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Chican@ Artistic Practice: Performing Community in Contested Public Space

Chican@ Práctica Artística: La actuación de la comunidad en el espacio público disputado

ABSTRACT: The article argues that it can be stated that Chican@ artistic practice has a strong affinity with community building. In this sense, Chican@ art practice holds a long tradition of seeking presence in public space in order to form, question and democratically promote communal bonding. The Chican@ art practice is largely hemispheric and refuses any national classification. In a cultural interspace between Mexican and American communities, Chican@ artists, musicians, and writers tend to engage in aesthetic and community-building cross-border projects. The article explores Chican@ performance culture from *El Teatro de Campesino* to contemporary border plays and performances of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and argues that artistic practices of Chican@ artists and activists have consciously sought to infiltrate public space and thus transform the public sphere through theater, art, and music in public settings.
KEYWORDS: public space, Chican@ culture, performance arts, music, community-building.

RESUMEN: El artículo argumenta que se puede afirmar que la práctica artística chicana tiene una fuerte afinidad con la construcción de la comunidad. En este sentido, la práctica artística Chican@ tiene una larga tradición de buscar presencia en el espacio público con el fin de formar, cuestionar y promover democráticamente el vínculo comunitario. La práctica artística Chican@ es en gran medida hemisférica y rechaza cualquier clasificación nacional. En un interespacio cultural entre las comunidades mexicana y americana, los artistas, músicos y escritores chicanos tienden a participar en proyectos transfronterizos estéticos y de construcción de comunidades. El artículo explora la cultura de actuación Chican@ desde El Teatro de Campesino hasta las obras de teatro fronterizo contemporáneo y las actuaciones de Guillermo Gómez-Peña y argumenta que las prácticas artísticas de los artistas y activistas Chican@ han buscado conscientemente infiltrarse en el espacio público y así transformar la esfera pública a través del teatro, el arte y la música en escenarios públicos.
PALABRAS CLAVE: espacio público, cultura chicana, artes escénicas, música, construcción de la comunidad.

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Introduction

Protest and revolution tend to begin in the street. On October 28th, 2016 *The Guardian* announced the following news:

> Law enforcement officials arrested 141 people in North Dakota after police surrounded protesters, deploying pepper spray and armored vehicles in order to clear hundreds of Native American activists and supporters from land owned by an oil pipeline company. (*The Guardian* 2016, n. pag.).

This was the most violent day in the three-month long standoff between police and hundreds of members of more than ninety Native American tribes, who were attempting to block the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline. Operated by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners and intended to transport fracked crude from the Bakken oil field in North Dakota to a refinery near Chicago, the $3.7 billion pipeline was seen by tribes as a threat to their water supplies and numerous sacred sites. As the demonstrations of the Standing Rock tribe and supporting groups of Native American activists show, the rethinking of public space remains central to public conceptions of the common good in the twenty-first century. Many Native American community movements defend sacred and community space in opposition to extractivist capitalist intrusion from hegemonic national and multinational companies. As with other contemporary grassroots movements, art practices in the Dakota movement – such as chant, performance, poster art, and on-the-spot sculpture – were primary vehicles for expressing dissidence and resistance. Not simply creative responses to moments of crisis, these practices serve as community-building forces, promoting sociability through helping people reimagine the social. Practices like these that engage with and in public space highlight art's central role for social creativity. In the first place they produce and receive a high degree of visibility. They also intensify the potential for dialogue between art and a larger public. The artist becomes a creator and activist. Walter Benjamin famously labelled the author a "producer" and equipped him with an "organizing function" (1986, 221–223). Benjamin's creative agent has become an inspirational image for socially and politically minded artists who create imaginaries of the social in public space embedded in dissident, democratic, utopian, and egalitarian thinking. Such linkage in art between the creative and the social has roots in the utopian ideals that were part of the colonial foundations of South and North America.

The Dakota events are just one instance of a new wave of social protest across the globe. The Occupy movement, the Arab Spring movement, the Dreamer's movement, the Resist movement, the student movement in Chile, the "Ni Una Más" [Not One More (Woman)] in Latin America, and the Black Lives Matter movement have been among the most mediatized examples of current sociocultural practices of (re)claiming, (re)interpreting, (re)constructing public space. At the same time, we are witnessing privatizations of public space in the sales of land to private companies, and in the sales of streets, squares, and plazas to private developers (Low and Smith 2005). In cities like Quito, Toronto,

and New York people are increasingly vulnerable to displacement by gentrification. In the wake of these developments, street art projects, communal gardening, and housing projects in urban centers that promote a grassroots approach to the use of public space. Public space outs itself as the very testing ground for rethinking history and heritage, reflecting on and installing power relations, performing culture wars, and staging new communal visions.

Chican@ art practice holds a long trajectory of connecting art with contested public space. The Chican@ art practice is largely hemispheric and refuses any national classification. In a cultural interspace between Mexican and American communities, Chican@ artists, musicians, and writers tend to engage in aesthetic and community-building cross-border projects. At the latest since the activities of *El Teatro de Campesino* conducted by Luis Valdez in the sixties, the artistic practices of Chican@ artists and activists have also consciously sought to infiltrate public space and thus transform the public sphere through theater, art, and music in public settings. Without generalizing, it can be stated that Chican@ artistic practice has a strong affinity with community building. In this sense, Chican@ art practice also seeks a presence in public space in order to form, question and democratically promote communal bonding. In doing so, artistic provocation comes to the fore, such as in the punk performances in L.A. streets by Alice Bag, the border plays and performances of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and the agitprop theatre in the works of Luis Valdez; however artistic reconciliation, too, such as in the fandango performances and workshops of the Chican@ group Quetzal. The works of the Chican@ muralists fusing art practices from the South and the North of the American hemisphere continue to tell the story of these communal imaginaries and transformations in hemispherically inspired murals in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago. In a descriptive and analytical manner, this essay seeks to approach the significance of public space for the art practice of the Chican@ artists and to interpret their artistic messages through their presence in public space.

Chican@ theatre in streets, on flatback trucks, and in union halls

El Teatro Campesino joined a vivid scene of performance arts when it came into existence in the 1960s. As the various examples of theatre and performance arts in the 1960s Americas show, public spheres were multiplied, public space was contested, and streets were sites of political struggle and resistance – a struggle for inclusion as well as difference (Bradford 2004). Marshal McLuhan's global village utopia inspired transcultural, transethnic, and transnational communication. While artists like Allan Kaprow and Marta Minujín embraced its technocractic cosmopolitan design in their transcultural art practice, poets and artists from the Black Arts movement, the Chican@ movement, and the Mexican and U.S. American counterculture such as *la Onda* and the Beat poets took countercultural opposition to technocractic and colonialist ideas of progress and control and provoked resistance to their artistic visions of community.

Central for interAmerican forms of theatre in public in the U.S. were the works of *El Teatro Campesino*. Since its inception,

El Teatro Campesino and its founder and artistic director, Luis Valdez, set the aesthetic and political standards for Latino theatrical production in the U.S. It was a theatre that emerged directly from the social conditions of farmworkers on the West Coast, the majority of whom were of Mexican or other Latin origins. Founded in 1965 during the Delano Grape Strike of Cesar Chavez's United Farmworkers Union, the company *El Teatro Campesino* wrote and performed "*actos*" or short skits on flatbed trucks in streets as well as on stages in union halls. These works were conceived as dramatic expressions of the people for the people (Broyles Gonzalez 1994), written explicitly for performance in public with a straightforward appeal to workers and the larger public. The company demonstrated a high degree of mobility and took the *actos* on tour to dramatize the plight and cause of the farmworkers. Hence, they frequented different public sites in various towns and cities to raise translocal social awareness.

The company also unfolded a hybrid conceptualization of theatre synthesizing various cultural and religious traditions. Borrowing from Aztec and Mayan sacred ritual drama, nineteenth-century Spanish missionary drama, and European commedia dell'arte, *El Teatro Campesino* fused various communal theatrical traditions in their occupation of public space for social protest and communal network building. A major force for linking the social with the theatrical, the company received national recognition when it was given an Obie Award in 1969 for "demonstrating the politics of survival" and Los Angeles Drama Critics Awards in 1969 and 1972. The political panorama of *El Teatro Campesino* expanded and included a wide range of issues between the years 1967 and 1972, including racism, the Vietnam War, and education. The theatre was also the propelling force for "the explosion of Chican@ arts," especially in the forms of public murals (Barnet-Sanchez 2012, 246–251).

Figure 1
El Teatro Campesino, November 16, 1970
(courtesy American Theatre)

Chican@ muralists built on the inspiration provided by Siquieros's *La América Tropical* (1932), which was the first large-scale mural in the United States that created a public space by being painted on an ordinary exterior wall. This practice was taken up during the political and social upheavals of the Vietnam War and Chicano Civil Rights movement. *La América Tropical* acquired its most far-reaching significance by becoming the predecessor and prototype for activist Chican@ murals in the 1960s. Chican@ muralism continued Mexican muralism's impact on the American art scene in the 1930s by expressing the social and political function of art during the turbulent period of the 1960s and 1970s.

Building on earlier South-North flows, *El Movimiento*, the Chicano Movement

fighting for Latino integration and equal rights, gained momentum in the U.S. in the 1960s. As an important aesthetic voice, the Chicano Art Movement represented attempts by Mexican-American artists to establish a unique artistic identity for Mexican Americans in U.S. Chican@ art. They were influenced by post-ideologies, pre-Columbian art, European painting, and Mexican-American social, political, and cultural issues. The movement challenged dominant social norms and stereotypes for the sake of cultural autonomy and self-determination. Issues addressed by the movement included the awareness of collective history and culture, restoration of land grants, and equal opportunity for social mobility. Throughout the movement and beyond, Chican@s used art to express their cultural values as social protest or for aesthetic purpose (Goldman and Ybarro-Frausto 1991; Jackson 2009). The art evolved over time, illustrating current struggles and social issues. In addition, it provided Chican@ youth with a sense of cultural identity and shared history. Chican@ art defined itself as a public forum for calling attention to "invisible" histories and people, depicting them in a unique hybrid form of American art.

Chican@ muralism drew much influence from prominent muralists from the Mexican movement. Nevertheless, it distinguished itself from Mexican muralist traditions by keeping production by and for members of the Chican@ community; their murals represented alternative histories on the walls of the *barrios* and other public spaces, and did not depend on government funding that might land them in museums or government buildings. In addition, similar to the creative process of *El Teatro Campesino* productions, Chican@ mural art favored collective work, including collaborations between multiple artists and community members. Ownership of a mural was frequently given to the entire community. The murals' significance was their accessibility and inclusivity, appearing in public spaces as a form of cultural affirmation and popular education. While most muralists were male, important female muralists emerged in the Chican@ movement, including Celia Herrera Rodriguez and Rosalinda Montez Palacios.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña's and Coco Fusco's "The Couple in the Cage" and Chican@ Punk: Contested public space in contemporary urban spectacle cultures

Contemporary urban culture celebrates festivals, spectacles, and the re-aestheticization of public space. Leftist and neo-Marxist intellectuals have criticized the spectacularization of urban spaces (Debord 1995; Zukin 1995). The general critical direction asserts that the culture of spectacles commodifies all forms of social, cultural, and political life. Yet, critics like Daniel Goldstein and Kevin Fox Gotham arrive at a more complex vision of spectacle culture. Aside from clearly present commodity interests, they locate a potential for resistance, rebellion and subversion in urban spectacles in contemporary times. Goldstein claims that "spectacles, like other public events, are systems for not only the performance but also the creation or transformation of social order" (2004, 16). With a nod to the New Orleans Mardi Gras, Gotham maintains that public spectacles have the potential to create "a radical critique

especially with respect to class and race inequalities" (2005, 235).

Gotham sees contemporary urban cultures increasingly expressing themselves through festival-related spectacle, from sports events to film and book festivals, from carnival and Christopher Street parades to street art festivals. Undoubtedly, spectacle cultures are deeply embedded in commodity culture and market circuits, but they are also important loopholes through which the social status quo can be challenged. An example from performance culture shall serve as a point of departure for exploring how public space can simultaneously be envisioned as a site of colonial and neocolonial oppression and a site of visionary knowledge production. The instance shows that art practices in public remain crucial for rethinking and redistributing public space. In Guillermo Gómez-Peña's and Coco Fusco's "The Couple in the Cage" performance tour, public space is envisioned as a grid-patterned cage, confining and porous at the same time.

These performances illustrate the increasing complexity when it comes to defining public space and the public sphere (Fusco 2015). As well-established performance artists, Gómez-Peña and Fusco started their "Couple in the Cage" tour in 1992, five hundred years after Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. For two years they travelled through various Western metropolises in the Americas and Europe, presenting themselves as undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked for five centuries. Their tour had a mobile and global presence, as they claimed various urban sites such as the British Museum in London for public performance. At the same time, they challenged and questioned the very concept of openness in public spaces. Employing the cage as locus of an interactive performance they addressed the audience directly and reacted to spectators' comments and wishes. Hence, public space and cage became relational sites. While performing in public, the couple never left the cage. Combining dressing and naming practices, they performed "natives" from "Guatinau," an imagined homeland, and called themselves tongue-in-cheek "Guatinauis." A small donation box in front of the cage signaled that for a small fee, the female Guatinaui would perform a "traditional" dance (to rap music), and the male Guatinaui would tell "authentic" Amerindian stories (in a made-up language). In addition, they would both pose for photos with visitors. As a caged couple, Gómez-Peña and Fusco brought imagined colonies to the urban centers. In the style of postmodern parody, they staged the colonial encounter as a zoo-like experience, leaving their audiences in a state of perplexity, amusement, and disgust.

For many spectators the scenery indeed appeared "real" and "authentic." The performances created a complex spatio-temporal link between coloniality and late modernity, between the cage as symbol of human enslavement and the public space as potential site of participation, interaction, and dialogue. Their tour playfully revealed that "knowledge [can] not only be accumulated in Europe and the US and, from there, spread all over the world. Knowledge is produced, accumulated, and critically used everywhere" (Mignolo 2005,

115). Even more importantly, their performance revealed that knowledge production is in the hands of those who control production as well as diffusion. As internationally established performance artists, Gómez-Peña and Fusco could gain access to highly visible public sites and channel the knowledge they wanted to share according to their means. They imaginatively posed their production of knowledge against Western versions of colonial histories and imaginaries of indigenous cultures, thus challenging and mobilizing modes and sites of knowledge production.

As Stuart Hall emphasizes,

> Europe brought its own cultural categories, languages, images and ideas to the New World in order to describe and represent it. It tried to fit the New World into existing conceptual frameworks, classifying it according to its own norms, and absorbing it into western traditions of representation. (1996, 204)

Sources that the colonial discourse drew on were the writings of Classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, religious sources that created knowledge by reinterpreting "geography in terms of the Bible" (Hall 1996, 207), and mythology, which "transformed the outer world into an enchanted garden, alive with misshapen peoples and oddities" (207). Yet, the most fertile source of information were traveler's tales –"a discourse where description faded imperceptibly into legend" (207). The combination of these sources created an image of the New World that the settlers internalized before they set foot in the New World. "Europeans had outsailed, outshot, and outwitted peoples who had no wish to be 'explored,' no need to be 'discovered,' and no desire to be 'exploited.' The Europeans stood vis-a-vis the Others, impositions of dominant power" (204). In the case of "The Couple in the Cage," it is, subversively, the reinvented indigenous from the New World who is the traveler occupying public spaces in the West and presenting "knowledge" through the masks of costume, body paint, made-up language, and interactive parody – thus pushing the boundaries of knowledge production and diffusion.

As a couple in the cage, Gómez-Peña and Fusco turned the public sites of their performances into unexpected educational sites, shaking the very foundations of established knowledge production through interaction, participatory culture, and the simulacrum of public space as a cage. As Sara Mills reminds us, "discourses do not exist in a vacuum but are in constant conflict with other discourses and other social practices which inform them over questions of truth and authority" (1997, 17).

Their events revealed public sites to be performative and fluid, yet, also porous and enclosed, oscillating between spaces of free interaction and social/economic entrapment. Public spaces in Gómez-Peña and Fusco's performances remain ambiguous, dangerous, and far from utopian, as they are sites of control, surveillance, manipulation, and consumption, in addition to being sites of free dialogue and individual expression. Yet, they remain the chosen loci of enunciation to challenge colonial and neocolonial forms of knowledge production, and to perform the political.

Another example of the complexities of transethnic identity formation is the emergence of Latina/Chicana punk in Los Angeles in the 1970s and 1980s. With a nod to Michelle Habell-Pallán, this essay argues that the new directions punk took in the Latina/Chicana context changed punk styles and perplexed identity politics within the diverse Latina groups in California. For some rebellious Chicanas, 1970s punk served as a liberating sonic mechanism, and the punk scene served as an emancipatory social space in public. "A new feminist Latina/Chicana consciousness emerged from the encounter between Latin female voices and punk culture. Social critique via campy humor became a trademark of Latina/Chicana performances in East L.A., Hollywood, the Westside, and cities in Mexico" (2008, 25). With the fading of the 1960s Chican@ youth movement, and with the rise of institutionalized multiculturalism, the sonic expressions of Chicanas like Teresa Covarrubias and Alice Armendariz Velasquez confounded easy categorizations of ethnic culture, social norm, and gender identity. Idiosyncratic and eclectic in performance, dress, and voice, they broke all the rules while integrating the non-conformist style of their rebellious Pachuca foremothers. Occupying public space and "transgressing the social norm, these punk musicians repudiated behaviors and identities imposed on them by the male dominant culture, Chican@ communities, and their conservative familial traditions" (27). The examples of Teresa Covarrubias and Alice Armendariz Velasquez also highlight the problematic, at times highly conflictive relationship between individualist and collective identity politics within non-mainstream groups.

Rethinking public space: The group Quetzal *and art practices at sites of mobility, at the border, and in the diaspora*

As a response to and reflection of mobility in times of accelerated globalization, art practices have entered and transformed airports, train stations, metro stations and bus stations as sites of mobility that connect local and global aspects of culture. These sites are intersections for flows of people, ideas, and goods in everyday life. Art seeks these sites as potential platforms for mobilizing ideas of community, social connectedness, and inclusion. Seizing the opportunity for outreach in these highly frequented locations, art practices recreate the social within everyday mobility. Performances and installations frequently fuse historical consciousness, communal vision, aestheticization of everyday culture. Public music performances like the Chican@ band Quetzal's "Tragafuegos" at a bus station in Los Angeles express new forms of community-building, taking into account the elements of cultural change, exchange, and diasporic experience. As the YouTube video *Here and Now: Quetzal "Tragafuegos"* shows, the lyrics, music, and performance in the event turn the bus stop into a vibrant contact zone for different people on their travels.[1] The music event self-reflexively performs the effervescence of communal bonding. Art practice here enters the social space as a surprising act of slowing down mobility. The performance of the band members includes participatory elements that invite passers-by to enter a transitory circle of music-making. Most important, the performance establishes sound and rhythm

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4YqrJuDmTE.

as a community-building force in the usually anonymous public space of rapid transit, transforming a "non-place" (Auge 1995) into a social contact zone with potential for inclusion, participation, and dialogue.

The Chican@ band Quetzal has also been the propelling force behind the *Fandango Sin Fronteras* movement which draws upon a restoration policy developed by *El Nuevo Movimiento Jaranero* in the mid-1970s to decolonize the state identity politics of the Mexican government by re-emphasizing the multicultural ingredients of the musical tradition and by reviving the participatory and improvisational elements in the fandango praxis of rural communities (cf. ibid.: 63). To link this newly regained praxis to Chican@ communities in the United States music groups such as Quetzal from Los Angeles, Mono Blanco from the port of Veracruz, and Son de Madera from Xalapa initiated transnational collaborations at the beginning of the New Millennium. In the meantime fandango has travelled to various urban centers and Latina/o communities in the United States and Canada and has created new networks of *convivencia* (the Latina/o notion of community and coexistence) by means of a participatory music culture. The musicians and community activists involved in *Fandango Sin Fronteras* frequently travel back and forth between various locations, have roots and contacts at different sites and build networks on translocal as well as transnational scales. Communal and cultural centers in Xalapa, Santa Ana, and Seattle are representative sites of network-building and nodal points of transit for musicians and activists alike. Hence mobility not only leads to plurilocal activism in community-building but also to a shifting positionality of actors in different networks.

As a result, multiple translocal and transnational flows of actors, concepts, and traditions challenge various norms, be they aesthetic, political, or social. Frequently there is also a divide between traditionalist purists and progressive fusion-oriented musicians in Mexican as well as diaspora communities in the US. What emerges from transversal flows of actors and their music is a transnational social and cultural network, and what constitutes the network structure are connected sites of cultural production, preservation, and diffusion in Mexico and the United States. Workshops run by the group Los Cojolites from the south of Veracruz take place in Jáltipan, Mexico in an annual weeklong series. These workshops are linked to the Center for the Documentation of *Son Jarocho*, the latter being dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and promotion of this Veracruz fandango tradition as a cultural heritage. Within these workshops both musical expertise as well as a participatory spirit are at the center of attention. Musicians from Los Cojolites and Ricardo Perry Guillén, the founder of the group and of the Center, a historian and cultural worker, travel back and forth between their center in Jáltipan and regional sites such as Xalapa as well as centers in Santa Ana, California, Seattle, and Chicago. They travel as musicians, social activists, and educators to spread the communal gospel of *Son Jarocho* in the context of *Fandango Sin Fronteras*. Their mission includes the preservation and expansion of this musical heritage but also dialogue and innovation through exchange and most of all the creation of a sense of communal belonging at home and in the diaspora. In the

area around Veracruz with an Afro-Latina cultural spectrum *huapango* events frequently function as communal gathering to bring the people from the farms and ranches to the 'pueblo.' In urban centers the intention is to create identitarian spaces for communal bonding in the metropolis as well as the diaspora. The birth of the Seattle Fandango Project in 2009 also resulted from frequent transversal journeys of Mexican and Chican@ musicians and activists between Veracruz, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Martha Gonzalez and Quetzal Flores had united with other fandango musicians in Seattle earlier in the New Millenium to launch a series of workshops.

Meanwhile, the Seattle Fandango Project has been supported by various cultural centers and educational institutions in Seattle such as El Centro de la Raza, Raices Culturales, the Ethnic Cultural Center, the University of Washington, and various primary and secondary schools. Cultural heritage politics, community activism, and amateur as well professional music production coincide, as Martha Gonzalez and Flores Quetzal are also the head of the professional folk-rock-jazz fusion band Quetzal, whose fifth album *Imaginaries* was rewarded the Grammy Award in 2013 for the Best Latin Rock, Urban, or Alternative Album. Their creation of syncretistic music and community activism is one of the propelling forces behind the grassroots politics of *Fandango Sin Fronteras* which reclaims public spaces, mobilizes communities, and creates alternative forms of mobility to cross boundaries. *Fandango Sin Fronteras* does not necessarily seek festival grounds to perform. On the contrary, performances often take place within local communities and community centers as well as in public spaces directly south and north of the border. Precisely in these nationally demarcated spaces marked by fences, walls, and border control, the performances of *Fandango Sin Fronteras* conquer public spaces for the performance of transborder communities. Professional music groups engage in these performances, with community building appearing to take precedence over market interests.

While the link between music, market, and politics in neoliberal capitalist society is generally undeniable, this grassroots musical movement is an attempt to open up new venues of distributing music and ideas of community. *Fandango Sin Fronteras* contains this element of connecting the individual and the local with the transnational. Both, aesthetically and spatially, *Fandango Sin Fronteras* locates itself in the border zone between ethnic, racial, and national identities. While the Fandango project and the musical activities of related groups such as Quetzal rebuild collective memory, it bears mentioning that their understanding of *latinidad* fuses Spanish, Indigenous, Arab, and African elements and opens a venue for new transnational identities, thus challenging a monolithic *latinidad* north and south of the Rio Grande. For the Fandango grassroots movement the *son jarocho* becomes an aesthetic means of expanding *mexicanidad* as well as *latinidad*, revealing native, Arab, African, and Spanish elements of rhythm and performance. In the words of Shannon Dudley and Quetzal lead singer Martha Gonzalez, influential figures of the Seattle Fandango project, the emergence of the project goes back to collaborations between musicians and communities on both sides of the border:

> To avoid creating a new orthodoxy of their own, professional groups in the grassroots movement, including *Mono Blanco*, *Son de Madera, Chuchumbé, Los Utrera, Los Cojolites, Estansuela, Relicario,* and *Los Negritos* continued to organize and participate in community fandangos, where they took part in a collective dialogue about the future of the tradition. This practice continues today, and many musicians in the movement contribute part of their earnings to the community centers that host free workshops and fandangos. This vibrant scene caught the attention of a new generation of community-oriented Chicano artists in Los Angeles who began making trips to Veracruz in the early 2000s. Chicanos shared their own experiences and techniques of community building through art. Back in Los Angeles they shared what they had learned about the fandango and brought up musicians from Veracruz. (Dudley and Gonzalez 2009, n. pag)

The *Nuevo Movimiento Jaranero* took shape through a process of research and reclamation, and the multiethnic roots of music in "Veracruz, as a Caribbean site" were reaffirmed (Gonzalez 2011, 66). This return to heritage, past, and cultural memory created a new interest in the living tradition of *Son Jarocho*, which most Chican@s had previously known through commercial recordings (or through Ritchie Valens's 1957 rock and roll remake of the traditional *son jarocho* song "La Bamba"). As Dudley and Gonzalez tell us:

> In 2002 *Fandango Sin Fronteras* was established as an informal musical dialogue between Chicanos and Jarochos. In 2004 members of Quetzal traveled to Mexico to help record and produce Son de Madera's CD, 'Las Orquestas del Dia.' In 2005, Son de Madera, one of the premier *son jarocho* ensembles from Veracruz, came to Los Angeles to perform with Quetzal at a fundraiser for the South Central Farm, an inner-city farm that the community had reclaimed from industrial wasteland, and from which the authorities were then trying to remove them. Through these and many other exchanges, *Fandango Sin Fronteras* has taken shape as a transnational musical dialogue rooted in the spirit of *convivencia*. (2009, n. pag.)

This music, *Son Jarocho*, is a style specific to the Veracruz region of Mexico, emerging from the mix of indigenous, Spanish, and African cultural influences on that society. The Mexican government canonized this music in the 1940s, moving it to the stage while taking out the culture and improvisation at the music's heart. It was reclaimed in the 1970s, representing a return to community values.

As Martha Gonzalez explains:

> As a participatory music and dance practice *fandango* conceptualizes community as a central aesthetic principle. Veracruzian communities utilize *convivencia* as a collective production of auditory identity, a culmination of memory through sound. Spanish, African, Arab and Indigenous legacies

> are present in the multiple dialogues and musical inflections. This musical dialogue is achieved through the expressions of *son jarocho's* multiple instruments, notably the heartbeat or pulse, of la *tarima. Bailadoras* (percussive dancers) are the drummers that produce the central pulse of the *fandango fiesta* through their footwork. In this sense they are percussionists. As percussionists these women dialogue with other instruments and singers in the *son jarocho* ensemble. (2011, 65–66)

Despite the overwhelming historical evidence of an African presence in colonial Mexico, its presence was not recorded in the nation-state's official history of Veracruzian cultural tradition. Caught up in an obsession with modernizing the nation in the early 1900s, the Mexican nation-state created a Veracruzian cultural identity that emphasized the Spanish influence and reduced the Indigenous and especially African elements. In the United States today, but also increasingly in Canada and Latin American countries, *Son Jarocho* and Fandango are performed in Chican@and Latin diaspora communities, and often on public stages and communal centers, as a way for members to connect with one another. As its multidirectional and transversal flows illustrate, *Fandango* has gone transnational by building new diasporic links across the boundaries of nation-states (González, Sirani, Yattsil Guevara González and Wilfried Raussert 2018, 121-23, Raussert 2021 forthcoming, 54-62).

While art and cultural practice, strangely enough, go frequently unnoticed and underrated in their function as creator of social meaning, at the end of this article, it appears safe to say that Chican@ artistic practice has established itself as an effective tool for redefining human relationships to public space and rethinking social diversity in public spheres. Chican@ public art has demonstrated its self-reflexive capacity to uncover conflicts and breaks in the spheres of the social, and its power to articulate them to a broader public.

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