charged fields in Los Angeles is that of acceleration and deceleration. As can be seen in graffitied walls in East L.A. (fig. 34), an effect of acceleration is the rapid, furtive creation of a hyper visual environment that mimics speed in its effect of hyper energy and chaotic interactions between artistic



Figure 34. *Wall with Graffiti*. Los Angeles, California

elements. At the other end of this spectrum, deceleration refers to slowing down. A design effect of deceleration is the careful delineation of form. A procedural expression of deceleration is the use of repetitive motion. These qualities of deceleration can be seen in many material cultural objects in Chicano communities. In fact, many of them contain both aspects of this charged field in different situations. For example, an artifacts process of being made will be deliberate and focused but its ultimate

exhibition/performance is short lived and explosive (i.e., accelerated).

The charged field of acceleration and deceleration can signify beginning to move quickly, to blur, connect, and focus. An effect of acceleration can be the creation of a sped up, hyper visual field. Often, evidence of an accelerated or decelerated field can be found on the surface treatment of an object, for example in a brush stroke or swipe of the pen or spray can.

This charged field of acceleration-deceleration can be seen at work in the iconic form and ritual of the piñata. The piñata has obtained a special signification as a form of celebration that creates specific aesthetically defined experiences at the street and family level in both Mexico and Los Angeles (fig.35). Traditional piñatas take time to make, using a laborious process that can take several days. For example, inexpensive tissue paper alternated with shiny paper is cut into hundreds of small squares and then glued one at a time to the ceramic or cardboard interior structure of the piñata. Piñatas serve as a focus of collective inspiration and exuberance.



Figure 35. *Piñatas in East L.A.*

Ironically, an architectural design that looks very much like it has a piñata's fringed and multi-layered surface is in Round Valley, Utah. This is the *Raspberry Fields Home* (fig. 36). Not surprisingly though, the home, a refurbished school house, is designed by an L.A. architect who has stated interest in, "the city's [LA's] longstanding tradition of realized experimentation." (Hirsuta website, 2012,

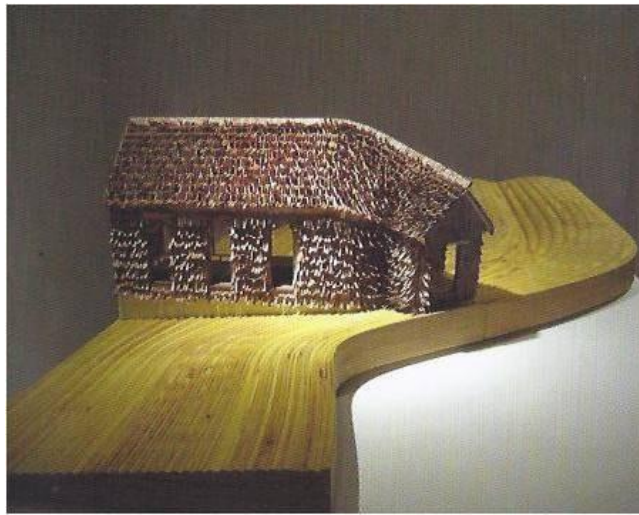


Figure 36. Payne, Jason. *Raspberry Fields Home*. 2011.

<http://www.hirsuta.com/OFFICE.html>). This is Jason Payne, principal of Hirsuta. The formal similarities between the appearance of piñatas and the Raspberry Fields Home are quite remarkable. Both are basic geometric shapes, covered by a complex, textured surface. In the Raspberry Fields Home, the texture of the surface is caused by the weathering of the shingles over time. Eventually, the side of the house exposed to the most extreme weather conditions becomes covered with unevenly curled shingles. The texture of the piñata is achieved by curling small pieces of crepe paper by a long,

laborious handmade process. From large scale to small scale, both are time-based products; one by weather and the other by the hand of the piñata-maker. Another similarity is the single-color scheme. In the Raspberry Fields Home, the topside of the shingles is painted in a single color—dark purple, and the underside—bright orange and purple. When the shingles curl over time, the bright colors are slowly exposed to create a high contrast between the dark top surface and the bright exposed underside of the singles. This contrast between dark and light is also commonly used in traditional piñatas to create a more dramatic and flamboyant visual effect. While the (re)design of the Raspberry Fields Home is officially inspired by the effect of blowing winds, it is also possible that the ubiquitous, SoCal piñata has an unconscious influence on the house's form. This is due to the fact that, according to the Nobel laureate author of the book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman, one of the most common reasons a person may begin to think a novel idea is good or true is because of previous exposure. Repeated exposure to a form (in any context) makes it appear to be a better choice for design, as compared to those that are unfamiliar. This follows that argument put forth by Burke, that hybrid forms occur cross culturally only after repeated exposure, not after a single experience. While the piñata influence may or may not be true in this case (and it doesn't matter if actually is), it provides an example of how cultural forms and processes can transfer and take on new meanings, scales or contexts, and create new environments and phenomenological experiences.

In the paintings by local L.A. artists, Gajin Fujita (fig. 37) and Chaz Bojorquez, incorporating and synthesizing the forms of graffiti, traditional Japanese prints, and comics into their work, they similarly saturate dense baroque surfaces with animated

color and graphic lines. These surfaces are created through an acceleration of the creative process. Both artists utilize spray paint, which dries quickly, forcing the artist to paint in rapid, continuous motion.

Conversely, deceleration can refer to slowing down, and reducing the speed of a process. It can relate to the ideas of taking more care about something, or scattering or expanding images and objects across a visual field. A design effect of deceleration can be the intricate delineation of form, or the wide openness of a composition. One example of the intricate delineation of form is the interior of the Hustler Casino in Gardena,



Figure 37. Fujita, Gajin. *Southland Standoff*, stencil painting, 2013

CA, designed by Godredsen-Sigal Architects in 2000. It is inundated by diverse, intricate, and detailed objects, surfaces, and environments. These range from the delicate chandeliers that drop down from the light-pocketed shimmering ceiling, to the seating areas enticing visitors with lush upholstery covered curved, soft forms. Every surface texture in this interior is different from the next and carefully considered. The varied surfaces provide distinct mini environments that cater to the whim of the visitors

changing environmental inclinations. Most obviously is the cover to the much-needed smokers' pavilion in the center of the casino which is a, “giant lotus-flower-like fabric structure that opens or closes in response to the elements” (Chase, 2006) (fig. 38).



Figure 38. *Hustler Casino Lobby*, designed by Godredsen-Sigal Architects. 2000

Another charged force that dominates the environment of Los Angeles, and in particular, East Los Angeles as part of the Spanglish Turn is extreme adulteration. Adulteration means to corrupt, debase, or make impure by the addition of a foreign or inferior substance or element. An effect of adulteration is a stretching out, a creation of more out of less. An example of this can be seen at the East L.A. art center, Self-Help Graphics and Art, where adulteration is used in two ways: first, the structure is functionally stretched out to include part of the parking lot, which transforms into a metal working space, playground and art viewing forum; secondly, the surface skin of the building has been thickened by the application of crowded, decorative, recycled

pottery shards to create a saturated texture (fig. 39). These strategies adulterate both the space and materials. The adulteration of materials results also in its opposite, a densification of surface texture. This densification is also apparent in the informal



Figure 39. *Self Help Graphics and Art building*. 2004

“stores” in household front yards where the baroque fences are from time to time carefully and compactly covered with items for sale.

In Ventura, adulteration can be seen in the design of the Somis Hay Barn (fig. 40) which has walls thickened by the stacking of hay bales in front of the thin wooden external structure. The hay bales are an inexpensive material that provides depth to the barn walls, and breathtaking rough surfaces of varying shades of green and beige. The hay bales are actually a functional aspect of the barn and their placement along the walls serves both as a design feature and as a practical storage feature. Additionally, the hay gets regularly used so it is regularly depleted and restacked. This creates an ever-

changing experience of the building as its environmental affect undergoes continual metamorphosis, from lush and comforting to stark and clean. When the hay bales are



Figure 40. *Somis Hay Barn*, designed by Studio Pali Fekete Architects. Ventura County, California

only partially in place, the resulting geometric patterning on the walls provides yet another, extraordinary visual display.

These examples all demonstrate extreme uses of adaptability and continuous rapid and transient translations of space into altered functions, visual impressions, social interaction, and viewers' experiences. In other words, the architectural forms become hybrid in their daily visual and functional transformations and in their regular recycling of repurposed spatial elements.

An artist whose work demonstrates the concept of adulteration is Mark Bradford. While ultimately creating highly dense surfaces, Bradford uses adulterated "stretched

out” materials to make them. To get his rich results, Bradford incorporates elements from his daily life into his canvases: remnants of found posters and billboards, graffitied stencils and logos, and hairdresser’s permanent endpapers he’s collected from his other



Figure 41. Bradford, Mark. *The Devil is Beating His Wife*. 2003. Painting

profession as a hair stylist. In *The Devil is Beating His Wife* (fig. 41), Bradford consolidates all these materials into a pixilated eruption of cultural cross-referencing. Built up on plywood in sensuous layers ranging from silky and skin-like to oily and singed, Bradford builds abstract imagery out of a popular culture base.

Clearly, the element of surface reigns supreme in L.A. within the Spanglish Turn. From interiors to exteriors of objects and buildings, surfaces are continuously decorated, coated, narrated, labeled, overlapped, stuck upon as well as transient and in a continual state of translation. These become dense surfaces thick with texture, color, and bold graphics that can either remain as permanent elements of the lived environment or have only a short life; one that is limited, brilliant, yet purposeful in its presence,

creating a social experience and then moving on to disappearance. Like luminescent moths, these short-lived imprints on the built environment always leave the seeds for the next generation of ephemeral aesthetic and brilliant forms.

Another charged force is densification, related to the saturation of detail. As such, the concept of density relates to the degree of compactness whether permanent or short lived. An example of dense surfaces and alternative sensibilities is *El Pedorrero* (fig. 42).



Figure 42. *El Pedorrero*, muffler shop, East Los Angeles, California

This is an iconic muffler shop in East Los Angeles that is decorated with an extreme saturation of objects, forms and colors. The owner of the shop has filled many of the shop rooms with extensive memorabilia, from car toys to World War II helmets. This decorative, personalized process imbues the interior surfaces with eclectic thick textures. He has painted the external walls of the shop with three basic colors: yellow,

blue, and white. The colors are each applied on the floor, walls, and ceiling in different combinations (squares, circles, stripes, etc.) to create various all-encompassing visual and atmospheric effects. This muffler shop then is a prototype of vernacular baroque style, and is a potential resource for architectural practices, not as a formula but as a paradigmatic shift.

In the similarly common practice in East L.A. of creating lowriders, one can also see the densification of materials brought about through the layering of paint, the saturation of the surface designs, and the use rich color schemes. To the viewer, this results in an illusion of endless detailed depth. One could say whimsically, that this experience has the potential to take the viewer into a perceived alternate world, a world in some ways similar to that experienced by Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*, where she had to come to terms with, and flourish, within new physical, procedural and cultural norms. It could be argued that this is an example of an alternate world of surprises, different cultural expectations and systems created by the Spanglish Turn in L.A. Additionally, and like *Through the Looking Glass*, this process which, carried along as a great torrent, is on its way to developing a landscape that is also mysterious, aesthetically vibrant, and potentially “upside down” from what has existed before. This ethos combined with existing L.A. norms and creative practices from diverse communities can, and will, define residents’ experiences in L.A. for decades to come, and potentially could become the backbone of the hybrid forms themselves which will define the sensibilities of the city.

In the piece inspired by lowrider cars, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (fig. 43), by Ruben Ortiz-Torres, one can see a powerful affect resulting from densification, that

is, of intensity and compactness. In this work, Ortiz-Torres juxtaposes the two extremes of glittering car paint, chrome and gold and the ordinary everyday lawnmower



Figure 43. Ortiz-Torres, Ruben. *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. 2002. Kinetic sculpture.

which it covers. The bulky form of the lawnmower is also customized with hydraulics to be able to dance to an original composition made by garden tools. He has adapted a painting style that is based on slow repeated coats of paints that work to finally achieve a deep luminescent quality that can be seen in the magenta surfaces of the lawnmower. This work builds upon a past body of work of his creating ultra-hybrid movable forms based on existing elements in popular culture, in particular, using the process of customizing, taking functional mundane machinery and altering them into something both aesthetically and functionally extraordinary, a tactic which is reminiscent of the extreme adaptability of the Mexico City ethos.

For the Spanglish Turn to present new forms of hybridity it is necessary to have a system of spatial and cultural analysis that respond to the specific contextual conditions of Latino Los Angeles. This system is comprised of two major concepts/ideas: Metafunctions and Charged Fields. Together these ideas are generators of form. Each concept has derivative components; combined, the results portray a very distinct, formal dimension to architectural and urban space. Metafunctions are strategic *processes* for the production of contemporary architectural and urban forms. Charged Fields are *properties* of the forms generated from such processes. In the case of Metafunctions these consist of Situatedness, Elements, and Organization. These three concepts are an essential part of a system of analysis for the Spanglish Turn. The other major concept driving the system of analysis is that of Charged Fields. These can be considered by-products of the Metafunctions, but the dynamic for their analysis are unique to each Charged Field. These take the form of oppositional forces that sometime work in a dialectical fashion. These oppositional forces are Adulteration - Densification, Aggression - Sedation, and Acceleration - Deceleration. Past analysis of Chicano and Mexican artworks has focused on content, giving primacy to questions of cultural identity, geography, political struggles, everyday life experience, and spirituality among others. This type of analysis often tends to eschew the formal and aesthetic dimension of the artwork. By switching lenses to see and analyze recent Chicano art where the aesthetic and formal properties become the central concern of the artists, we experience a new and convincing conceptual switch to the aesthetic and formal where the artwork presents a new dimension distinct from the past Chicano art.

6.2. Vocabulary: Fifteen Key Words in Spanglish Architecture

Architecture

Charged Fields

Desmotherna

Elements

Hybridity

Mestizaje

Metafunctions of Space

Organization

Place

Rasquachismo

Scale

Situatedness

Space

Spanglish

Spanglish Architecture

Chapter 7. Openings to a Normative Spanglish Architecture

7.1. A Grammar for Spanglish Architecture

One way of revealing cultural hybridity dynamics within contemporary architecture is through experimentation of architectural forms derived from cultural and spatial concepts. The emphasis on formal analysis rather than function (performance, programming, etc.) or structure (technology) is not new to architectural theoretical

discourse. Current preoccupations within theoretical discourse include considering contemporary architectural form as a repository of new technologically-based design sensibilities rather than a manifestation or response to the dynamics of our global/local culture. This dominant approach to architectural theory and practice has opened up the field to new, exciting architectural forms. With the development of ever more sophisticated design software programs, it has become relatively easy to generate architectural forms that carry powerful and seductive appeal. Much has been said about the powerful effects of visual media technologies upon individual subjectivities and cultural identities, both positive and negative. In architecture, the embrace of new media technologies has resulted in an intensification of highly sophisticated modes of digital representations. I believe that, for the most part, this recent 'technological [digital] turn' in architecture has had a positive effect. However, oftentimes overemphasis on technology neglects or even dismisses other approaches towards architectural design that might lead us towards alternative forms of architectural experimentation. Past cultural approaches towards architectural ideas and forms are now seen as ideologically suspect or even disconnected from our current emphasis on pragmatism. Whereas architectural theorists like Eisenstein and Scott Brown and Venturi looked at the literary theory of deconstruction and commercial culture respectively, others like Hejduk looked to poetry and mythology for inspiration. Tschumi looked to film theory for his approach. But this is not the case now. Perhaps it makes sense that the pervasiveness of technology within architectural design reflects the pervasiveness of technology in our daily lives. As a culture, we are obsessed with technology. My intent is not to dismiss the significance and relevance of technology in architecture but to aim focus back into the realm of

critical cultural analysis. This approach is based on the conviction that architecture serves us best when it is directly engaged with the dynamics of contemporary cultural production.

Design approaches for generating architecture that respond to context and culture are not new. Even within the universal aesthetic principles of Modernist architecture, some noticeable principles of hybridity are evident. For instance, the architecture of Alvar Aalto in Scandinavia, Frank Lloyd Wright in the U.S., and Luis Barragan in Mexico found successful ways of mixing modernist design principles with local (physical and cultural) traditions. Again, within postmodernist architectural theories such as Critical Regionalism, formulated in distinct iterations by Kenneth Frampton (*Towards a Critical Regionalism*, 1983) and Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre (*Why Critical Regionalism Today?* 1990) advocated the importance of context specificity in the development of architectural design. Recently, Bernard Tschumi in *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*, 2004 makes a strong case for the necessity of design processes that critically engage dynamics of our contemporary urban culture.

One of the most dynamic, intriguing cultural and social trademarks today is the incessant contact and mixing of diverse cultures. The recent conflation of time and space at a global scale has accelerated processes of cultural mixing in the last several decades. This phenomenon is most pronounced in large, urban metropolises that function as destinations for many diaspora groups. Los Angeles is a prominent example. This city is distinct from other large metropolises for three reasons: 1) The scale of the city and its population (12.8 million inhabitants in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area). Within the U.S., the Los Angeles metropolitan area is the second largest in term of population and

the first in terms of area; 2) As part of the Pacific Rim, Los Angeles' geographic location has created unique immigration patterns with the largest influx of people coming from the Pacific Rim area; this link is evidenced in the current demographic make-up of the Southern California region; and 3) The historical relationship and geographic proximity of L.A. to Mexico has also had a deep effect in the appearance and tenor of Los Angeles' cultural composition.

Why my own work?

Designers frequently test theoretical ideas through their own experimental work. In architectural parlance, this type of conceptual architecture is often referred to as “paper architecture” or “cardboard architecture.” John Hedjuk, Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi, and Greg Lynn are among those whose work includes “paper architecture.” Strategically, new architectural ideas may be explored from a more conceptual framework and in speculative fashion; this design strategy also frees the designer from pragmatic limitations and constraints demanded by the needs of a real building.

I approach the research from a similar perspective. Relying on my own art/design work—on my own *paper architecture*—allows me to demonstrate the potential for cultural hybridity in contemporary architectural design. I have generated ten speculative drawings reflecting ideas and concepts about architectural forms and cultural hybridity. The architectural forms generated by these drawings respond to the overarching concepts described in Chapter 6, *Metafunctions of Space: Situatedness, Organization, and Elements* and the *Charged Fields: Adulteration - Densification, Acceleration -*

Deceleration, and Aggression - Sedation. Countering current architectural design practice, these ten drawings concretely engage dynamics of contemporary cultural hybridity.

My intent is to explore the concept of Hybrid Architecture, utilizing the principles below:

- Hybrid geometric and curvilinear lines and forms
- Heavy, black lines
- Solid color surfaces
- Saturated surfaces indiscriminately mixing color, textures, shapes, patterns, and lines
- Contrast between heavy solid volumes and delicate surfaces
- Tension between volume and void (object and ground)
- Impressions of provisionality, or short-term permanence
- Flexibility and adaptability
- “Free-style” ornamentation
- Relaxed posture of forms, non-rigidity.
- Shiny and shimmering layered surfaces (similar to the effects of lowrider car painting)
- Theatricality of spaces, volumes, and surfaces (a sense of immanent spatial drama)
- Tension between symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes
- Mixing of artificial (geometric) and natural (organic) shapes and materials

- Impressions of formal vulnerability
- 'Gossip' as a design tactic

A (new)cultural approach to Architectural design

We seldom find architectural design approaches today that specifically develop their processes within a conceptual framework of popular culture or cultural hybridity. As mentioned earlier, the dynamics of specific cultural phenomena are not a major consideration in current architectural design thinking. In the last few decades, culture has lost purchase in architecture; concerns with popular and material culture are not seen as fundamental or necessary for generating innovative designs. From this perspective, culture is often seen as an expendable luxury in architecture. Prevailing architectural approaches not considering specific cultural concerns often champion globalization. Globalization shrinks cultural phenomena into a homogenized state; however, it may also generate mixing effects. As discussed in Chapter 1.2.1. (Types of Mixing), throughout history there has always been cultural mixing at different levels of intensity between different societal groups. This contact has always generated a degree of mixing. Such exchanges are not always harmonious, nor is mixing easy; oftentimes strong reactions arise during the process of mixing. Mixing provokes change and movement but also offers openness and positive risk-taking. Cultural mixing, transculturation, and hybridity are always dynamic processes of constant transactions and negotiations. Keeping, exchanging, or giving up something is an intrinsic part of the cultural hybridity process; and regardless of the degree and intensity of the exchange, there is always the potential for creating something entirely new and exciting. The type cultural mixing that

I refer to in this research is a mixing that is autochthonous to Los Angeles. This mixing is a result of a strong, defining influx of Chicano and Mexican immigrant culture.

'Gossip' as a design tactic

The notion of gossip provided the conceptual framework for my ten architectural design prototypes. Here, gossip is defined as a critical tactic to produce an alternative type of knowledge based in popular culture. Cultural theorist, Clare Birchall, presents an original analysis of popular knowledges—including gossip—for creating alternative forms of cultural and political agency. Birchall states that “popular knowledges don’t pretend that there is an ultimate foundation to knowledge; they don’t present themselves as unshakably true. In their playful, provisional, speculative form, popular knowledges hold less connotations of power, force, or violence.”³⁹ Gossip naturally occurs. This type of verbal exchange operates in the in-between space of knowledge and non-knowledge and formality and informality. Gossip passes between fact and fiction. This liminal quality—of thriving in an in-between space that is flexible, provisional, and adaptable, liberates knowledge from the dominant notion that the main function of knowledge is utilitarian.

The experimental prototypes were derived from a process similar to that of gossip. Birchall sees gossip as a type of tactical (popular) knowledge that occurs in the tension between the public and the private; it is interactive and dynamic. Gossip is conversational, and tends to blur fact and fiction as a way to get and sustain attention. Birchall again, “gossip is largely unconcerned with its past (where the content comes

³⁹ Birchall, Clare, *Knowledge Goes Pop: From Conspiracy Theory to Gossip*, BERG Publishers, Oxford, UK. (2006)

from) and its future (what will happen as a result of the content being shared),” (p. 94). She thinks of gossip as a highly speculative endeavor. In this way... “the status of the information it communicates is ambiguous in terms not only of its verity, but also of whether it is claiming any veritable status at all. It could simply be about putting an idea into circulation that may or may not prove to be a good investment,” (p. 96). The ten architectural experiments were created as a type of (design) knowledge that, like gossip, is playful, provisional and speculative. Gossip, as a medium of informal information exchange, *simply put an idea in circulation*; and these experiments act accordingly to produce new architectural forms.

Ten experimental Spanglish architectural prototypes

Specifically, the ten drawings explore applicability of Spanglish Turn principles upon architectural form. Dealing directly with form, composition and style, the experiments represent a synthesis of the aesthetic principles of the case studies and the spatial analysis. They serve as informal prototypes to demonstrate how cultural hybridity may be a dynamic force in generating innovative architectural design concepts. In addition, the prototypes respond directly to one or more of the hybrid architectural principles listed above.

7.1.1. Affect: Blue House

Recently, a renewed interest in emotions and body sensations has taken hold of architecture. In opposition to rational 20th century Modernist architecture, this new approach relates to a broader investigation that began in academic circles in the mid-

nineties. Called the “Affective Turn” in the social sciences and the humanities, the notion of affect is described as pre-individual bodily forces. This relates to automatic responses, which may enhance or diminish a person’s body capacity to act or engage with others or with its environment (context).⁴⁰

In this architectural drawing, I explore how architectural form provokes a psychological and emotional affect through playful interplay of geometric and curvilinear shapes and the color blue. The choice of color relates to the psychological properties associated with blue. In color psychology, blue is the hue of the mind. It is soothing, and it affects us mentally, rather than physically.⁴¹ Blue is serene and mentally calming. It is the color of clear communication. Research has shown that blue is most people’s favorite color regardless of cultural background or socio-economic level.

The main concept is generated by the interplay of two, interlocking cubes (fig. 44). The place where they interlock becomes an ‘empty cube’ inside the structure of the overall house (creating a third negative space) that can function as a mezzanine. The strict geometry of the facades, of the three-level house, is disrupted serendipitously by the vertical and horizontal windows that look like locks of curly hair, which connect the three “cubes” extending outside the structure. Vertically they extend beyond the roof to become solar panels to generate some of the energy for the house, creating a hybrid (passive/active) solar energy system. When the windows extend horizontally outside the

⁴⁰ Leys, Ruth, *The Turn to Affect: A Critique*, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring 2011), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. (2011)

⁴¹ Color psychology is the study of the effects of the electro-magnetic radiation of light on human mood and behavior – a universal, psychological reaction, which is not as heavily influenced by culture, age and gender as is generally thought.



Figure 44. *Blue House*

surface of the house they become sculptural landscapes that reinforce the whimsical character of the house.

The color palette of the entire surface of the building plays with three shades of blue, with dominant horizontal stripes in two types of light blue. The third element in the façade are two volumes – one square at the interlocking space of the two cubes and one triangle at the main entrance. They are painted in lowrider style metallic blue.

The horizontal stripes all around the building form patterns and their repetition is a way to hint at a type of horizontal ‘ornamentation,’ that is abstract and geometric, linear and continuous. In addition, the “curly” windows and landscape/sculpture element at the main entrance have a strong defining presence within the volumes, giving the appearance of neo-baroque style.⁴²

⁴² Neo-baroque style is simply defined as a synthetic fusion of multiple contemporary aesthetic forms and stylistic practices. Neo-baroque style is understood as the appropriate creative and artistic sensibility that reflects the high complexity of contemporary global cultural mixing. For more on this theme see, Juan Luis Suarez’ *The Neo-Baroque, A Cultural Solution*, in Susan Edelstein and Patrick Mahon, Eds. *Barroco Nova: Neo-Baroque Moves in Contemporary Art*, published by Artlab Gallery, University of Western Ontario, Ontario, Canada (2012)

The relationship between background and foreground is played out by the relationship between the curly windows that seem to extrude out from the façade and the ‘flatness’ of the general volume. All the different elements (“stripped” walls, “curly” windows, iridescent shiny surfaces) give a spectacular theatricality to the house, as well as the appearance of being a malleable volume.

7.1.2. Hybridity: *Kaleidoscopic Building*

In this drawing, I explore how the concept of hybridity is applied to architectural space and form. The main premise of hybridity is the mixing of two entities that creates a ‘third entity’ entirely new and different from the first two. In this experiment, pressuring spaces and shapes, contrasting materials, textures, and colors make possible intriguing and surprising hybrid architectural forms. *Kaleidoscopic Building* explores how the tension between opposites, such as geometric volumes and organic forms, artificial and natural elements, primary and secondary colors, foreground and background, horizontality and verticality, generate dynamic architectural forms. This hybrid design strategy results in a building that is prismatic in character. Its form gives the viewer the impression that the building is constantly changing and moving.

The building’ form operates like a kaleidoscope. The building gives the impression of changing forms and colors depending on the movements of the user within the spaces, provoking a different sensorial experience each time. Kaleidoscope may be defined as the observation of beautiful forms. The term was coined in 1817 by Scottish inventor Sir David Brewster. Three ancient Greek terms are joined together:

kalos, which means beautiful or beauty, *eidos*, a form or shape that can be seen; and *skopeo*, to look to, to observe at.

This prototype reflects a building that gives the impression of constantly changing its skin, like a chameleon that changes color depending on the mood and environment. The end-result is an architecture that is psychedelic and illusory. This visual effect of the surface resembles the effects of the lowrider painting technique of Kandy Polychrome, in which the color changes with the movement of the viewer.

In this proto-type, the idea that predominates the design is that of a "cube" (organization) being contaminated (adulteration) by free floating fragments of multiple colors (fig. 45). The main building is a rectangular flat solid wall (blue in the middle,



Figure 45. *Kaleidoscope Building*.

gold on the sides) juxtaposed with a tent-like kaleidoscopic structure (forcing two competing geometries to come together). There is a distinctive contrast between a single

large and solid colored surface and fragmented multicolored layers that break the continuity of the flat surface. In this way, there is a quality of aggressiveness in the composition implicit on the surface, as well as the property of adulteration by the addition of multiple fragments of different sizes, shapes, and colors. That is to say, the adulteration of fragments condenses the overall surface to create an effect of densification, the saturation of materials. The central segment of the wall is painted blue in the lowrider style, giving special visual effects of endless depth, shimmering, and movement.

7.1.3. Autochthonous: *Red and Gold House*

In this prototype, I explore how a basic solid geometric form, a cube, can be “softened” by dramatizing its spatial and formal composition. An intense use of the color red, tension between solid volumes and voids, and the eccentric use of whimsical curvilinear elements all contribute towards achieving this effect. In addition, the notion of levity, or weightlessness, is addressed by orchestrating a playful interaction between the two large volumes. Surprisingly, two seemingly heavy and static volumes give the impression of defying gravity, as the relation between the volumes is tweaked. One of the volumes teeters, about to fall down, while the other appears off-balance. This tension is exacerbated by the radiating intensity of the color, red, which enhances the spatial drama between the volumes. The curvilinear elements functioning as windows or garden sculptures add a heightened sense of theatricality to the tense drama at play between volumes and voids. The result is an outlandish building that offers multiple readings.

This proto-type is formed by two red cubes outlined by a gold strip all around the façade (fig. 46). It also contains undulating windows: one horizontal that extends to the interior patio and converts into a shade element and one vertical that extends all the way up to the ceiling. In addition, the complex contains a red sculpture/landscape shaped similarly to the windows, in a waving form that frames the main entrance to the building, functioning as a roof for the interior patio are pink solar panels at the top connecting the two red cubes and providing shade for the interior patio.

There is a curving element that frames the main entrance and that functions as a sculptural diagonal garden. There is a playful attitude between the red cubes and the

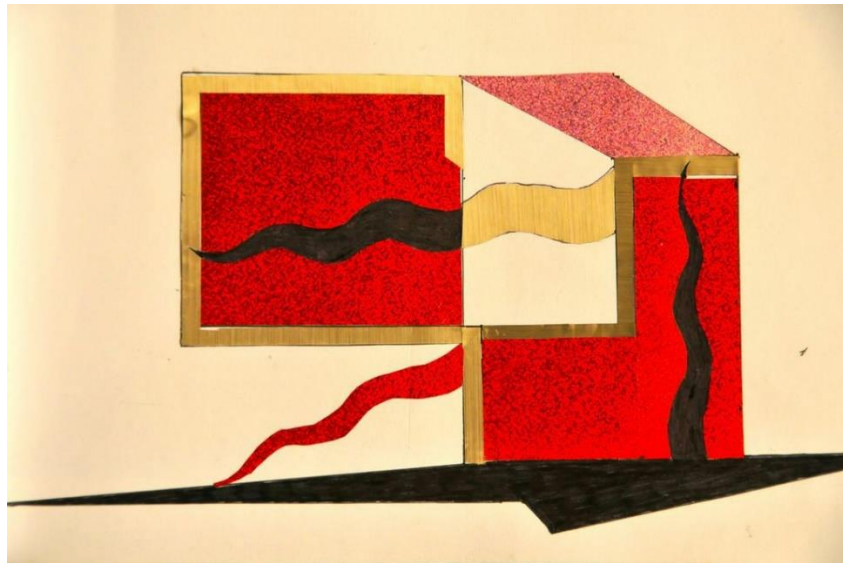


Figure 46. *Red and Gold House.*

black, gold, and red curly elements. This gives it a sense of incongruence as well as theatricality and performance.

There is a dynamic tension between the more organic forms and the solid static cubes. The surface of the building dominated by red, gold, and black expresses a sophisticated type of sensuality, like the refined make up of a fashion model. On the ground, at the side of the building there are dynamic triangular shapes (made out of asphalt) that contrast with the regularity of the square cubes. This juxtaposition of colors and shapes give the building and its immediate surrounding a mysterious contrast between the bright and shiny surface of the building and the stark black of the ground. This contrast makes the building appear as if it is ‘floating’ in space and the black ground gives it a certain levity, as if it is in suspended animation.

7.1.4. Assimilation: *Big Blue Cube*

The underlying concept for this prototype is that of assimilation. There are three main research areas of assimilation: cultural, psychological, and biological. Although each is defined within a specific framework; in general terms, assimilation refers to the process by which individuals or groups absorb characteristics and qualities of another group. Assimilation is considered an easy process of adaptation because it does not require a great deal of adjustment. Cultural assimilation, in the context of groups, can refer to either immigrant diasporas or native residents dominated by another social group. Assimilation, similar to hybridity, is a spectrum. Partial assimilation often grasps first generation immigrants while full assimilation may be seen in second and third generation immigrants. However, cultural assimilation is not a one-way phenomenon. The host society may be affected, often transforming towards the assimilated group. Spanglish is one such example. In Southern California, the Spanish language has been

transformed into a local hybrid Spanish that contains Hispanicized English words. This architectural experiment demonstrates the process of ‘assimilating.’ Disparate formal and stylistic elements create an architectural form that is both fragmented and coherent at the same time, offering visual degrees of assimilation.

The composition is dominated by three structures that interact in a dynamic tension between each other. These are: 1) a main “cube” with an appendix in the shape of smaller cube, protruding from the side façade of the building; 2) a large elongated canopy of irregular shape painted pink and purple positioned in front of the building; 3) a “basement” structure that functions as a multipurpose space (a ‘cuarto’ principle that changes function to accommodate the desire and needs of the moment). The overall feel is conveyed by the intensity of the painted surfaces with glittering finishes and shiny fields of color (fig. 47).



Figure 47. *Big Blue Cube Building.*

The juxtaposition of all the different parts gives the building a whimsical appearance. The large canopy is supported by columns in the shape of inverted, leafless “gold branches,” the repetitive allocation of the branches serves as decorative elements and an intriguing type of ornamentation. The same effect of decoration exists within the basement structure, where repetitive geometrical elements in the shapes of inverted triangles function as both structural support and ornamentation. This repetitive quality in both the branches and the inverted triangles conveys a unique affective experience.

To access the building, one needs to walk through the golden branches which stimulate the feeling of walking through an ‘artificial forest,’ like going through a strange arcade. The result could be one of surprise and curiosity, where one wonders, where is this taking me? The experience is intended to awaken a sense of mystery and the unknown. A sense of fun and playfulness are integral parts of the general whimsical experience of the building. The ‘branches’ imitate nature which has its own organizational principles. In other words, the building imitates nature (the artificial dimension of nature or man-made nature) adding a kind of picturesque quality that provides an exciting visual and spatial experience.

7.1.5. Tradition/Memory: *SHOE*

This architectural prototype stems from the tension between two cultural concepts: tradition and memory. The word, tradition, is derived from the Latin word for *tradere*. It means ‘to transmit.’ Tradition is defined as a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something meaningful by people in a particular group, family, or society. Tradition transmits over time to other individual or groups. Cultural traditions often take

the form of stories, beliefs, myths, rituals and everyday customs. Traditions often evolve over time and adapt to new circumstances and settings. Some of the most intriguing aspects of immigrant cultures are the ways in which different groups negotiate their own traditions into a new place. Traditions morph when subjected to a new socio-cultural milieu.

Memory refers to the process of acquiring, storing and retrieving information. It involves three major processes: encoding, storage, and retrieval. Encoding is the process of transforming information into a usable form. Storage involves retaining the encoded information for future use. Much of the information that we keep stored lies outside the realm of our awareness while retrieval is the process of transforming that information into our consciousness. According to Atkinson and Shiffrin's theory, there are three 'stages' of human memory: sensory memory (the earliest stage of memory), short-term memory (the conscious mind), and long-term memory (the unconscious or preconscious). Memory is an essential part of humanity. It would be impossible to manage our lives on a daily basis if we were not able to recall names, places and basic information. The present is managed by our short-term memory, or *working* memory. Our long-term memory, or *semantic* memory, is where we store past knowledge and experiences, and give meaning to such experiences. Memory is malleable. It has the capacity to change, stretch, or bend, depending on the experience or context.

The SHOE prototype is a conglomeration of disparate, small architectural volumes that form the shape of a child's athletic shoe footprint. Footprints are impressions left on the surface of the ground. They are marks resembling memories of a past experience. A print is a trace, a record of a past experience; in other words, it is a

memory of an event.

This complex of multiple small buildings is organized based on a print of a kid's athletic shoe (fig. 48). The ground where the buildings are laid out is composed of seven

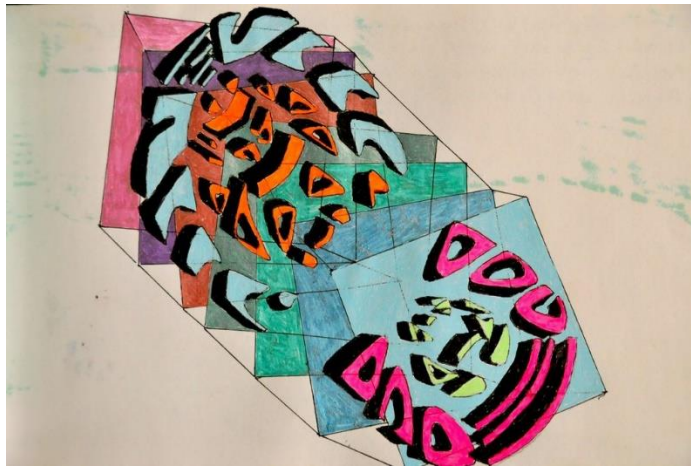


Figure 48. *SHOE*.

layers of landscapes squares of different colors and materials (flowers, grass, plants, trees, water, concrete, and stone). The arrangements of the squares give the impression that all are in some type of motion – that the ground is slowly moving or sliding, like tectonic plates trying to stretch outwards.

The buildings are seen in a site view plan with the ‘ground’ constructed of different types of landscape organized as a series of squares. The color and forms of each individual building are bold and dynamic. There is a juxtaposition between the ‘moving ground’ of the squares and the organic shapes of the buildings. In fact, the building resembles a larger form that has been shattered in multiple little fragments. It is adulterated by the fragmentation of the individual pieces. The explosive quality of the

composition gives the impression of being in a state of aggression. The quality of acceleration, the speeding up of elements, is given by the impression of the ground (squares) moving which in turn is contrasted by the static state of the buildings on top of the squares. This juxtaposition of movement and stillness gives the complex an impression of different speeds, and at times, a sense of deceleration.

The unique shapes of the individual buildings resemble pictograms or pre-Columbian glyphs, based on either Aztec or Mayan codices. They could also appear to be like a broken Aztec calendar shattered into multiple fragments. This explosive quality seems to come from an earlier, unknown force of energy, and the objects give the impression of being in space, moving outward in slow motion to stretch the universe.

The different cluster of buildings is painted in four fluorescent colors: pink, green, orange, and blue. The colors function to distinguish the type of activities occurring inside the buildings, where some might be offices, other apartments, artist studios, or commercial spaces.

There exists a sense of playfulness between the moving ground floor and the static buildings (between squares and organic shapes) as well as the collage of colors between horizontal planes and the vertical volumes.

7.1.6. Risk: *Four Interlocking Cubes and a Big Golden Fish*

This prototype explores the idea of risk. Risk is the notion that something bad or unpleasant will or may happen, and often implies an exposure to danger or an encounter with unforeseen challenges. People often believe that life does not advance without taking risks or chances. Risk is a fundamental condition of our human life experience.

The process of hybridity requires risky attitudes and actions. There cannot be mixing without risking some of the original cultural traits. One must be open to unexpected changes, which makes cultural hybridity a risk-taking process.

A second idea behind this experiment is that of *ukiyo*. Originally, the word *ukiyo* expressed the Buddhist idea of the transitory nature of life. This rather pessimistic notion was turned upside down during Japan's Edo period (1603-1868). This transitory process often implied taking risks. *Ukiyo* also means "to float." It was a period in which prosperous merchants, situated at the bottom of the social order, became interested in buying art, as a way to unofficially elevate their socio-cultural status. A hedonistic and risky cultural attitude defined by the term, the "floating world," was the central characteristic of the Edo period. The most popular themes in art of the ukiyo period were: beautiful women, kabuki actors, sumo wrestlers, folk tales, travel scenes and landscapes, flora and fauna, and erotica. In a masterly way, woodblock prints from this period express those ideas, the artwork of printmaking masters such as Katsushika Hokusai, Utawa Horshige, and Utamaro expressed the sentiments and sensibilities of the period. The combination of the notions of risk and transitory life served as the basis for this formal scheme.

This building is directly inspired by the Japanese woodblock prints in the ukiyo-e style of the Edo period (fig. 49). There are four interlocking cubes painted in different colors and in different positions. Also connecting the cubes is a large golden fish that gives the impression of "swimming on the surface of the cubes." This results in a tension between geometric forms (cubes) and the free organic form (fish) dynamizing the surface of the building.

The interlocking of the cubes at different angles (45, 60, and 90 degrees) with each other resembles the “rolling of dice,” which is very dynamic and in motion. The entire building appears to be slowly rolling on the ground and then suspended in the air before the last role.

The cubes are painted in four different colors: one cube is painted in bright green, another cube is lavender, another turquoise blue, and another light pink. Some of the areas where the cubes intersect are windows. These extend beyond the shapes of the cubes. The fish functions as a vertical sculptured landscape attached to the surface of the building. The entire complex of volumes and shapes gives a geometrically complex and chimerical quality. Also, the different materials, colors and shapes interacting with each other to display a sense of playfulness and exuberance.

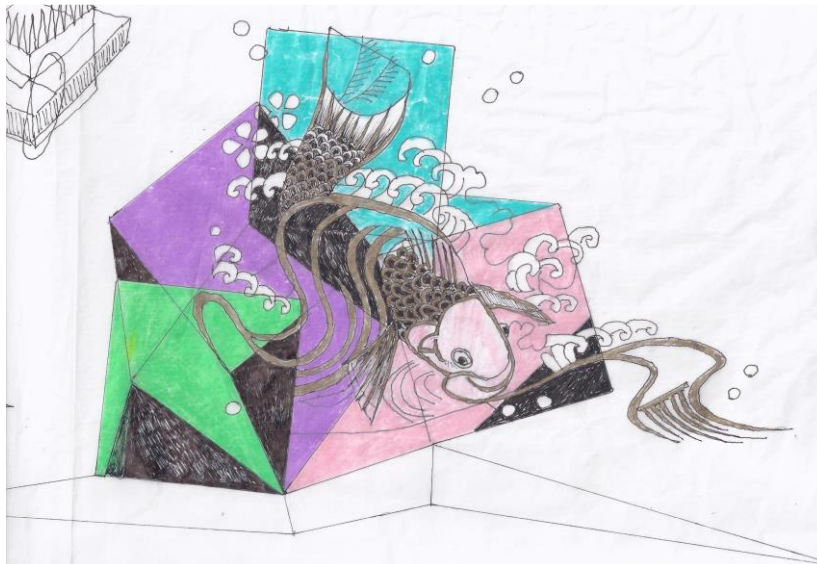


Figure 49. *Four Interlocking Cubes and a Big Golden Fish.*

The quality of acceleration is present in the building through the juxtaposition of the cubes with each other and with the fish/sculpture/landscape. Combined and in full interaction, the forms give the sense of movement that is sometimes slow and sometimes fast depending on the time of the day or night. In addition, the fish/sculpture/landscape “swims” on the surface of the building in different directions and “grows” and “shrinks” depending on the season of the year. The surface of the building functions as a dynamic field that seems to be moving in slow motion. This unstable ‘field’ presents a cacophony of colors, textures, and figures. The ornamentation of the building is comprised of elaborate details of the fish/sculpture and the motifs of water being splashed all over the building. This effect provides the building with a tremendous dynamic condition that gives the impression of a new artificial field-ecology being formulated. The building as a whole also conveys the distinct quality of an eventscape where the viewer or user can become active and a certain theatricality is established.

7.1.7. Joy: *Radiant Yellow Building with a “Mohawk” and with Large Wings*

One of my greatest pleasures is speculating about unusual and contradictory architectural design and artistic ideas. I enjoy making art that is coherent and exciting from chaos and disarray, and consider it a very stimulating and intriguing challenge. It is from this perspective that I approached this prototype. Here I combine three seemingly disparate and completely unrelated elements: a human emotion or sensation (joy, or extreme pleasure or happiness), a hairstyle (Mohawk punk style), and a pre-Columbian poem. These three disparate elements are combined, creating a coherent architectural form that reflects traces of the three elements within its wholeness.

How can an architectural form embody an intense human emotion such as joy? Joy is a basic fundamental human quality. It is universal and transcends cultural backgrounds or one's socio-economic status. We experience joy regardless of age, gender, or race. Joy is defined as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness and often involves unexpected positive encounters. Psychologist Martin Seligman, considered the father of positive psychology, states in his book *Authentic Happiness* (2004), that five conditions are needed to achieve authentic happiness. The PERMA effect per Seligman includes:

- 1) *Pleasure*: examples include enjoying tasty food or a warmth bath.
- 2) *Engagement* or flow: engaging in a challenging yet enjoyable activity.
- 3) *Relationships*, social ties: having a close networks of family and friends.
- 4) *Meaning*: pursuing something bigger than oneself.
- 5) *Accomplishments*: the realization of tangible goals.

The term, *Mohawk*, refers to the Iroquois nation people. The Iroquois' traditional hairstyle involved plucking hair from the head on both sides while leaving a three-inch square of hair on the back crown of the head. This hair was left long, ending in three short braids. Often, three upright feathers were placed on each of the braids to denote one's leadership and group status. Today, the Mohawk hairstyle has been adopted by sub-cultures to signify non-conformity or rebellion against mainstream culture. There are many Mohawk hair styles depending on the type subculture (most subcultural groups are associated with a specific music style or movement such as punk or metal). Some of the most popular include liberty spikes, the deathhawk, frohawk, chelseahawk and fanhawk.

For this prototype, I chose liberty spikes for the dramatic and flamboyant appearance of the hairstyle. Liberty spikes are hair spikes aligned in a row on top of a shaved head. The spikes may be one's natural hair color or dyed various colors. Bright colors are common, but when this style is worn by members of the goth subculture, it may be dyed in darker tones. The term also applies to this style when it is worn over the entire scalp.

Another element that inspired this building (fig. 50) was a pre-Columbian Nahuatl poem/text that describes the artist, and goes like this:

“the artist: disciple, abundant, multiple, restless.

The true artist, capable of, practicing, skillful,

Maintains dialogue with his heart, meets things with his mind.

The true artist draws out all from his heart:

Works with delight; make things with calm, with sagacity;

Works like a true Toltec;

Composes his objects; works dexterously; invents;

Arranges material; adorns them; make them adjust”.

This complex building is a clear example of a “go for broke” attitude. It is extremely exuberant, aggressive, fast, malleable, wild, and baroque in style. Every surface is covered with color, patterns, and different types of shapes. The building is painted with only four colors: yellow, red, pink, and gold. The combined effect is astonishingly visual. The brilliant colors and different types of shapes seem to be going “wild.” The whole complex gives the impression of being an exotic tropical bird flying

with its wings wide open. The neo-baroque forms play with different types of geometries creating tension between triangles, squares, and ovals. This relationship between the different parts make the building seem chaotic, confused, and extremely exotic.

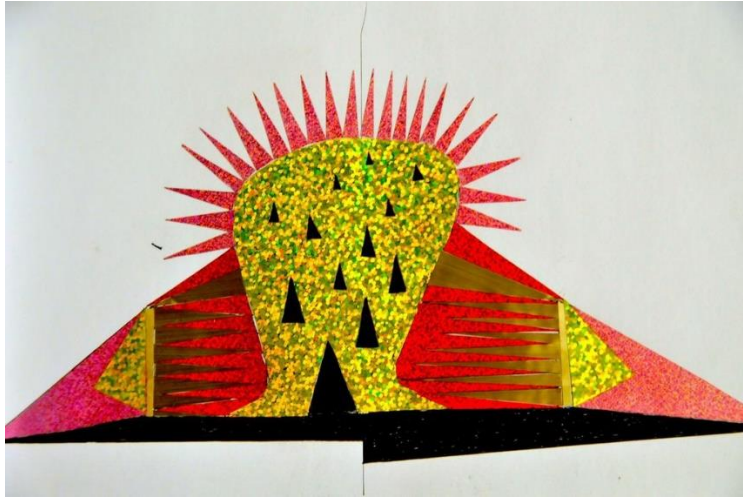


Figure 50. *Radiant Yellow Building with a “Mohawk” and Large Wings.*

There is a “pink crown” or “Mohawk” on the roof of the oval volume; these are solar panels that move depending on the orientation of the sun. This gives dynamism and the sense of motion to the architectural complex.

Solid shiny yellow color dominates the field (the main volume). Interaction between red and gold gives dynamism to the “wings” (second and third volumes). The black windows that actually diminish in size on their way up the yellow building gives the impression that they (the black windows) are trying to “escape” the building, flying away from it. On the left and right wings, there are thin triangular elements pointing to

the main yellow building that seem to be pinching the side of the building.

7.1.8. Liminal/Blurred: *Gold and Blue Building with Heavy Black Lines*

I am intrigued by origami. The ability to develop intriguing complex forms through the single act of folding and cutting a simple square piece of paper is incredible. The idea of achieving a high degree of complexity from a very basic simple geometric square sparks inspiration. There has been a long tradition in Europe, China and Japan of folding paper to create unique forms and figures. In architecture, folding has been a dynamic concept for generating interesting, new architectural forms. In the seminal book, *Folding in Architecture*, edited by Greg Lynn in 1993, the initial framework for understanding the dynamics and principles of folding in architecture was laid out, and set the parameters for consequent developments in folding architecture. Recently, new software design programs have greatly increased the possibilities for generating more sophisticated and complex forms of folding architecture.

My specific interest was in the application of origamic techniques into architectural forms. *Origami* is the Japanese art of folding paper into decorative shapes and figures (from *ori* meaning folding and *kami* meaning paper). Origami started in the Edo period (1603-1868). The concept of origamic architecture was developed in the early 1980s by Masahiro Chatani, an assistant professor of architecture at Tokyo Institute of Technology. He started experimenting with folding greeting cards. Cards have a special significance in Japanese culture; they are everyday social instruments for connection and communication between people of all different backgrounds. There exists a long tradition in Japanese culture to give unique greeting cards to celebrate special occasions and holidays. Chatani was concerned that in today's fast-paced,

modern world, the emotional connection evoked by the experience of giving and receiving greeting cards would be lost. Besides intricate folding and cutting, light and shadow both play an essential part in achieving the desired visual effects of origami. According to Chatani, “the dreamy scenes created by light and shadow invites you to enter a fantasy world.”⁴³ I want to convey a similar sense of fantasy in the Gold and Blue Building with Heavy Black Lines.

The building is inspired by “origami” (the Japanese tradition of folding of paper to make different kinds of figures). The building gives the impression of being a gigantic origami figure in the process of being folded out (fig. 51). The building is formed by three volumes “stitched” together by heavy black lines. Two blue volumes and one gold volume with heavy black lines. The two blue volumes work as a roof/attic structure and



Figure 51. *Gold and Blue Building with Heavy Black Lines.*

⁴³ Chatani, Masahiro and Keiko Nakazawa, *Origamic Architecture*, Ondorisha Publications, University of Illinois (1985)

as a functional “basement” space.

There is a contrast between horizontal heavy black lines and gold lines with the two-solid iridescent blue volumes. The connected volume of the gold and black lines functions as the main body of the building. The surfaces of the building are highly reflective with sophisticated painting techniques (that of the lowriders style) that result in special atmospheric affects.

The building seems to be made by fragments or pieces that are glue together to form the different volumes. This gives the impression that the volumes are not static but are in motion. The effect of the heavy black lines is that of acceleration, where all the parts seem to be moving fast in one direction. This dynamic appearance is reinforced by the electrifying special effects of the painted surface.

The two iridescent blue volumes serve different functions. The upper volume functions as an attic, while the lower volume functions as a basement. The two volumes give the impression of “squeezing” the gold and black lines volume, and this creates the appearance of the building braking into small parts that are held together by the stitching effect.

The entire building has the quality of exuberance, elegance, and speed. These respond to the conditions of: 1) adulteration – the heavy black lines give the impression of “stretching” the building, and 2) acceleration – the three volumes in conjunction with the heavy black lines give the impression of fast forwarding.

7.1.9. Multilingual: *Kimono Building*

In *The Arcades Project*,⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin investigates the cultural, social, and political potential of fashion both as an economic force and as a visual signifier. He sees fashion as something more than a historicized element. For Benjamin fashion constitutes a historic fact that creates a historical continuum—both activating the past and revolutionizing the present. Benjamin uses fashion as an analogy for a productive tension between the past and present. By fashion moving from history to the present, fashion creates a (self) reference and friction simultaneously. Fashion emphasizes the present, it always exists in the ‘here and now’, it is contemporary in its expression and character, as well as it is detached from the historicism inherent in other decorative or applied arts.

This experimental prototype examines the relationship between the kimono, a traditional Japanese garment, and architectural form. Kimonos are traditional Japanese garments. It is a t-shaped robe wrapped around the body from left to right. Kimonos flourished during the Edo period. It was during this time that a dynamic urban culture developed. Fashionable dress played a central role in this culture.

Over time, economic and political changes in Japanese society affected the style and design of kimonos. Constant shifts between opulence and restraint developed new techniques and styles. A preference for subdued colors and fabrics came into vogue, based on a new sensibility called *iki*. Popular among commoners during the Edo period in Japan, *iki* is an aesthetic quality meaning ‘chic’ or stylish in the traditional Japanese fashion. In a kimono, the most significant parts are the patterns that adorn the surface. Color and decorative motifs are indicators of social status, personal identity and cultural

⁴⁴ Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (1999)

sensitivity. The designs and patterns may also reflect aspirations of personal and social virtues, particular emotions, or the seasons. The images and iconography on the surface of kimonos often convey complex meanings related to religious or popular beliefs. Flora and fauna are important themes in the images of a kimono. For instance, the crane is one of the most popular birds depicted on kimonos because of its elegance and its symbolism of longevity and good fortune.

Colors also have strong metaphorical and cultural connotations in kimonos. Colors may denote healing properties or represent the spirit of plants, animals, or places. Colors can represent the five elements (fire, water, earth, wood and metal), associated with particular directions, seasons, virtues and materials. Perhaps the most popular color for the kimono is red. In Japanese culture, this color denotes youthful glamour and allure. Young women often wear red kimonos. Red is also a symbol for passionate, transient love. Men prefer dark colors such as blue, brown, grey or black. White kimonos are used for mourning occasions only. Also, kimonos relate to architecture because it is the one and only garment that has specific furniture built to house it in its folded state.

This building is inspired by traditional Japanese kimonos (fig. 52). The building is a three-story building that resembles an up-side-down kimono. The building is composed of three volumes glued together. The surface is saturated with patterns of distinct shapes and textures. It contains two large windows that resemble open Japanese fans or the open wings of a crane.

The color gold is used on the edge of the building to accentuate the main entrance of the building and the color silver is used on the window frames to dramatize

the shape of open fans or wings. The three volumes that make up the building are painted bright ultra-marine blue (the color blue in Japanese culture is associated with healing) with shimmering special effects to convey the presence of the deep ocean waters.



Figure 52. *Kimono Building*

The ornamentation is subdued with three long rows of circles tied together. They are like super-sized worms crawling up the building. They are painted bright pink and orange. The window shapes that of an open traditional Japanese fan or the wings of a crane about to start flight function as dramatic ornaments. Together with the worms they give the surface a certain dynamism that gives the impression of the surface being activated, moving in slow motion.

Traditional Japanese kimonos have a very strong symbolic value in Japan. They represent a dimension of traditional Japanese culture. The design of the kimonos, its

patterns, colors, and details, are created to convey a story, a story relevant to the person who is intended to wear it. With this in mind, the Kimono Building tries to tell a story, while conveying a sense of pleasure and delight.

7.1.10. Flexispace: *Green House*

Flexispace explores the notion of malleable time, from the universal concept of timelessness to the quantum theory that time does not exist at all. Specifically, I play with experiences or places that seem to be suspended in time. In this prototype, I investigate how the manipulation of color, shapes, and lines generates the sensation of slow or stopped time in architectural form. I'm intrigued by the idea that ritual time, such as the Day of the Death, seem to slow down time during celebration to the point that time becomes irrelevant or even non-existent. For a short moment, time seems to stop existing. Most of us think and understand time the way Isaac Newton defined it, "as a river flowing at the same rate everywhere, as something absolute, true to itself, and from its own nature, something that flows equally without any regard for anything external."⁴⁵

Modernist architecture advocated for a concept of timeless architecture; architecture that could transcend and travel through time unaffected. Proponents of modernist ideas believe that architecture could be at place everywhere anytime.

This ethos contrasts dramatically with our current contemporary sensibility of the 'here and now.' This new time/space based sensibility is place-based and emphasizes the

⁴⁵ Frank, Adam, *About Time: Cosmology and Culture at the Twilight of the Big Bang*. Free Press, New York, NY (2011)

temporary nature of our lives. Our contemporary experiences tend to be short-lived, ephemeral, malleable, an in the moment, the opposite of the modernist idea of timeless experience.

According to physics theorist Julian Barbour time does not provoke change, but the opposite, “is change that provides the illusion of time, we exist in a series of connected moments that are whole, complete, and existing in its own right, these moments are called “Nows.” It was very appealing the idea of a building existing outside the sense of time, no a timeless building but a ‘no-time’ building. A building living in an endless ‘Now’ or connected “Nows,” that are constantly changing in unpredictable and surprising ways.

This proto-type plays with a whimsical dimension of form, color and time (fig. 52). A building that presents different ways to experience it visually and spatially, provoking three dimensional and optical ‘tricks.’ It uses a monochromatic color pallet based on five shades of green, accentuated by straight and undulating heavy black lines Within a spectrum of solid color fields.

Another quality characteristic of the green building is that of the replication of cuartos. These take on a playful manner with the different scales of the cuarto system – L, M, S, and XS. The size and character of each cuarto is given by the functional needs. In addition, I was interested in exploring different types of patterns that work as decorative elements, (repeating ornamental elements based in geometric forms), then ‘breaking’ the geometry by adding whimsical forms (these are intuitive and in juxtaposition to the implied logic of geometry). The juxtaposition between strait lines and geometric forms with curvilinear waves (here, curvilinearity works as an imposition

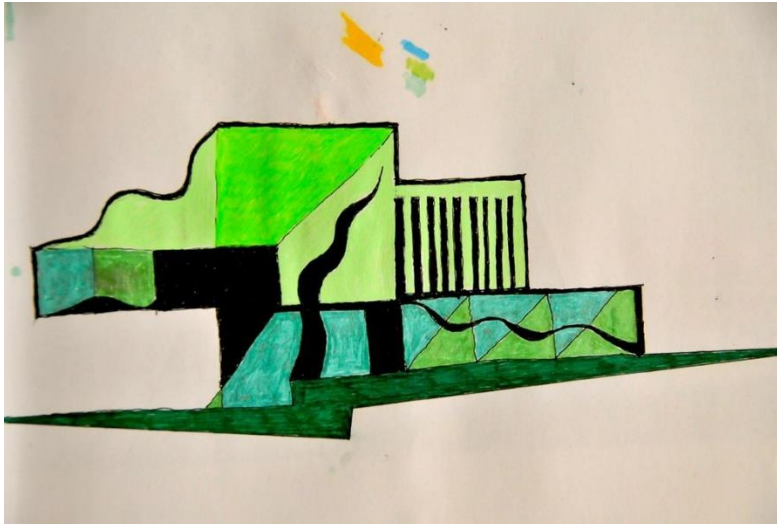


Figure 67. Green House

to the main form) convey an interesting and unpredictable tension in its formal expression.

The volume of the building resembles the Day of the Dead celebration in that it appears to be suspended in time. There is a stillness of time associated with the properties of sedation while the building seems unhurried and calm, oblivious to external concerns.

In general, the predominant spaces are clean and simply organized, but there is a hierarchy of space given by the variation in scales and geometries. The curvy forms add momentum to the stillness provoking a tension in the juxtaposed dualities of sedation (calmness) and acceleration (sped up).

Chapter 8. Conclusions

This dissertation is about the production of Hybrid Architectures in contemporary Los Angeles as analyzed by the Spanglish Turn theoretical framework. It looks at the production of Architecture through the lens of cultural hybridity as manifested in visual arts, popular and material culture and Modernist architecture. This theoretical framework proposes a new architectural lexicon for the production of alternative architectures within the context of contemporary Los Angeles.

8.1 Summary of Findings

Today, in Los Angeles new emergent cultural hybridities are being created. These hybridities find innovative expressions in the visual arts, contemporary urban practices, and architecture. The theoretical framework to situate and analyze these spatial transformations is defined as the Spanglish Turn. The Spanglish Turn in Los Angeles is made up of parallel traditions, materials, scales, and visions, which coexist and co-mingle to create new urban and architectural forms. The Spanglish Turn is informed by the cultural connection between Los Angeles and Mexico City, a connection that has been intensified in the last few decades. This historical connection between people, beliefs, customs, and objects has facilitated the strong cultural flow between the two cities, joining the Latinization process occurring in Los Angeles and other major U.S. cities. As such, the relationship between these two major cities has matured, establishing the high speed and dynamic cultural corridor where interchange and hybridity are second nature to a continually transitioning and emergent urban population.

In broad terms, this dissertation centers on the study of culture, specifically it focusses its attention on cultural hybridity and its insertion into contemporary architectural discourse. Cultural hybridity has existed for very long time, and it is now seen as the main cultural symptom of our current globalized world. In Los Angeles, this cultural mixing is the result of particular and unique dynamics that has at its center Latino/Mexican culture. In Los Angeles, new sensibilities and mental cartographies are the reprogrammed “code,” establishing the unique and emergent hybrid culture influencing the creative practices in L.A., including current and future architecture in the city. Hybridity can happen and alter all different dimensions of culture: High and Low, Mainstream and Marginal, and Universal and Particular.

As the Latinization of the U.S. population continues, cultural hybridization will play an increasingly central role in the creation of space, architecture, aesthetics, and identity. In addition, the nuances of cultural context and the particularities of physical circumstances inform cultural mixing processes. Within the Spanglish framework, hybridity is autochthonous to Los Angeles, closely tying recent Mexican immigration to this process of cultural mixing. As broader cultural processes in contemporary Los Angeles rapidly intertwine with Chicano and Mexican immigrant cultural dynamics, hybridity is rapidly becoming the force forging the future of the city.

In Los Angeles, cultural mixing occurs at different scales and intensities. These dynamics are influenced by the large scale of demographics and the landscape itself. For instance, there is deep mixing that results in the creation of new and more enduring forms, and superficial and transitional mixing also occurs in the city, as well the various degrees of mixing between these two poles. Today mixing, from “light” mixing to the

creation of enduring, more Creole-like cultural forms exist side-by-side and in various configurations across the city. Among these are also those forms that resist any mixing at all.

Chapter two is a historical analysis of the three major cultural forces that converge to form the Spanglish Turn. Los Angeles is the place where an emergent hybrid culture is being forged. This cultural and spatial transformation is what I define as the Spanglish Turn. There are three cultural flows that inform the Spanglish Turn: the Historical Progressive California, Chicano Culture, and Mexican Immigration. These three dimensions work in a trialectical fashion and offer the capacity to produce new and innovative cultural hybrids that are essential for understanding and defining the spatial and formal expressions of contemporary Los Angeles. This set of three cultural flows aim to form the basis of a theoretical coordinates for the Spanglish Turn.

Los Angeles is a hybrid city. The historic culture of California and Los Angeles and the variations of its geography, promoted acceptance of newness, difference, and innovation. This ethos of accepting newness and difference, and actually defining itself by these vary characteristics, is a big part of why the creation of so many hybridities has occurred on the scale that it has, and why this city is, at heart hybrid and more adaptive than many other metropolises.

Today, many small changes occurring throughout Los Angeles are guiding its urban evolution. These changes are primarily the result of the region's Latinization process and have accumulated to create a quiet revolution of innovative social and cultural networks. These are based on hidden informal economies, appropriated technology, and rapid communication and mobility.

Another major influential cultural flow of the Spanglish Turn is the Chicano culture in California. Chicano culture is a hybrid culture, a mix of Mexican and American traditions and customs. Chicano culture is based in an open cultural system that allows for absorption and incorporation of other cultural practices that it finds necessary for its own benefit. Since its beginning of its founding, Los Angeles has been influenced by Chicano or Mexican-American culture, this is evident in the name of streets, and neighborhoods, in popular music, food, lowrider culture, as well as in local politics, as demonstrated in 2005 when Antonio Villaraigosa became the first Mexican American mayor of the city of Los Angeles since its founding.

The third cultural flow is the current Mexican immigrant culture. Mexican immigrant cultures bring with them fresh formal and aesthetic sensibilities that tend to mix with existing ones creating new sensibilities that result in novel hybrid forms and aesthetics. They bring with them traditions and customs are transforming the urban spaces of Los Angeles, affecting the dynamics of private and public space usage. One distinct tradition that has slipped into the Los Angeles urban dynamics is the use of public space. In Mexico City, the distinction between private and public space is consistently blurred. It is in the public spaces that one can see an expression of a contemporary sensibility based on temporality, informality, adaptability, and performativity. This state of continuous unpredictability includes a strategic disregard for potential disaster on the one hand, and a disinvestment in the notion of permanence on the other. This has led to a perspective that has greater investment in acts and aesthetic forms which are short lived, spectacular, and fantastic. This hybrid sensibility

has slipped into Los Angeles and is rapidly transforming its spatial dynamics, as is evidenced in today's urban physiognomy.

These three separate cultural flows converge at different degrees of intensity to form the conceptual triad that form the core of the Spanglish Turn theory.

In part 2, I looked at how the Spanglish Turn principles are manifested at the scale of individual perceptions and at the scale of cultural community. I also analyzed modernist architecture in Los Angeles as a form of resistance to the Spanglish Turn principles. In chapter three, the individual perceptions were analyzed through the work of three visual artists: Ruben Ortiz-Torres, Salomon Huerta and Refugio Posadas. Their works shows the effects of cultural hybridity in the development of new forms and aesthetic principles. Collectively, the work of these three visual artists provide a formal analysis through examples of “paring down” or “stripping away” to get at the essentials of line, color, form, and movement, as well as the opposite, the display of the ornate, decorative and baroque. These trends exist separately and in juxtaposed proximity, creating tension, excitement and unease. The two trends are conflicting and complementary, relating to the different charged forces within the Spanglish Turn.

In the work of Ortiz-Torres cultural and physical context are essential. Hybridity and customization are two concepts that are central to his artistic practice. In his work, hybridity is characterized as a ‘trickled up’ cultural phenomena. Based on multiple factions that come in constant (and intense) contact by their proximity, they have produced cultural forms that tend to be radical, malleable, wild, and bold. Another concept significant in his work is that of playfulness. For Ortiz-Torres the qualities of

playfulness, style and delight are paramount to his artistic practice and aesthetic approach. Playfulness in Ortiz-Torres's work serves a dual purpose: to disarm the viewer by making him or her laugh or experience humor, and then provoke a subtle form of critique on the conventions and relationships between "high culture," cultural identity, Chicano culture, and cultural representations.

Salomon Huerta's work shows us how cultural hybridity is expressed in the formal-aesthetic principles of color, composition and surface. His work provides us with an aesthetic vocabulary that is hybrid, synthetic and highly formal. The way he uses the elements of line, color and shape (re)present a unique way to show Chicano culture and art as a hybrid culture. In the evolution of his artwork we see a marked shift from painting based in narrative and symbolic content to paintings that are essential, bare and denuded of cultural signifiers.

The work of Refugio Posadas demonstrates how cultural hybridity affects aesthetic and formal choices in architecture. His design process tends to favor intuition and direct experience over the logic of mathematics and incorporates and recontextualizes American cultural artifacts, practices, and principles. His project *Stories about Buildings* reflects a new paradoxical condition of both old and new cultural identities, location and dislocation, and English and Spanish. His work clearly presents a unique process that has at its center the production of new cultural hybrids. By recombining popular and high culture, the everyday, myths and fantasy, imagination and intuition, he synthesizes the formal and the aesthetic within a Spanglish Turn framework. That is to say, Posadas's work (re)presents a new synthesized hybridity that by its own nature responds in a direct manner to Spanglish Turn dynamics. The work of

Refugio Posadas emerges from a productive space that is hybrid and dialectical, this space is the result of the juxtaposition between art and architecture, where intermittently artists and architects have looked into each other territories for inspiration for their work.

Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the effect of cultural hybridity at the cultural scale of the group community. In this case cultural hybridity is discerned through a close analysis of popular culture (Day of the Death) and material culture (Lowriders and Taco Trucks). These community expressions show us how hybrid forms are configured as a result of collective actions, also they demonstrate how cultural hybridity is a process that works well in the interstices of the public and the private spheres and challenges traditional notions of what constitute private and public space. The rhythms of these popular cultural processes have similar qualities in the careful slowness of their preparation and the culmination of their efforts in a spectacular short-lived performance. In this sense, ritual, aesthetics, and meaning become interwoven. Through this mechanism, rituals provide an emotional groundedness for both individuals and social groups, complicating the relationship between culture/creativity and the forces of commodification, providing a necessary antidote to the forces of depersonalization.

The Day of the Dead is a hybrid cultural experience per excellence, originally a fusion of Spanish and Mesoamerican Indian traditions the celebration has evolved over time incorporating distinct popular expressions from both sides of the border. Within the Spanglish Turn framework, the Day of the Dead presents an incredible capacity for adaptation, transformation, synthesis, collaboration, and an openness to evolve into something entirely new.

During the Day of the Dead celebration private domestic spaces and public community places get transformed and transgressed to facilitate the celebration. These environments become decorated and redesigned in such a way as to affect the performativity of the spaces and the experiential sensations of the participants. In Los Angeles, the celebration of the Day of the Dead takes into another dimension of hybridity, by appropriating different cultural fragments from other cultural groups. The performative and exuberant aspects of the celebrations, as well as the evanescence form, relate to Spanglish Turn principles. Within the Spanglish Turn framework, we can see that the formal and aesthetic expressions of the Day of the Dead (evanescence, exuberance, affectivity, performative, etc.) get expressed in intense and exciting forms.

Lowriders hold tremendous potential for the field of architecture in terms of both aesthetics and design principles. Lowriders are unique objects that express cultural value, but at the center of its value system is the aesthetic dimension. Form and performance are the two most important values in lowriders. Form is essential to the signification of the object; form rules the object, and it is through the sophistication of the formal aesthetic qualities that a lowrider obtains its value. Line, color, and painting special effects all combine to form a distinct object charged with aesthetic ingenuity and affective exuberance. It is in the surface of the object that lowriders most directly express their distinct sense of aesthetics and style. This hybrid baroque aesthetics, that combine high and low notions of art, craft and art per se, decoration and ornamentation and design, are the product of long elaborated process of meticulous customization that has developed over many decades.

Other important characteristics of lowriders are those of humor and pleasure. In the Chicano community humor plays a major part in the community's character and culture. Chicano material culture, such in the case of lowriders, is charged with emotive and affective qualities that reveal a sense of belonging and pleasure.

Taco trucks with their mobility create an art in motion and their movement from place to place and the congregation of various food mobiles perform in a distinct formal and aesthetic way. Mobility allows the food trucks to claim different spaces of the city and imprint them with their presence for a short period of time. This ephemeral claiming of space and presence is important to understand the contemporary nature of Los Angeles, where temporality, ephemerality, and non-permanence are central characteristics of the city's contemporary urban spaces.

The notion of a traditional public space does not really exist in Los Angeles, large public spaces are very limited in the city. At the same time Los Angeles is a very open place for radically innovative cultural and social forms, and as such, a new social phenomenon and public space has been brewing in the city around food trucks. These temporal gatherings are creating a new type of communities across the city that revolves around fast food. The crowd that is engendered around food trucks is organic and flexible and emergent with the potential to galvanize for social or political action. These new types of crowds are redefining what constitute for public space in Los Angeles, these new spaces are ephemeral, spontaneous, novel, and ambiguous and respond to the principles of self-organizing entities.

With the trucks being decorated in multiple forms, they add an aesthetic dimension to the streets of the city. This aesthetic dimension is very important for the

formulation of the city, where multiplicity, difference, and ephemerality are aesthetic trademarks of a new contemporary urban condition.

As mentioned in Chapter two, different levels of hybridity exist, from ‘deep’ hybridity to ‘light’ hybridity to the rejection of any kind of hybridity at all. In addition, the absorption or rejection of hybridity is conditional upon temporal and spatial elements. Each cultural sphere, field or material object is susceptible to the particularities of time and place.

To understand the limits of hybridity, I analyzed a situation in which mid-century modernist architectural design resists the Spanglish Turn altogether. In this particular instance, the result is a rejection/negation of the Spanglish Turn condition, allowing for non-hybrid spaces to exist in the contemporary city that remain untouched by the dynamics of cultural change. The Mar Vista Housing project was designed by Gregory Ain in 1948. The Mar Vista Housing complex recently was designated as part of the Historic Preservation Ordinance Zone (HPOZ). In principle, common sense dictates that good quality housing design can be a positive force for increasing the quality of life for residents. Conversely, housing design may also be complicit in enforcing dominant politics of space use, often constricting neighborhood representations as well as rejecting new cultural trends. In this case study, I considered the twofold nature of the Mar Vista Tract. On the one hand, the housing development’s design and neighborhood layout creates an engaged public space, and on the other, it resists any inclusion of any cultural and aesthetic norms that does not fit within the narrow original modernist architecture design principles and ethos.

The Mar Vista neighborhood provides an example of how the preservation zoning of neighborhoods has the powerful potential to position them within the frame of visual arts' space, and as such, as semi-static exhibitions instead of evolving living environments. While display and performance can be important vehicles for enacting the public spheres of these neighborhoods, creating a balance between preserved space and lived space appears to be a challenge.

The HPOZ potentially can “harden” neighborhoods in time by increasing their fixity within specific cultural and temporal frameworks. The challenge is not to suppress diverse tastes and aesthetics in this process but to move towards the goal of promoting equal social connectivity, even at the expense of compromising artistic integrity.

Residents in Mar Vista could remember in their current preservation zeal that Ain and Eckbo's original design was informed by the belief in flexible uses of space, evolving notions of private and public, and responsiveness towards the temporary conditions of neighborhood life, all ideas consistent with the Spanglish Turn.

These types of expressions are influencing many creative practitioners and are taking place in various places in Los Angeles. The components of the Spanglish Turn (metafunctions and charged fields) are manifested in various contemporary structures. In this case, art and architecture are vehicles that convey the different forms of hybridity that are part of the Spanglish Turn framework.

In architecture in Los Angeles we can find some indications of the Spanglish Turn, although not the entire building some fragments are expressions of a new hybridity that is specific to Los Angeles. Such as in the Bobco Metals Showroom created by NULL.LAB, the building is designed to reflect the dark, dystopian feel its

environment and it uses reappropriated pieces of metal from its storage of a variety of scales, shapes, and thickness to eclectically clad both its exteriors and interiors. The metal layered and protruding over all the surfaces create strong lines and geometric shapes that most concretely establish the building's environmental effect.

Other architectural examples using Spanglish Turn principles are two projects designed by the L.A. architect Robert Stone in Joshua Tree. Stone used lowriders as an inspiration for his designs. In Acido Dorado (Golden Acid) and Rosa Muerta (Dead Rose) houses, Stone cites lowrider baroque as the main influence in his designs. This can be seen in the rich gold used in the surface treatment of the Acido Dorado home. The decorative metal work used in the design of the gates and fences speaks to the more general Latino influences on his work.

A design that uses the similar logic and framework as the food trucks is the design proposal by architect Rem Koolhaas and artist John Baldessari for the Caltrans building design competition in Los Angeles. The most extraordinary part of their design scheme consisted of painting all the Caltrans trucks with different, coordinated colors. The idea was that every morning the truck would travel all over the city becoming "animated points" that would invade Los Angeles. This cacophony of bright colors moving and crossing the city would produce a unique urban experience.

In Ventura, the charge field of adulteration can be seen in the design of the Somis Hay Barn, which has walls thickened by the stacking of hay bales in front of the thin wooden external structure. The hay bales are an inexpensive material that provides depth to the barn walls, and breathtaking rough surfaces or varying shades of green and beige. The hay bales are actually a functionally aspect of the barn and their placement

along the walls serves both as a design feature and as a practical storage feature. Additionally, the hay gets regularly used so it is regularly depleted and restacked. This creates an ever-changing experience of the building as its environmental affect undergoes continual metamorphosis, from lush and comforting to stark and clean. When the hay bales are only partially in place, the resulting geometric patterning on the walls provides yet another, extraordinary visual display.

Part 3 provides us with a new theoretical framework for creating new architecture. This is a spatial and architectural lexicon that serves as a guide towards generating a Spanglish Architecture in Los Angeles. Chapter six presents a theory of language called Systemic Functional Linguistic Theory (or functional grammar), this theory, or system of analysis is adapted to work within an architectural context. Central to this theory is the notion that form and meaning are interwoven, or in this case, form and spatial affect. Linguistic functional grammar posits that all language is realized in a social context, a similar perspective as the Spanglish Turn, that all architecture is registered in a social context.

For the Spanglish Turn to present new forms of hybridity it is necessary to have a system of spatial and cultural analysis that respond to the specific contextual conditions of Latino Los Angeles. This system is comprised of two major concepts/ideas: Metafunctions and Charged Fields. Together these ideas are generators of form. Each concept has derivative components; combined, the results portray a very distinct, formal dimension to architectural and urban space. Metafunctions are strategic *processes* for the production of contemporary architectural and urban forms. Charged

Fields are *properties* of the forms generated from such processes. In the case of Metafunctions these consist of Situatedness, Elements, and Organization. These three concepts are an essential part of a system of analysis for the Spanglish Turn. The other major concept driving the system of analysis is that of Charged Fields. These can be considered by-products of the Metafunctions, but the dynamic for their analysis are unique to each Charged Field. These take the form of oppositional forces that sometime work in a dialectical fashion. These oppositional forces are Adulteration - Densification, Acceleration – Deceleration, and Aggression - Sedation.

Metafunctions are related to the macro conditions of the production of space and their resultant formal expressions, as well as the material and performative qualities of a given space or culture. Metafunctions are divided into three categories: Situatedness, Organization, and Elements. Each of these properties function as individual forces that together formulate a dialectical triad to convey a clear picture of the qualities of spatial form, in this case, of the Spanglish Architecture.

Situatedness relates to the theatricality of space or object, sensibilities, and the relationship between intention, the experience of space/object, and behavior within that space. It is also attuned to the tone or level of formality in urban contexts such as the ambiance of a building, space, object or process. The concept of Organization refers to the nature of the placement, proximity, and size of various spatial elements within a given environment. It is also concerned with the manner in which elements are linked, such as the organization of space and an architectural program. The metafunction of Elements refers to the basic concepts of line, color, movement and form. It also defines

the architectural elements of space, from surface, volume, and boundaries, to openings, passageways, and interruptions over time.

Charged Fields are a set of dualities that work symbiotically to define, at the micro level, the multiple opportunities that can be generated by the interaction of hybrid properties. Charged Fields also serve to reinforce the Metafunctions of space, illuminating spatial change and transformation. The connected oppositional forces that constitute the charged fields are: 1) Adulteration - Densification, 2) Acceleration - Deceleration, and 3) Aggression - Sedation. Specific ways in which these processes affect form are numerous. For example, Adulteration can multiply, recycle, and stretch. Its opposite Densification can saturate, detail, and intensify. Acceleration may connect and blur while Deceleration may scatter and delineate. Aggression has the power to heat, make graphic, and embolden while Sedation can restrain, soften, become delicate, and disappear.

These examples all demonstrate extreme uses of adaptability and continuous rapid and transient translations of space into altered functions, visual impressions, social interaction, and viewers' experiences. In other words, the architectural forms become hybrid in their daily visual and functional transformations and in their regular recycling of repurposed spatial elements.

In chapter seven ten architectural experiments were created which main aim is to examine the normative dimension of the Spanglish grammar into architecture. These experimental prototypes respond to a design process derived from Spanglish Turn principles and result in new and unique hybrid architectural forms. Also, this process insinuates a distinct aesthetic vocabulary for the design of new architectural forms.

I decided to use my own work because in this way allows me to explore architectural ideas from a conceptual framework and in speculative fashion; also, this design strategy frees the design approach from pragmatic limitations and constraints demanded by the needs of a real building.

The architectural forms generated by these drawings respond to the overarching concepts described in Chapter 6, Metafunctions of Space which encompasses Situatedness, Organization, and Elements and the Charged Fields which encompasses Adulteration - Densification, Acceleration - Deceleration, and Aggression - Sedation. Countering current architectural design practice, these ten drawings concretely engage dynamics of contemporary cultural hybridity. Together the ten design experiments demonstrate the significance of alternative forms of conceptual and popular knowledges for generating design processes that results in unique aesthetics and novel architectural forms.

In addition, the prototypes respond directly to a series of hybrid architectural principles such as: hybrid geometric and curvilinear lines and forms, heavy black lines, impressions of provisionality, or short-term permanence, theatricality of spaces, volumes, and surfaces (a sense of immanent spatial drama), ‘gossip’ as a design tactic, etc.

What follows is a synthesis of the ten architectural experimental prototypes that were developed to demonstrate how Spanglish Turn dynamics generate new architectural forms. It includes the name of the prototype, analysis of the drawings, a description of the main concept(s) behind the prototype, and a narrative describing the affective qualities of the building. Together, the title, the drawing, the concept, and the

narrative, convey a story about a building that is hybridized and that directly responds to Spanglish Turn principles.

In the first drawing, the Blue House, the form is the result of the exploration of the notion of affect (bodily sensations and forces), and the psychological effects associated with the color blue.

In the Kaleidoscopic Building, the concept of hybridity drives the production of an architectural form. Hybridity is the mixing of two entities that creates a ‘third entity’ entirely new and different from the first two. Kaleidoscopic Building explores the tension that results between opposites, such as geometric volumes and organic forms, artificial and natural elements, primary and secondary colors, foreground and background, horizontality and verticality, and how this tension generates dynamic architectural forms. This hybrid design strategy results in a building that is prismatic in character.

The underlying concept for the Big Blue Cube is that of assimilation. Assimilation is a strategic form of adaptation and survival. Historically, assimilation has been a driving force in the cultural evolution of U.S. society. In this prototype, disparate formal and stylistic elements create an architectural form that is both fragmented and coherent at the same time, offering various degrees of assimilation.

Tradition and memory are the two conceptual coordinates for the prototype SHOE. These two ideas are foundational in immigrant cultures, and in this case, are the driving force behind SHOE’s architectural forms. These fragmented and disparate forms that resemble ancient Mayan hieroglyphics or a broken Aztec calendar are transmitted and recycled over time.

The Four Interlocking Cubes and a Big Golden Fish prototype is based on the concepts of risk and of ukiyo (or “Floating World,” the Japanese belief in the transitory nature of life). Hybridity is a transitional process that can’t exist without risk taking. The fusion of these two ideas results in unpredictable and hedonistic architectural forms that seem to be projected by the notion of chance and uncertainty.

The Radiant Yellow Building with a “Mohawk” and with Large Wings prototype combine three seemingly disparate and completely unrelated elements: a human emotion or sensation (joy, or extreme pleasure or happiness), a hairstyle (‘Mohawk’ punk style), and an Aztec poem. These three disparate elements are combined, creating a coherent architectural form that reflects traces of the three elements within its wholeness. The architectural form is a clear example of a “go for broke” attitude. It is extremely exuberant, aggressive, fast, malleable, wild and baroque in style. The relation between all the disparate parts make the building seem chaotic, confused, and extremely exotic all at once.

Gold and Blue Building with Heavy Black Lines responds to the notion of liminality, folding, and the concept of origamic architecture. The dominant idea is that of an architectural form shaped by the endless folding and unfolding of its surfaces resulting in a form that exists in a sensorial threshold. The architectural form responds to the charged fields of adulteration and acceleration. The entire building projects the quality of exuberance, elegance, and speed.

In the Kimono Building, two ideas are behind its design, multilingualism (the ability to speak or understand several languages) and fashion; specifically, the architectural form responds directly to the idea of the traditional Japanese kimono.

Within the context of fashion, the kimono dress becomes a connecting signifier between the past and the present. The Kimono Building is represented as an upside-down kimono. The surface of the Kimono Building, through its design, colors, patterns and details convey a story, a story that not only shows the personal taste, but also expresses the individual desires. With this in mind, the Kimono Building tries to tell a story, while conveying a sense of pleasure and delight.

The Green House explores the notion of malleable time, from the universal concept of timelessness to the quantum theory that time does not exist at all. The forms of the Green House respond to the contemporary notion of the 'here and now,' an experience that favors the provisional, temporary, ephemeral, momentary, and that renders time quasi irrelevant.

In synthesis, these ten speculative architectural design experiments explore the applicability of Spanglish Turn principles upon architectural form. Dealing directly with form, composition and style, the experiments represent a synthesis of the aesthetic principles of the case studies and the spatial analysis. They serve as informal prototypes to demonstrate how cultural hybridity may be a dynamic force in generating innovative architectural design concepts.

Together, these ten prototypes demonstrate how local contextual conditions, when seeing through the critical lens of hybridity, gives us new conceptualizations of complex, transnational, and expansive places such as Los Angeles.

8.2. Next Steps

8.2.1. Re-inscribing Cultural Studies into Architecture

One way of revealing cultural hybridity dynamics within contemporary architecture is through experimentation of architectural forms derived from cultural and spatial concepts.

Current preoccupations within theoretical discourse include considering contemporary architectural form as a repository of new technologically (digital)-based design sensibilities rather than a manifestation or response to the current conditions of our contemporary global/local cultural dynamics.

Often times overemphasis on technology neglects or even dismisses other approaches to architectural design that might lead us towards alternative forms of architectural experimentation. Past cultural approaches towards architectural ideas and forms, such as postmodernism, are now seen as ideologically suspect or even disconnected from our current emphasis on pragmatism.

As a culture, we are obsessed with technology. My intent is not to dismiss the significance and relevance of technology in architecture but to aim focus back into the realm of critical cultural analysis. This approach is based on the conviction that architecture, as a cultural practice, serves us best when it is directly engaged with the dynamics of contemporary cultural production.

Design approaches for generating architecture that respond to context and culture are not new. Even within the universal aesthetic principles of Modernist architecture, some noticeable principles of hybridity are evident, such as in the architectures of Frank Lloyd Wright in the U.S., Alvar Alto in Scandinavia, and Luis Barragan in Mexico.

One of the most dynamic, intriguing cultural and social trademarks today is the incessant contact and mixing of diverse cultures. The recent conflation of time and space at a global scale has accelerated processes of cultural mixing in the last several decades. It is not doubt, that we are becoming more and more a hybrid culture society, a condition that will continue and become stronger in the next few decades.

8.2.2. Applicability of the Spanglish Turn method to other contexts/cities

The Spanglish Turn is the first iteration of a method of analysis that posits cultural hybridity at the center of the production of new architecture. This mode of analysis is context specific, it intimately engages the dynamics of cultural and spatial production of a specific place and time. As mentioned earlier, cultural hybridity is the sign of our times of our global culture, and the more societies and cities evolve the dynamics of cultural hybridity will become more intensified and complex. Although the Spanglish Turn method is specific to Los Angeles, it could be applied to other cities that are going, or will go, through similar dynamics of cultural and social change. The first logical next step will be to test the Spanglish Turn framework in other cities with a large number of Latino immigrants, for example Chicago, San Antonio, San Francisco, New York, Miami, to mention just a few. Also, the Spanglish Turn could be expanded and applied to other cultural contexts. U.S. society is becoming more diverse as we speak, this cultural diversity is often dramatically manifested in the cities appearance and tenor. It is not doubt, the contact and mixing of different cultural groups has been intensified and will continue to intensify in the next decades. Architecture and urban design will tremendously benefit by engaging with the dynamics of cultural hybridities in its

practices and theories. In a larger framework, it would be interesting to see the applicability of the Spanglish Turn at the global scale, there are many large cities around the globe that are experiencing dramatic changes in their social and cultural make up due to recent immigration. In Europe, cities such as Paris, Berlin, London, Amsterdam are being transformed by their own dynamics of immigrant cultures creating their own new social and cultural patterns. In this way, the Spanglish Turn can be utilized as a theoretical “blueprint” that can guide future research in other places experiencing significant cultural, social and urban change. Each of these cities, whereas in the U.S. or around the globe will have their own particular set of analytical systems and strategies, their own Metafunctions of Space, including Situatedness, Organization and Elements, and their own localized Charge Fields, including their own set of opposites forces such as Adulteration - Densification, Acceleration – Deceleration, and Aggression - Sedation. The Spanglish Turn can provide us with a new and different system of analysis for architecture that is intimately engaged with its own cultural and social context. An architectural design system that counter-balances the current dominant emphasis on mathematics and presents an alternative process that favor other forms of thinking, feeling and knowing for architectural design, a process that produces novel and fresh architectural forms.

8.2.3. Inscribing Latino culture into Architecture

While this process of analysis remains in its beginning stages, it is clear that the discipline of architecture has benefited, and will continue to benefit, from broadening its processes to include Mexican/Chicano aesthetic sensibilities and emergent behavioral

systems within its ever-present goal to achieve contemporary relevance. As the process of Latinization will only continue to get stronger in the years to come, the aesthetic and spatial ramifications of this transformation of the contemporary city are enormous and exciting. And as the sensibilities of the Spanglish Turn become more fully elaborated, it seems certain that they will provide a picture of elaborate, malleable, and performative aesthetics that can provide a fresh take on old design approaches. Additionally, the conceptualization of forms as having both specific spatial attributes (situatedness, organization, and elements) and charged fields (adulteration - densification, etc.) can provide architects with the tools to utilize these translatable sensibilities for architectural design and to become agents of change within the city's contemporary landscape.

Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates that various dynamic cultural streams have come together to create a vibrant cultural and artistic milieu in the Southern California region today. This can be seen in the popular culture, visual art, and architecture produced here. It is also wonderful to think about future directions this may take as people respond to more and more of global communications opportunities and gain exposure to alternate sensibilities. Needless to say, it seems inevitable that a tipping point is coming in terms of the incorporation of the aesthetics and spatial sensibilities of Chicano and Mexican immigrants into the design principles and aesthetics of the region. This in turn expresses the new political reality that Latinos are redefining what it means to be American, and through the sheer force of numbers and the resulting emergent patterns, are turning this nation's course towards a new, alternate direction – a direction whose specific end is still unknown – but one which will clearly be vibrant and dynamic.

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