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POLITICS AND CHICANO CULTURE:
The Case of El Teatro Campesino

(Preliminary Draft)

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INTRODUCTION

Within the growing body of literature in Chicano Studies there have been few systematic attempts to analyze the relationship between the politics and culture of the Chicano Movement. While it is important to acknowledge past efforts, we must also be aware of their shortcomings in order to gain a better understanding of the role culture has played in recent history. One problem is a lack of theoretical specificity. Although theories and perspectives are not always explicit, many are nevertheless reflected in unstated assumptions. A survey of studies suggests two misconceptions about Chicano culture and politics. The first is the assumption that cultural expression and political activity are autonomous and separate spheres. A second error is the assumption that cultural expression is largely determined by economic and political forces.[1] As we shall see, both perspectives present serious obstacles for the study of culture in advanced capitalist society.

The first perspective is characterized by conceptual rigidity. Culture is usually defined as folklore, literature, "artifacts," or intransigent national traditions; in short, as specific and autonomous objects which can be analyzed as distinct components of a larger totality called "culture." The definition of politics, on the other hand, is usually confined to certain formalized activities: the electoral process, labor organizing, reform movements, class struggles, etc. This definition is lim-

ited by a fragmented view of politics, excluding many processes such as media and public relations, which have a significant impact on economics and politics.

The second perspective, on the other hand, seems to acknowledge a relationship between culture and politics, but tends to assume the subordination of cultural expression to the sway of political and economic currents. This perspective implicitly suggests a one-to-one correspondence between certain historical events, as for example, between U.S. annexation of the southwest and the development of corridos to instill pride among the Mexican populace. There is, of course, ample historical evidence to substantiate developments such as these. However, the assumption that Chicano culture developed only in response to major historical events or only in opposition, obscures the rich contexts in which cultural expression emerges. Moreover, in its zeal to emphasize the dominance of political and economic forces, this perspective uncritically adopts the same limiting concepts of the first perspective. In doing so, it suggests that socio-political developments are mechanically "matched" or "reflected" by periodic "flowerings" of art and subcultural practice.

Thus, whereas the first perspective tends to define politics and culture rigidly, suggesting little or no relationship between the two, the second perspective uses the same concepts to support the argument that cultural developments follow political and economic activity in lock-step fashion. Both perspectives limit our understanding of the intricate relationship between these

developments within the Chicano Movement during the past two decades.

This study of El Teatro Campesino begins by developing an historical framework within which Chicano culture and politics may be analyzed. I shall argue that culture and politics share a reciprocal relation in capitalist society, in that each influences and shapes the other.[2] Moreover, other forces play a role in joining these activities together, while at the same time contributing to the dialectic of multiple factors having multiple influences in each sphere. Ultimately, the parameters which many scholars assume "contain" cultural activity are shaped by the dynamic interplay of psychological, cultural, political, as well as economic forces. Within this framework, cultural expression enjoys moments of relative autonomy, and thus the opportunity to develop its own interests and influence human behavior. When art is created in the vortex of a political movement, as was the case of El Teatro, its impact can be traced both in the range of its vision and in the degree to which it attempts to establish political agendas. Implicit in this view is the assumption that artists respond to political and economic developments in a variety of ways: at times in an accommodating manner, sometimes seeking autonomy, at other times resisting change, and still at other times in active opposition to change. This study argues that the relative autonomy of certain Chicano artists allowed them to create new cultural forms which were intended to have a direct impact on key issues in the Chicano Movement.

What then was the relation of El Teatro Campesino to the Chicano Movement? More specifically, how did the theater's artistic development influence and how was it, in turn, influenced by the political changes of the period? This paper argues that El Teatro developed in dialectical relation to Chicano political activity, in that the theater grew from and helped shape the intellectual currents of the Movement. At the same time, the plays of Luis Valdez developed the capacity to "distance" audiences from the dominant ideology through humor and satire.

The emergence of El teatro and the work of Luis Valdez began as a critique of the dominant ideology. El Teatro's unique artistic forms made effective use of humor and satire to deflect stereotypes and values which helped maintain the belief among Chicanos that their subordinate positions could not change. Valdez's plays also attempted to "detach" and "distance" his audiences from elements of the dominant ideology by exposing and dramatizing contradictions, by emphasizing their social effects, and by demonstrating the vulnerability of unquestioned stereotypes. The degree to which Valdez as an artist and his plays have been and are currently distanced from ideology corresponds to the ability of El Teatro to give audiences a conceptual understanding of the Chicano experience. The implications of Valdez' changing interpretation of that experience are demonstrated throughout each section of the paper then summarized and evaluated in the conclusion. By moving in these admittedly uncharted directions, the intention is to present the subtle, but no less political,

dimensions of Chicano cultural practice over the last two decades.

FARMWORKERS' THEATER

Almost every discussion of Chicano politics points to the important role played by the United Farm Workers Union, and with good reason.[3] The Delano Grape Strike and Boycott of 1965, together with the Civil Rights Movement and the mobilization of the New Left in the Anti-War effort, served as a catalyst for the creation of the many Mexican-American organizations that emerged in the sixties. The grape strike and boycott was to culminate in the first successful effort to unionize U.S. agricultural workers since the 1930's. Equally important were the union's efforts to counteract traditional racial stereotypes directed at Mexicano and Filipino field workers. It was the need to restore a sense of pride and dignity to workers during the strike that provided the initial motivation for a farmworkers theater.

The Delano strike quickly became a powerful symbol for many Chicanos. Among them was a young college student, Luis Valdez. Valdez first heard reports of the strike while writing and performing with the San Francisco Mime Troupe. He later went to Delano to investigate the situation for himself; it was an experience that proved unsettling. As Valdez recalled in an interview a few years later,

There was this organizer, Cesar Chavez, and all these campesinos, Mexicanos, and Filipinos, marching through the streets. ...it really grabbed me. We marched down

Ellington Street. I was born on Ellington Street.... Marching past streets I had grown up in. I even saw some of my relatives. Some of them were even out in the fields scabbing. I had to straighten out a lot of things.[4]

Valdez returned to San Francisco after the march, but realized he would be back. When Chavez came to the city to speak at a rally a week later, the student was ready with an unusual idea. Valdez described how he finally caught up with the union leader,

...I chased him. Because he was so busy he got into one car and I followed in another. We ended up in a church. That was the first time I heard the song "De Colores" sung in the context of La Huelga. Shortly afterwards I told him about my idea to start a teatro to help the strike.[5]

Impressed, Chavez described his own reaction and the first days of El Teatro,

I said, "Yeah, lets try it." So he organized the original El Teatro Campesino with four or five farm workers. They played for the first time at the regular Friday night union meeting in Delano. Then people began to look forward to the next performance on the picket line or whenever the occasion lent itself.[6]

The theater's intention, one writer observed, was "to bring the bigness of agrusiness down to a ludicrous scale." El Teatro did this by the most unconventional means. The first rehearsals were held in the back room of the union's headquarters. Using hand-lettered signs and improvising as they went along, the actors drew from their experiences during the strike. As skits developed they were used to illustrate the conflict. On picket lines, often within sight of armed guards and sheriff

deputies, El Teatro began to take daring jabs at the traditional exploitation of agricultural labor. From these first outings emerged several stock characters: El patron (the boss), Don Coyote (the labor contractor), and El Esquirol (the scab). When direct access to farm worker audiences was denied--a frequent occurrence as their popularity grew--the troupe performed on flatbed trucks driven up to the fences of the labor camps. Soon masks and other props began to replace the crude signs. As more workers were recruited, the number of characters and plots increased. Eventually, El Teatro's fragmented improvisations began to develop into a unique artistic form which Valdez and his actors called the Acto.

While partially a collective creation, the Acto was primarily the result of Valdez's experiments with a variety of theatrical styles. The first of these drew from the work of the Spanish poet and playwright, Federico Garcia Lorca. Valdez was initially attracted to Lorca's work because of the latter's unusual comical style which the young student tried to emulate. Lorca was one of the few European artists to break with the tradition of the formal stage by bringing performances to audiences scattered over the Spanish countryside. Another source of inspiration was the comedia del'arte style of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. This technique, described by a writer as "...a 16th century Italian method of broad comedy using stock characters, improvisation, and intense physicality," was infinitely useful to the union, and became the vehicle for much of El Teatro's early

work.[7] The blending of comedy and satirical improvisation also had its roots in the agitation-propaganda tradition of Brechtian theater. As some writers have noted, in the early years El Teatro already showed evidence of a style that was "part Brecht and part Cantinflas." But when emphasizing the "alienation effects" of the former, the Actos went beyond mere comedy. They began to acquire a pedagogical flavor. Valdez explained,

Brecht's technique of learning plays became a very real aspect of teatro, especially when we tried to teach workers about the grape strike. People can go on strike very simply. That's the easy part. What's hard to understand is what striking involves as well as the tactics of a prolonged struggle.[8]

The lessons Valdez and his troupe attempted to convey are evident in an early Acto, "Las Dos Caras Del Patroncito" (The Two Faces of the Boss). More a series of short skits, the play attempted to counteract the myth of El Patron's material and cultural superiority over the worker. If there was a moral lesson it was perhaps that the "mask" of economic dominance worn by the grower was subject to the conditions of class struggle, a reference to the strike and international grape boycott. Only when the farmworker could see that the grower's power was vulnerable could his weaknesses be exposed and the mask symbolically removed. The realization that existing productive relations were vulnerable was also meant to imply that certain kinds of struggle had effects on cultural relations as well. Thus, the question was subtly raised: If economic dominance could be subverted, could not the forces of cultural dominance also be overcome?

Here lay the strongest emphasis of the Acto, for to Valdez the "mask" of economic dominance had a less obvious profile, cultural superiority. As control of productive relations suggested the interests of the grower to control the economic realm, cultural superiority not only suggested his dominance, but an identification with and an acceptance of subordinate status by field workers. In order to counteract the former, farm workers had to recognize and overcome the ideological supports inherent in the latter.

Thus, as the curtain closed on this early Acto it became evident that the thrust of resistance was both economic and cultural. Audiences were shown the benefits of opposition to social relations that maintain control by an agrarian elite. Valdez emphasized this theme when he observed of his plays, "We try to make social points not in spite of the comedy but through it. This leads us into satire and slapstick, and sometimes very close to the underlying tragedy of it all...the fact that human beings have been wasted in farm labor for generations." [9]

TEATRO OF THE MOVEMENT

Without fully realizing it, Valdez had positioned himself at the forefront of a growing political movement. Just as the UFW reached the height of its struggle in California, activists throughout the southwest were organizing. In New Mexico, Spanish and Mexicano farmers under the leadership of Reyes Lopez Tijerina founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes, an organization to

recover land and water rights lost to federal appropriation since the 19th century.[10] In Colorado, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez, a former precinct captain for the Democratic Party, was providing legal and health services to Chicano youth in Denver through the Crusade for Justice.[11] By March, 1968 more than 10,000 high school students in East Los Angeles had walked out of their classes and staged a sit-in at the Board of Education. The walk-out led to the formation of the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee, an organization that lobbied for the improvement of facilities and curriculum.[12] A similar walk-out and protest in Crystal City, Texas led to the founding of El Partido de la Raza Unida, and later to the election of Raza candidates to seats on the local city council.[13] These and similar events in other parts of the southwest suggest the beginnings of a political strategy that called for self-determination by Latinos at all levels of American society. In each case organizations were formed as relatively autonomous entities representing particular interests. At the same time these organizations, by virtue of a common cultural heritage contributed to a larger movement of people on several fronts.

This re-awakening suggested to Luis Valdez that the issues raised in the early farm worker Actos may have been limited. Activism from other quarters (blue and white collar workers, women, students, urban youth, and academics) suggested that the scope of the plays had to be expanded and redirected. Despite the broader concerns brought about by this activism El Teatro's

future in 1966 was still very much tied to the UFW. The close association between the organizations was not without conflict, and because of different priorities, may have temporarily stalled the theater's ability to reach new audiences and address new issues. Valdez described some of the difficulties the actors and actresses faced during this period.

After the first month, the boycott against Schenley Industries (a major grower in the San Joaquin Valley) started and my two best actors were sent away as boycott organizers. There was a lot of work to rehearse so there was a lull for a month. That was due, in part, to the fact that most of my actors were taken away, and we were involved in picketing and boycotting and chasing trucks.[14]

It was not only a matter of union activities taking precedence over rehearsals, however. According to a former member of the troupe, the union's moderate leadership may have been dismayed at what was perceived to be the actors' leftist orientation.[15] There were signs that Chavez's union was already polarized from some militant factions in the Chicano movement. As one writer unsympathetically observed, "The farmworkers movement has been led for the most part by pacifist reformists like Chavez, who supports liberal Democrats." The writer adds that the union has had a nationalistic thrust which helped set other Chicanos in motion, but comments, "This independent dynamic has been incomplete and blunted by the refusal of the Chavez leadership to break politically with the Democratic Party..."[16] To Valdez, whose sympathies straddled both socialism and Chicano nationalism, these rumblings signaled a coming philosophical rift. There

may have been sufficient cause to seek other sources of organizational support. It was not surprising perhaps that the first opportunities to do so were with the encouragement of the union.

Shortly after El Teatro performed for the first time at Stanford University the union asked Valdez to tour other college campuses to promote the grape boycott. Within a year El Teatro attracted the attention of critics and audiences alike. Most of the theater's notoriety was due to the talent of the performers and, significantly, to a new group of plays Valdez had written for the tour. Two Actos in particular, "Huelquistas" and Vietnam Campesino," continued the advocacy of the UFW struggle. The latter was especially skillful in highlighting the common interests of the growers and the military establishment. In a third Acto, "Soldado Raza," Valdez experimented for the first time with character development in a drama focusing on the experiences of a young Chicano soldier. Through the course of the play, the audience witnessed "Johnny's" gradual realization of the war's tragic consequences not only on his own family, but on a people whose social condition Valdez believed to be similar to Chicanos in the United States. One of the most important Actos of the period was "No Saco Nada de la Escuela" (I Don't Get Anything From School). Its principal value lay in its ability to touch on two underlying issues which had yet to be addressed by Chicano artists; the alienation of youth, and the problems of teacher-student relations. In the playwright's hands both issues conjured up images of paternalism and latent racism.

The momentum generated by these productions moved El Teatro toward a specific set of goals. Valdez's intention was to inspire social action through the illumination of specific contradictions which the actors were to address in the most straightforward manner. The Actos were also to employ satire and humor in order to minimize the force of an anti-union advertising campaign begun by the growers. Finally, the Actos were to hint at certain solutions which the actors felt to be consistent with the audience's thinking.[17] The adoption of these formal objectives suggest that Valdez fully realized that the theater had to broaden its critique to include issues that concerned not only campesinos, but all oppressed peoples.

On the basis of this new strategy and their recent triumphs, the troupe began to win wide critical acclaim. This led to opportunities for national exposure. In 1967 El Teatro Campesino was invited to perform at the prestigious Newport Folk Festival. One week later, at the request of Robert Kennedy, the theater performed before a Senate sub-committee on migrant labor in Washington. El Teatro's national reputation was enhanced once more by a special "Obie" award for, as the inscription read, "...creating a worker's theater to demonstrate the politics of survival." Future recognition as a legitimate theater would earn El Teatro a reputation as "...a beacon to guide Chicanos to material and spiritual dignity." This potential, the unresolved political questions with the union, and the promise of an identity other than a "Farmworkers Theater" eventually cast the

differences between El Teatro and the UFW leadership in sharp relief. These factors were instrumental in bringing about the formal separation of the two organizations late in 1967. Later Valdez revealed his thoughts on the split.

The strike in Delano is a beautiful cause, but it won't leave you alone. A cause is a living, breathing thing. It's more important to leave a rehearsal and go to the picket line. So we found we had to back away from Delano...to be a theater. That was a very hard decision to make...very, very hard. Do you serve the movement by being just kind of half-assed, getting together whenever there's a chance, hitting and missing, or do you really hone your theater down into an effective weapon? Is it possible to make an effective weapon without being blood close to the movement?[18]

These would be difficult questions for any artist intimately involved in politics, but the circumstance of Chicanos throughout the sixties and the seventies made Valdez's inquiries that much more urgent. In the years that followed, the playwright would find himself wrestling with the same thorny questions. Could he continue to interpret faithfully in aesthetic terms that which his audiences experienced as a "lived reality?" Could the theater and Valdez continue to develop their artistic potential without compromising their self-proclaimed political objectives? By the late sixties some answers seemed to be forthcoming.

TEATRO OF RITUAL

The period following Delano was perhaps the most critical for El Teatro, as well as for the Chicano Movement in general. Within five years many organizations were able to develop a high

degree of influence in the political arena; Chicano legislators, local officials, educators, and community activists made significant inroads for their constituencies. By the end of the sixties, however, state and federal authorities began to recover from their initial setbacks and mobilized to meet the challenge from the left. Organizations within the Chicano Movement, because of their militancy, were especially vulnerable. For example, the Alianza's ability to continue the struggle in New Mexico was blunted by a lengthy court battle involving Tijerina. The trial resulted in his conviction and incarceration in 1967.[19] Cooperation between the Los Angeles Board of Education and the Sheriff's department in southern California tended to isolate radical members of the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee, while failing to remedy the situation in East Los Angeles high schools.[20] This added fuel to anti-authority sentiments during the Chicano Moratorium in August, 1970. Organized against United States involvement in Vietnam, the moratorium quickly escalated into what Armando Morales referred to as a "police riot," one that left more than 400 people injured, 3 dead, and several million dollars in property damage.[21]

The Farmworkers Union was now also vulnerable to repression. By 1971 the success of the Delano strike and the national grape boycott were overshadowed by sweetheart contracts tying together the Teamsters and commercial lettuce growers. Competition between the Teamsters and the UFW was so intense that the latter was forced to seek the intervention of the AFL-CIO and the Demo-

cratic Party. These organizations may have anticipated the vote gathering appeal of the union among Chicanos in the west, particularly at a time when the traditional link between Chicanos and the Democratic Party was beginning to weaken. By the 1972 presidential election, the UFW had clearly come over to the liberal camp.

These events had serious repercussions within the Movement as well. The fact that the union aligned itself with the AFL-CIO and the Democrats, organizations which had traditionally shunned agricultural workers, suggested a major shift in strategy. The new alliance may have sharpened simmering differences among more traditionally-oriented rural activists and urban organizers who distrusted the liberal's motives.[22] These differences were perhaps widened as much by militant rhetoric as they were by political strategy. As Jose Limón suggests in a case study of a Texas university community, some differences may have been brought to a head by the militants' unsympathetic use of certain terms, such as "Chicano." The appropriation of "Chicano" from a traditionally derogatory folk usage by La Raza Unida organizers, Limón maintains, was largely resented by the older generation; use of the term, it may be inferred, raised questions about the intentions of the party in general.[23]

La Raza Unida had other serious problems. In Denver, where the party was integrally related to Gonzalez's Crusade for Justice, organizers were continually harassed by local law enforcement officials. This tended to weaken La Raza Unida's already

laaginq effectiveness, while at the same time helping to depreciate the standing of the Crusade in the community. On a national level, political infighting at the 1972 Raza Unida convention in El Paso, Texas was climaxed by a split between Chicano "pragmatists" led by Jose Angel Gutierrez, and Chicano "socialists" led by Corky Gonzalez. The division left La Raza Unida without a leadership that could gain consensus, and subsequently opened the door for moderates within the party to gain a foothold on important committees.[24]

In sum, an intricate pattern of events within and outside the Chicano Movement was taking shape in the early seventies. The most important aspect, perhaps, was the nature of political alliances. The previously assumed consensus based on nationalism was now closely scrutinized in light of recent developments, and by implication, attendant strategies based on specific alliances were now open to question.

As an organization within the movement, El Teatro was especially affected by these events. But while repression and internal strife limited the effectiveness of other organizations, the increasing loss of confidence among Chicanos in the goals of the Movement had lasting effects on the group. For El Teatro's contribution was largely its ability to convey a conceptual understanding of the world, to suggest an "experience" through humor and satire that contradicted ideological stereotypes. In this way the intrinsic value of the Actos was their resistance to dominant values and their ability to express sentiments thought to

be shared collectively by others in the Chicano community. Once the fragile alliances that held the Movement together began to crumble, the faith in a common goal began to fade. With that loss of faith the basis upon which El Teatro's reinterpretation of reality rested also came into question.

This process first became apparent in the attitude of the actors. Pressures within the Movement quickly fueled conflicts among members of the troupe. Their differences threatened to inhibit both the theater's artistic development and its future as an organization. Valdez stated in an interview,

Anger against the imperialist, anger against an unjust system, was very quickly satisfied by anger between members of our group. They let out their hostility toward injustice on each other. It complicated our own work because it destroyed the very unity that we needed to continue, and it destroyed the very reason we were doing all of this work, our own brotherhood. [25]

To overcome these obstacles Valdez pushed for better organization and discipline within El Teatro. This meant streamlining the troupe according to specific tasks. To these ends, Valdez was appointed playwright-in-residence, while other members were assigned jobs according to their own theatrical or technical expertise.

Valdez also sought new ways to continue the development of the theater's art, an activity without which, he argued, the theater could not survive. One of the ways in which the playwright achieved this was by expanding the activities of the theater group to attract a growing number of Chicano artists

whose presence became apparent by the late sixties. During this period a significant number of activists turned toward aesthetic acts, once once opportunities in the political had areua begnar-rowappear.[26] Among them was a core of young playwrights who adopted some of Valdez's Actos for their first productions. Their interest in Chicano theater prompted Valdez to publish El Teatro in 1970, a journal devoted to the exchange of ideas and techniques. During the same year the playwright organized the first "Festival De Los Teatros" to provide a forum to show new work and begin sharing ideas. Following the second festival in 1971, Valdez and a group of directors and teatro representatives founded "El Teatro Nacional de Aztlan" (TENAZ), the first Chicano theatrical organization. According to one of its founding members, TENAZ was to stimulate communication among Chicano and Latino theaters and create a body to assist them in "...developing acting and staging techniques and in creating more esthetically politically sophisticated material." [27]

The creation of TENAZ can be viewed as an attempt by Valdez to secure a base of support to replace El Teatro's former tie to the UFW. Thus, TENAZ was organized to promote and encourage Chicano theater independent of other political work. More important, however, Valdez may have viewed TENAZ as a means to usher in a revival of the Movement, a revival based on a commonly assumed acceptance of nationalism. In this regard, the playwright wrote,

...if Aztlan is to become a reality, then we Chicanos

must not be reluctant to act nationally. To think in national terms: politically, economically, and spiritually. We must destroy the deadly regionalism that keeps us apart. The concept of a national theater for La Raza is intimately related to our evolving nationalism in Aztlan...Consider a Teatro Nacional de Aztlan that performs with the same skill and prestige as the Ballet Folklorico of Mexico... It would draw its strength from all the small teatros in the barrios, in terms of people and their plays, songs, designs; it would give back funds, training, and augment strength of national unity.[28]

Significantly, TENAZ's role implied a different kind of political strategy. For while Chicano artists were articulating a nationalist perspective a new agenda was subtly taking shape. This included a re-evaluation of the Movement's aims for the seventies, a shift toward cultural identity that resonated among many activists, and especially in the work of Luis Valdez. According to the playwright,

...beyond the mass struggle of La Raza in the fields and the barrios of America, there is an internal struggle in the very corazon of the people. That struggle too calls for revolutionary change. Our belief in God, the Church, the social role of women... these must be subject to examination and redefinition on some kind of public forum. And that again means teatro. Not a teatro composed of Actos and agit-prop but a teatro of ritual, of music, or beauty and spiritual sensitivity. A teatro of legends and myths, a teatro of religious strength.[29]

One of Valdez's first attempts to create a "teatro of ritual" was the play "Bernabe." "Bernabe" illustrated the underlying premise of the new strategy: an acknowledgment of the Chicano Left's ambivalent relation to an increasingly hostile world. As the protagonist, Bernabe personified the Chicano caught between two worlds, the material world in which he was powerless,

and the spiritual world in which he sought to gain strength.

In the play Bernabe is portrayed as an outcast, a village idiot still dependent on his aging mother. His cousin, El Primo, and an uncle attempt to salvage his manhood by arranging an encounter with Connie, the local prostitute. But Bernabe enjoys the experience so much that he refuses to leave Connie's room. When El Primo threatens to use force Bernabe refuses even more strenuously. An argument ensues and Bernabe hits El Primo over the head with a chair. Thinking he has killed him, Bernabe flees. As he reaches the fields, Bernabe stops and begins to weep uncontrollably. Suddenly La Luna (the Moon) appears dressed as a 1940's pachuco and immediately recognizes Bernabe's status as a man. The moon subsequently produces a joint and as they talk he suggests that Bernabe get to know La Tierra (the Earth), La Luna's sister. La Tierra arrives and eventually challenges Bernabe to assert his manhood and marry her. But first Bernabe must convince her father, El Sol (the Sun), of his good intentions. El Sol is at first belligerent, but Bernabe is persistent. Eventually, the father concedes, and cleanses La Tierra of her previous defilements. El Sol then strikes Bernabe dead with a thunderbolt. In a few moments he rises rejuvenated, ready to defend La Tierra "hasta la muerte."

Thus, Valdez seems to portray reality during this period as a separation of the material world from that of the spirit. In the former, Bernabe is not considered very intelligent, nor much of an adult. He is an insecure outcast who simply does not

belong. Bernabe's deviancy is painfully reinforced by his expulsion from Connie's room. Rejection forces Bernabe back into his role as the powerless, anomic child, a reference perhaps to the ill-fated attempts of Chicano militants to recover from their recent setbacks. Bernabe's inability to maintain his relationship with Connie, moreover, symbolizes the political and economic impotence of Chicanos during the late sixties. Without work, without a woman, without the dignity of an adult, Bernabe has no real link to the material world.[30]

By contrast, in the spirit world Bernabe is all powerful. He is the Vato Loco, the epitome of Chicano strength and, above all, the legitimate heir to an ancient philosophical tradition. As a Chicano and a man, Bernabe is shown to be one with the representations of power; La Luna dressed as El Pachuco, La Tierra, and the Aztec symbol, El Sol.

Despite achieving this status, however, Bernabe is never able to reconcile the two worlds. In short, he cannot transfer his new status to the real world, largely because Chicano self-determination is on the decline. As material strength is thought to be contingent on achieving a level of power similar to that which Bernabe enjoyed in the spirit world, the play's meaning becomes clear. The militant's strategy missed an important element; an acknowledgement of the Chicano cultural experience. In doing so, the militant's position is no longer valid. Instead, nationalism, represented by Aztec and Mayan symbolism, is seen as a means to obtain power. As long as Chicanos neglect this

cultural legacy, Valdez seemed to be saying, they would remain mired in unproductive political practice. It was with such a vision that El Teatro entered the seventies.

THEATER AT ODDS

The 1970's provided a chaotic atmosphere for Valdez to continue his work. By the middle of the decade Chicano organizations continued to disintegrate and seemed even further from a common political direction. Many factors contributed to this turn of events; the decline of UFW membership as a result of union-busting efforts by the Teamsters and the federal government; Chavez's call for the deportation of undocumented workers in 1974 (a position that further diminished his status in the Movement); a factional split within the newly-created California Agricultural Labor Relations Board which virtually nullified liberal guardianship of the farmworkers union;[31] the infiltration of Chicano organizations by local, state, and federal intelligence operatives; and the general disorganization of student-run groups. Perhaps the most significant setback for the Movement followed the 1972 La Raza Unida Party convention in El Paso, Texas. As one observer, Richard Garcia, has noted, with the election of Jose Angel Gutierrez as the LRUP National Chairperson, most of the adopted platform proposals which had been suggested by rival factions were ignored (most notably those that had been suggested by the Colorado contingent led by Corky Gonzalez.[32] Juan Jose Pena, an active LRUP official from New Mexico, also reported that although a proposal for a central

steering committee was drafted, no officers were ever elected. The major obstacle, according to Pena, was the resistance of the Texas LRUP leadership, who were attempting to consolidate their influence among moderates, and thus prevent the participation of socialists.[33] Besides programmatic and ideological differences, there were also personal conflicts between Gutierrez and Gonzalez, leading to allegations which further separated competing factions.[34] These events left pockets of more localized political strength intact (particularly in south Texas), but ultimately left the Movement without a national electoral strategy nor a consensus on goals.

This scenario strengthened Valdez's convictions about the Movement's weaknesses and his resolve to develop his art. Although some critics have suggested that Valdez's exploration of ritual theatre in the seventies amounted to a political retreat, there is evidence which suggests the playwright was motivated by other factors. Taking into account his proximity to the Movement, especially his on-again, off-again relationship with the UFW, it seems reasonable to suggest that Valdez may have been attempting to develop a broader analysis of the Chicano experience. In essence, Valdez may have been trying to fill a void created by the lack of adequate political leadership. In other words, the playwright was attempting to present a "cultural" solution to what was previously defined as a "political" problem. Regardless of how Valdez's "solution" may be judged, his approach was vibrant, if not at times also perplexing.

El Teatro's development up to 1972 was the culmination of experiments undertaken at the troupe's new headquarters in San Juan Bautista. This phase is illustrated by two works, "La Carpa de Los Rasquachis," and the poem "Pensamiento Serpentino." In "La Carpa," Valdez began with an Acto which told the story of an underdog, Jose Pasquachis, and his family's struggle to survive in the United States. The Acto was later expanded and refined through the use of the "Corrido," or poems set to music, which illustrated Jose's exploitation, the circumstances leading to his death, and the subsequent quest for power by his sons. A third form, the "Mito," or myth, was introduced at the conclusion to suggest that only a spiritual re-awakening among Chicanos, rather than material gain, held promise in the future. Reflecting on the play, one critic summarized Valdez's position as an attempt to regain political perspective; only now the stress was on psychological drama and satire. What was new was that rather than the politics being an end in itself, a "spiritual struggle now informed the social struggle." [35]

Were we to consider only "La Carpa" as representative of Valdez's work during this period, the critic's assessment might seem valid. However, because of the political situation surrounding the Movement and Valdez's adjustments, it might be more accurate to say that he was now moving to a point where the spiritual struggle was the social struggle. That perspective is evident in the poem, "Pensamiento Serpentino." In contrast to the theme of Bernabe, the separation of the Chicano's role in the

material world from the world of the spirit, "Pensamiento Serpentino" promised a joining of both realms. Appropriating an ancient Mayan symbol, the Great Serpent, Valdez sketched out a theory in which he envisioned the struggles of Chicanos continually evolving to a higher state of consciousness. As the serpent shed its skin to emerge rejuvenated, audiences were shown by analogy that certain conditions also change, that Chicanos ultimately have the ability to withstand repression and internal strife. This realization, however, would only come about if Chicanos were willing to be guided by religious "truths" born of Mayan philosophy. As the playwright observed, "La nueva realidad nace de la realidad vieja." (A new reality is born of the old.) [36]

The basis of this new reality was the concept "Lak 'Eck," which Valdez interpreted humanistically as "If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself. Whatever I do to you, I do to myself." The same principle was to be applied within the Movement. Chicanos were to find love through a common respect for each other. Self-respect in turn was to cultivate trust for peoples of all races. Once Chicanos understood this logic and that love emanated from a supreme spirit, "La Energia that created the Universe," they could overcome the present obstacles facing them. Thus, Valdez wrote,

As Chicanos

As Neo-Mayans

We must re-identify

with that center and proceed
outward with love and strength
Amor y fuerza (love and strength)
and undying dedication to justice.

"La 'Eck" also involved a kind of divine social plan in which Valdez acknowledged human limitations. Further on in the poem, he linked the Mayan way of life to a grand proscenium in which the Great Spirit took on multiple roles. "He" was thus "El Great playwright del universe," "el scene designer y costume maker," and

El make-up man del teatro
infinitivo
que nos pone el maquillaje (the one who gives us faces)
brown, white, black, yellow

None of the faces, Valdez continued, could be considered ugly or beautiful, although we may not always be content with them. "The point is to participate in the play (of life), not to reject the parts we are given to play." The Great Spirit gave Chicanos their roles for specific purposes. Valdez stressed that no one else had the Chicano part. "If a Chicano rejects his part," that is, denies his cultural roots for the sake of material gain, "He's going to mess up." In the end, the role of Chicanos in this world was what the Mayans called the "limit," the physical separation of material existence from the world of the spirit. Beyond lay a realm that was not bound by the body. The point was that once you learned your limitations, once Chi-

canos learned the material limits of the real world, "you encounter your infinite potential. Encuentras a dios en tu corazon" (you find god in your heart). For ultimately, the Great Spirit resides in all individuals and charts the course in the material world.

The importance of Valdez's contribution to aesthetic as well as political discussion should not be lost in the poem's rhetorical style. In effect, he was proposing a crude, yet humanistic, approach to politics which attempted to incorporate nationalist sentiments. By doing so Valdez, along with other intellectuals, was opening the door for a broader approach to Chicano analysis. Valdez's enthusiasm was matched by the zeal of writers who touted the "higher" truths of indigenismo,[37] or political scientists who called for "responsible and authentic relationships" among Chicanos that must be characterized by "honesty, integrity, and a respect of those in others,"[38] or the ideas implicit in some scholar's work that humanism transcends politics, and thus formed a symbolic link among all Chicanos.[39] In these and other examples, the emphasis on humanism was tantamount to a call on a fragmented class to take a closer look at itself, to find those intangible qualities that Chicano leaders apparently had not taken into account. To Valdez the crux of the problem was reducing factional differences within the Movement to their most fundamental level instead of viewing the world from a strictly materialist vantage point. In short, Valdez called for expanded horizons by embracing a spiritual aesthetic grounded in an emerg-

ing nationalist ideology.[40]

Perhaps because he was one of the most prominent advocates of the humanist approach Valdez came under intense criticism. Ironically, the same festivals he helped organize turned into debates over his art. At the fourth TENAZ festival in 1973, for example, controversy raged over Valdez's support of religious theatre which some observers believed largely negated the political role of Chicanos.[41] At the fifth festival conflicts between community-based and professional theatres may have been fueled by Valdez's brand of aesthetics. This led to accusations from a number of artists that the playwright had lost touch with the developments of the Movement.[42] A third observer who witnessed a performance by El Teatro described it as "...entertaining, but confusing."

A lot of it was Aztec and Mayan ceremony. The costumes were far-out and the choreography, wild. But it didn't really give people a clear message. When we talked to people afterwards, they said they liked it, but they couldn't explain what they saw.[43]

The greatest drawback to Valdez's approach was that the dialogue it generated was confined to a relatively small circle of intellectuals. Several artists during the seventies enthusiastically embraced the playwright's position: their work reflected the influence Valdez had on Chicano theatre and Chicano art in general.[44] However, in terms of a larger audience, "La Carpa" and "Pensamiento Serpentino" were largely foreign to the experience of working class Chicanos. Perhaps this was because

Valdez was asking them to accept on faith certain social and metaphysical principles which were not only unfamiliar but historically suspect.[45] The proposal that the audience "turn the other cheek" to confrontation, moreover, suggested that Valdez's approach rested on an avoidance of social problems, and came very close to accommodation. The result was that instead of "an examination and redefinition of concrete issues," day to day reality was obscured by religious jargon, and a coherent political agenda never materialized.

Valdez's response to his critics can be gleaned from a letter he wrote explaining his position.

We do not feel that this is in any way inconsistent with our Chicanismo. Ask La Raza. They will tell you. Our people believe in the Creador, hermano. The Great Spirit...they are all manifestations of the same Cosmic force. Man is a spiritual animal. Man in his heart contains the divine spark. What we intellectuals struggle to grasp with our minds, La Raza mas humilde has always known through sheer faith alone.[46]

Yet, there is evidence that the playwright may have overestimated the passivity of his audience. To observers in TENAZ it was apparent that some members of the audience were not content with merely watching theatre; many wanted to become actively involved. As more activists joined the organization and began to participate in the exchange of ideas, however, tensions rose over TENAZ's approach to art and its relevance to daily experience. As Nicolas Kanellos wrote,

...a number of groups have looked upon (TENAZ's) efforts at professionalism suspiciously and have considered

them to be too fancy, too removed from their everyday reality and their issue-oriented theatres. The members of these groups have formed teatros not because they consider themselves actors, performers or artists, but because teatro is a means of serving their communities in the struggle for civil rights and human dignity.[47]

Some controversy emerged over the use of Valdez's original Actos by the community-based theatres. To their members, the Acto was more conducive to collective involvement than the Mito in that the very process of artistic creativity in the earlier form involved a wider range of individuals whose daily experiences were the material for the plays. These experiences were often specific to the region in which the troupe performed, and helped to create a close bond between actors and audiences. At times that relation was so intimate that actors and members of the audience often changed roles throughout a play's development. In this way themes reflecting concern for specific issues, such as labor organizing, welfare rights, or putting an end to barrio warfare, were often presented by individuals who were striving towards these goals in real life.

Beyond internal differences, there were other factors which may account for Valdez's resistance to community-oriented productions. The playwright's adjustment to political struggles within the Movement as evident from other activists' reaction and Valdez's own response to those struggles, may have been influenced by El Teatro's increasing popularity outside the Chicano community. By the late sixties Valdez began dabbling with different forms of theatre and other media. In 1971 his screenplay

for "Yo Soy Joaquin," an adaptation of a poem by Corky Gonzalez, won El Teatro a national film award. To capitalize on the popularity, Valdez shortly afterward divided the theatre into two companies. One performed at San Juan Bautista and served as a training component, while the other toured in the United States and abroad. Despite the pressures on Valdez from within the Movement, El Teatro was thus sheltered by its increasing courtship of non-Chicano audiences. This recognition may have indirectly bolstered the playwright against his critics, while opening the way for a further development of his art which was now largely cut off from its original social base. At the same time, El Teatro's popularity may have given a new meaning to the uniqueness of Valdez's plays. For what had been previously considered unusual or avant garde was suddenly in demand by theatrical promoters who recognized the appeal of El Teatro's performances to a mass audience.

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF EL TEATRO

Valdez's courtship of new audiences tended to coincide with the emergence of an influential strata of Chicano professionals. By the latter half of the seventies this well-educated, predominantly male group, the first to benefit from affirmative action policies, made significant advances toward equal opportunity. Like other racial and ethnic groups, however, Chicano professionals paid a price for their mobility. In government, these bureaucrats have held roles as political intermediaries between the government establishment and the Chicano and Latino communi-

ties. As a consequence, some have argued, the bureaucrats' professional standing rests largely on their service to the bureaucracy rather than to the majority of working class Chicanos.[48]

Among the ranks of the professionals are a small but vocal group of intellectuals who were able to gain a foothold in major universities across the country. Collectively, Chicano intellectuals have a strong influence on the kinds of policy issues that will be discussed in the eighties. However, the generation of issues by this new intelligentsia has by no means led to a coherent or unified voice for the Chicano community in the United States. On closer scrutiny much of the current scholarship tends to evaluate the effects of social problems rather than analyzing the underlying causes.[49] What has been missing is an examination of larger schemes such as the underlying assumptions of education or immigration officials, or the reproduction of dominant ideas through different forms of media, or the use of stereotypes to neutralize different racial groups, or the study of racial voting behavior in relation to the so-called "mandate" of certain class factions to govern the American political system. The inability, and in some cases the unwillingness, of Chicano professionals to confront these and similar issues may account in large part for the ad hoc nature of Chicano policy study in the more recent period.

Perhaps the same observation could be made of the founder of El Teatro Campesino. As one writer noted, "For Campesino, professionalism was a goal fostered and realized through the efforts

of the university-trained playwright and director, Luis Valdez. It represented the only avenue to a full exploration of the esthetic and cultural possibilities of the Mexican-American theatrical form that Campesino had helped to invent."^[50] The process by which Valdez's narrower interests emerged should be understood in relation to El Teatro's recent contribution, the stage production of "Zoot Suit."

"Zoot Suit" dealt with a long submerged incident in Chicano history, The Sleepy Lagoon Murder Case. In 1942 Jose Diaz, 22, was found dead of a fractured skull near a Montebello swimming hole known as Sleepy Lagoon. Police officials, goaded by the Los Angeles Times and the Hearst press at the height of World War II, eventually arrested 22 members of the 38th street gang for Diaz's murder. Labeled "Zoot Suiter Gangsters" because of their fondness for wearing exaggerated business suits popularized by young blacks in Harlem, the youth became the defendants in one of the most prejudicial trials in California history. After many legal maneuvers and much public pressure the convictions were overturned two years later for lack of evidence.

On the basis of his research on the trial and the infamous "Zoot Suit Riots" which followed in 1943, Valdez fashioned a musical-drama centering on the defendants and the historical events surrounding the case. "Zoot Suit" proved so successful in its Los Angeles debut that in 1979 the play moved onto Broadway. This marked the first time a Chicano production was able to break into the mainstream of American theater.

"Zoot Suit's" success owed as much to the staff of the Mark Taper Forum, where it was first presented, as it did to the perseverance of Valdez and his troupe. A close relation between the forum's staff and the playwright in fact was a prominent feature of the play's early development. In 1977 Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director for the Taper, began a series of experimental productions called the "New Theater for Now." A major effort was made to produce plays involving local cultures in the Los Angeles area, particularly Chicanos who make up a sizable but untapped audience. Davidson hired Kenneth Brecher, a trained anthropologist, to solicit potential works for the new project. One of Brecher's first visits was to San Juan Bautista to encourage Valdez to produce a play.[51] Commissioned by Davidson, Valdez immersed himself in 6,000 pages of Sleepy Lagoon trial transcripts and read through hundreds of letters, defense papers, and newspaper clippings to reconstruct the events. Meanwhile, he and Brecher contacted the major principals of the case.

Despite these efforts, Valdez's first draft was apparently not what Davidson had in mind. As a recent interviewer disclosed,

Instead of the excitement and theatricality of Brecht and Cantinflas, (Davidson) beheld a fairly conventional work of Odets-like naturalism. Immediately he sensed the problem: Luis Valdez had become overwhelmed by the myriad facts of his long research. Gordon counseled the playwright to start all over again, to abandon strict naturalism for a more theatrical structure, to find a metaphor for his tale that evoked the throbbing rhythms of his people, to splash color and fire across his pages.[52]

Valdez apparently accepted Davidson's assessment. In another interview the playwright acknowledged the obstacles he faced and gave a glimpse of the new direction the play would take.

You can see the problem: (Valdez remarked to Dan Sullivan of the Los Angeles Times) how to integrate it all. If I used a naturalistic approach, I couldn't make it through the story. So the backdrop is symbolic. Some of the characters are based on real people, some are composite characters, and some are symbolic characters.[53]

The playwright's use of symbols is evident from the opening scene when El Pachuco slices through a huge World War II newspaper headline with a six foot switchblade. "When that enormous switchblade knife comes out," one reviewer commented, "it's clear that exagguration will be one emotional keynote for the evening--we're meant to understand that we're in for something a little larger than life." [54] Exagguration began with El Pachuco's costume. Dressed in a knee-length coat, billowing pants banded at the ankle, a gold chain stretching to the floor, topped off by a wide-brimmed feathered hat, El pachuco personified the legendary hero-gangster of the barrio. And that was apparently how Valdez envisioned him; part legend based on the Aztec "lord of education and experience," and part social misfit and non-conformist. By bringing to life this cultural archetype, the playwright instilled in the character a "subliminal power" designed to span the full spectrum of the barrio hierarchy: from the street personality who had taken on a god-like quality among Chicano youth, to the socially "deviant" gang member as seen from the perspective of more traditional observers. At the same time, Valdez was

aware that his characters had to be relevant to other audiences. For while El Pachuco was "to be admired and despised at the same time by some of the same people," he was also to be funny and frightening. "I wanted to capture that energy in the play," Valdez stated, "and use that as a bridge, the human bridge into mainstream America." [55]

The intention to reach into the American mainstream was not lost on early reviewers of the play. Some critics noted that because of Valdez's intention to attract middle class patrons, it was obvious that Chicanos were not the play's primary audience. "I am certain that its popularity," Harold Clurman wrote, "is not due to a large attendance of Chicanos."

The majority of the audience at the Taper was, and perhaps still is, to a considerable extent unfamiliar with the various sections (of Los Angeles) inhabited by its minorities. What does Hollywood, not to speak of Beverly Hills, Brentwood, Bel-Air and Santa Monica know of Watts, Boyle Heights and other 'submerged' parts of the town where the other dwell? [56]

Another critic, Gerald Rabkin, wrote, "Valdez, in responding to Gordon Davidson's commission to write a play...was well aware that an evening of Actos and Mitos would not satisfy middle-class theatrical expectations. [57] In this light, Davidson's suggestion to abandon naturalism for a "more theatrical structure" might have involved other than artistic motives. On the one hand, it is conceivable that Davidson's efforts were a sincere attempt to give the playwright criticism and badly needed exposure. On the other hand, given Davidson's position as executive producer for

all productions at the Mark Taper Forum, his contribution may well have been intended to transform "Zoot Suit" into a profitable venture by appealing more to middle-class tastes. Davidson's role as a promoter may partially explain Valdez's intention to direct the play "beyond the barrio." As Valdez stated in an interview,

I wanted to write a play that was not just a Chicano play but an American play. I wanted to make a single human statement, to invoke a vision of America as a whole including the minorities--using joy and humor.[58]

The desire to make a "single human statement" on a grander scale may have motivated Valdez and Davidson to take "Zoot Suit" to Broadway. Valdez explained that

...Zoot Suit staying in the barrio would be like that pachuco putting on the zoot suit and staying in the barrio. The play had to come to Broadway because this is the Palladium of the theater. Zoot Suit belongs here.[59]

While "Zoot Suit" may have belonged on Broadway, the reality of the situation suggested otherwise. After only four weeks the play closed because of poor ticket sales. Part of the problem, one critic observed, was strained relations between Teatro personnel and the play's New York promoters, the Shubert Organization. Both parties apparently entered into the agreement with different goals; the Shuberts not concealing the fact that they viewed "Zoot Suit" as potentially a commercial hit, while Valdez and his troupe considered their very presence in New York a political coup. Predictably, the differences eventually came to a

head over finances. The Shubert organization allocated only seven thousand dollars, out of a seven hundred thousand dollar advertising budget, for promotion in New York's Latino districts.[60] At the same time, the Shuberts saw no contradiction in paying \$15,000 per ad to the New York Times for promotion outside Latino districts. With the troupe and the Shuberts working at cross purposes as it were, the curtain quickly fell on El Teatro's Broadway debut. Thus, despite Valdez's and Davidson's best intentions, the legend of El Pachuco could not make the final leap across America's cultural plain.

This is not to say that "Zoot Suit" was unsuccessful, however. As a play it continued in Los Angeles for many months to rave reviews and before sellout audiences. More recently, a film version which is a significant departure from the play has made the rounds of theaters from coast to coast. The fact that there is a new version represents further strides taken by perhaps the most innovative Chicano artist working today. But if success in art can be measured at all it is perhaps in the way a film, a play, a painting, a sculpture, etc. is perceived by groups of individuals. Getting an accurate assessment of perception is always difficult, although not impossible. It may lie in art's imitative value, the mimetic quality of each artifact that individuals reflect upon and take home to use at some time during their daily lives. If this criteria can be used as a measure of art, then the most recent production of "Zoot Suit" scores very high. Its use of montage and audience participation, its depic-

tion of alternative life styles, and the political questions the film raises, almost in spite of itself, are only now being recognized. Valdez continues to spark the imagination of young and old alike by making people look critically at the past to implicitly question the present. In this regard El Teatro and Luis Valdez in particular have not changed since the first Acto. As always, Valdez's art provides an intellectual service whose value can be realized only in the heat of future struggles.

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrated how Chicano theater grew out of fundamental contradictory relations between Chicano, Mexicano, Filipino field workers and agricultural growers in California. Plays originally written to illustrate exploitative relations and to demonstrate fallible ideologies between farmworkers and growers were later expanded to expose basic contradictions between all Chicanos and American society. Each succeeding period in the development of Chicano theater should then be viewed as a series of dialectical responses to contradictions originating outside the Movement, as well as those originating from within. That those adjustments were resistant, although not entirely oppositional, seems clear. The focus has been Chicano theater's relationship to the status quo; its dialectical character in response to the Movement in light of that relationship, and to forces outside of it, all of which provided the motor force for artistic expression.

That later artistic expression took on an introspective tone, particularly during and after the suppression of the Movement, suggests the derailment of focus. In its first years El Teatro attacked notions of cultural deference and subservience which maintained field workers in an insecure state and self-doubt. The same ideas were at the root of traditional Mexican and Chicano voting behavior--a sort of marginal man woman syndrome that depressed voter turnouts or greatly reduced voting altogether. Union propagandizing and the theater's Actos worked against these obstacles by instilling pride, dignity and a willingness to seek change. By the seventies, however, as self-doubt riddled Chicano intellectuals: the crux of El Teatro's early critique, the basic contradiction between field labor and agrarian capital, was no longer part of its repertoire. The reasons for this were, as we saw, the need for better organizational support, the further development of El Teatro's art, changing political directions in light of internal shifts, and an attempt to suggest a revival of the Movement in general. Yet pressure on the theater from outside the Movement was also substantial. For whereas other organizations were often overtly suppressed, El Teatro bore the brunt of the system's ideological assault. Pressure from critics, promoters, even from other Chicano artists to become "legitimate," to be more "professional," to cultivate other financial resources, to travel certain artistic roads rather than others were significant enough to direct Valdez's attention away from fundamental contradictions toward less critical issues. As the Movement deteriorated we find, for example,

debates between "moderates" and "militants" in El Teatro's plays, or dialogues between recognized "heroes" or "heroines" and as yet reformed mortals. In other words, rather than taking an overtly critical position against exploitative relations, El Teatro attempted to define Chicanos as legitimate and illegitimate members of the American polity. That Valdez eventually "took sides" is not the point. At issue are the pressures that came to bear on him at precisely the moment when the Chicano Movement was being systematically dismantled by less surreptitious means. The sources of those pressures are many; we must leave that question to historians of the Chicano Movement. We should emphasize, however, that those pressures were multiple, highly complex, and had a significant impact on Valdez's art. And they would not have occurred without Valdez's on-going relationship to the Movement throughout the period.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See, for example, Juan Gomez-Quinones, "On Culture," in Revista Chicano-Riquena, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 1977); Juan Bruce Novoa, "The Space of Chicano Literature," in De Colores, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1975, pp. 22-42, and; Jose Limon, "Agringado Joking in Texas Mexican Society: Folklore and Differential Identity," in New Scholar, Vol. VI, 1977; Tomas Ybarra Frausto, "The Chicano Movement and the Emergence of a Chicano Poetic Consciousness," in New Scholar, Vol. VI, 1977; Joseph Sommers, "From the Critical Premise to the Product: Critical Modes and Their Applications to the Chicano Literary Text," in New Scholar, Vol. VI, 1977, and; Luis Davila, "Otherness in Chicano Literature," Contemporary Mexico, eds., James W. Wilkie, Michael C. Meyer, and Edna Manzon de Wilkie, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 556-563.

[2] Such an approach must begin with more flexible concepts. Culture, for example, should be conceptualized not solely as specific objects or "traits," but as Raymond Williams suggests, "a constitutive social process, creating specific and different 'ways of life.'" (Marxism and Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) The analysis of these ways of life," or subcultures, and the forms that result, can deepen our understanding of cultural practice in recent Chicano history.

The definition of politics must, by the same token, be expanded to include those activities which contribute to the creation and re-creation of organized ways of political life. This expanded definition may include not only formal political routines, such as elections, but also the ways in which traditional political relations are reproduced ideologically, through dominantly defined values and stereotypes.

[3] See Armando Rendon, Chicano Manifesto, (New York, 1971); Armando Navarro, "The Evolution of Chicano Politics," in Aztlan, Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 1974); Rodolfo Acuna, Occupied America, Second edition, (New York, 1981); Tomas Ybarra Frausto, op. cit., and; Gustavo Segade, "Identity and Power: An Essay on the Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics in Chicano Thought," in Aztlan, Vol. 9, 1978.

[4] "Platicando Con Luis Valdez," Rayas 4, (newsletter of Chicano arts and letters), July-August, 1978, p. 11.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Jacques Levy, Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa, (New

- York, 1970) p. 196.
- [7] Paula Cizmar, "Luis Valdez," Mother Jones, June, 1979, p. 52.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Beth Baqby, "El Teatro Campesino: Interview with Luis Valdez," Tulane Drama Review, Vol. XI, No. 4, (Summer 1967), pp.70-80.
- [10] Clark Knowlton, "Guerrillas of Rio Arriba: The New Mexico Land Wars," in F. Chris Garcia, ed., La Causa Politica: A Chicano Politics Reader, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1974).
- [11] Stan Steiner, La Raza, The Mexican Americans, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969).
- [12] Carlos Muñoz, "The Politics of Protest and Chicano Liberation: A Case Study of Repression and Co-optation," Aztlán, Vol. 5, Nos. 1&2, (Spring & Fall, 1970).
- [13] John Staples Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1974).
- [14] Baqby, op.cit.
- [15] From an interview with Felix Alvarez, a former member of El Teatro, April, 1978.
- [16] Olga Rodriguez, ed., The Politics of Chicano Liberation, (New York, 1977), p. 36.
- [17] Also from the 1978 interview with Felix Alvarez.
- [18] Sylvia Drake, "El Teatro Campesino: Keeping the Revolution on Stage," Performing Arts, (September 1970), pp. 59-60.
- [19] Clark Knowlton, op. cit.
- [20] Carlos Muñoz, op. cit.
- [21] Armando Morales, "The 1970-71 East Los Angeles Chicano-Police Riots," in Garcia, ed., op. cit.
- [22] Rodriguez, op. cit.
- [23] Jose Limon, "The Folk Performance of Chicano and the Cultural Limits of Political Ideology," unpublished manuscript, 1979.
- [24] Richard Garcia, "The Chicano Movement and the Mexican

American Community, 1972-1978: An Interpretive Essay," Socialist Review, No. 40-41, (July-October 1978).

- [25] Theodore Shank, "A Return to Mayan and Aztec Roots," Drama Review, (December 1974), Vol 18, No. 4, pp. 56-78.
- [26] Ybarra-Frausto, op. cit.
- [27] Nicolas Kanellos, "Folklore in Chicano Theater and Chicano Theater as Folklore," Journal of Folklore Institute, Vol. XV, No. 1, (Jan-April 1978) p. 74.
- [28] See Actos: El Teatro Campesino, (Fresno: Cucaracha Press, 1971) p. 3.
- [29] Ibid.
- [30] For a vivid example of Valdez's attitude toward militants during this period, see his Acto, "The Militants," in Actos, op. cit.
- [31] See Margarita Arce Decierdo's "The Struggle Within: Mediating Conflict in California Fields," Chicano Political Economy Collective Working Paper No. 106, University of California, Berkeley, Institute for the Study of Social Change, 1980.
- [32] Richard Garcia, op. cit.
- [33] Juan Jose Pena, "Reflecciones Sobre El Movimiento," De Colores, Vol. 2, No. 1, (1975), pp. 59-63.
- [34] See Acuna's, Occupied America, 1981, p. 389.
- [35] Arthur Sainer, Village Voice, April 26, 1973.
- [36] Luis Valdez, "Pensamiento Serpentino: A Chicano Approach to the Theater of Reality," (San Juan Bautista, 1973).
- [37] See for example Rendon's Chicano Manifesto, op. cit. and to some extent, Gomez-Quinones' "On Culture," op. cit.
- [38] Raymond A. Rocco, "The Role of Power and Authenticity in the Chicano Movement," Aztlan, 1974.
- [39] See the work of the Chicano "formalist" school, particularly the writings of Juan Bruce Novoa. Ybarra's article, op. cit., cites other examples.
- [40] There were of course others who organized along nationalist lines. The range of arguments and polemics in this area is too vast to adequately assess here. However, there were Chicano nationalists who attempted to incorporate socialist

principles into their analysis, and thus could be distinguished from so-called "strict" nationalists. Among the former was Corky Gonzalez. See the pamphlet by Pathfinder Press, November, 1971 presenting Gonzalez's El Plan de Aztlán, as adopted at the first National Chicano Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado, in March, 1969, and the programmatic statement by Gonzalez. See also Gonzalez's remarks given at a symposium on Chicano Liberation at California State College, Hayward, printed by the same publisher in 1970.

[41] See Unity, June 15, 1977.

[42] Juan Bruce Novoa and C. May Gamboa, "El Quinto Festival de Teatros," in De Colores, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1975).

[43] See Unity, op. cit.

[44] Ybarra Frausto, op. cit.

For example, it is highly unlikely that feudal relations in Mayan and Aztec societies were founded on humanist principles.

[46] Personal correspondence to Jorge Acevedo, April 12, 1973, on file in the Chicano Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[47] Kanellos, op. cit.

[48] Acuña, op. cit., p. 385.

[49] Educational reform through data gathered in attitude surveys, health care, la Chicana, demography, electoral studies, etc. An example in the area of education is the issue of Aztlán, dedicated to "education and the Chicano" (Vol. 8, 1977).

[50] Kanellos, op. cit., p. 79.

[51] In the interview, Valdez described how the project began and gave an indication of its initial purposes.

We talked about several things with the Taper. Finally, I said to Ken, how about a play about the pachuco era? He was pretty excited. And it turned out Gordon Davidson had just heard something on the car radio about the period so it was on his mind too. We researched the Sleepy Lagoon Case and the riots at the UCLA Chicano Library, but what we came up with isn't a Chicano play like the ones we do at San Juan Bautista. It's an American play. (Los Angeles Times, April 16, 1979, p. 69.)

- [52] The New York Times Magazine, February 11, 1979, p. 99.
- [53] The Los Angeles Times, April 16, 1979, Calendar.
- [54] See Encore, May 7, 1979, p.32.
- [55] The Los Angeles Times, op. cit.
- [56] Harold Clurman, Nation, April 21, 1979, p. 444.
- [57] Gerald Rabkin, Newstatesman, June, 1979, p. 962.
- [58] Cizmar, op. cit.
- [59] See Encore, op. cit.
- [60] Cizmar, op. cit.

CHICANO POLITICAL ECONOMY COLLECTIVE

The Chicano Political Economy Collective (ChPEC) is composed of Faculty and Graduate Students, primarily from the University of California, Berkeley. The group shares the interest of studying social relations of the Chicano-Mexicano community in the United States from a critical perspective. In particular, ChPEC focuses on how race, class, and gender intersect in the process of oppression as well as in the struggle against it. Through its seminars and Working Papers, ChPEC challenges the contemporary and established academic perspectives on the Chicano experience. The Working Papers are part of an effort to create a wider forum for dialogue. Comments and critiques of the Papers are encouraged.

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