Bilingual-Bicultural Homogeneity for Sale

In the world of chinonges, of difficult relationships, ruled by violence and suspicion—a world in which no one opens out or surrenders himself—ideas and accomplishments count for little. The only thing of value is manliness, personal strength, a capacity for imposing oneself on others.

Labyrinth of Solitude
Octavio Paz

You can keep your Californian ways, your New Mexican manners, your midwestern style. Somos hermanos, somos raza. Somos hermanos until we disagree, then out comes the dagger in the name of el movimiento. Your roots shall be questioned, your motives made suspect. Te hacen mierda, but don't worry, it's all in the interest of the common good. The common good as seen through eyes twisted by the need for power. If you question or doubt you have fallen prey to the white man's ways. Your honesty is naive, your ethics laughable. They have shown you the way—now follow.

It is useless to resist the pearl drop smile, the movements smooth and slow, the battle cry "Chicanopowerdeghamariza," the favors, the gifts. Inflame your chest and allow the wind to sift through your lacquered locks. By all means avoid trust and sensitivity, they are exceedingly messy and will only spoil your polish. Trade in your mind for their friendship. They shall swaddle you with their political, stuff you with their words. Pay homage to your model—Mr. Chicanosuper Stud, the smile before you the finger behind, self-appointed carrier of the scales of Chicanoism. He offers acceptance, just hand him your mind.

Discipline, Mr. Stud, pero soy personas y quiero ser, and I don't need you to tell me how. My dreams aren't up for barter and I won't submit myself to the choice of any man—white or brown. Sehor Chingon, your pendejadas are leading el movimiento down a path white than any one I've known. You are grinding our spirits and filtering them through your myopic views. But this one won't go. This one does not need the comfort of uniformity. This one can see the insecurity behind your facade, the corrosive potential of your acts. This one can listen and will be listened to.

Dos Poemas

Este Lado Del Sol
"Sunnyside"
Bloody roots, Bloody leaves
Smell of Burning Flesh
Viento de animal muerto y perro mojado
Escurriendo con yerbas sangrantes
Vida Prima
Gotas de Amor
sonando en chorro
de llamas encarnadas
Sacritz engranghado de Amor Golpado

Low Moon
Caught in the brushing sage of Arizona
Slow Moon
Drifting into flooding rivers of crying chihauras
Fluid gleam of rising golden Moon
Weaving through dark wet needled trees
Cuse esta tierra hecha parras

Raza Art and Media Collective, Inc.
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Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109
Non-Profit Organization
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To our Audience

The Raza Art and Media Collective is a non-profit corporation at The University of Michigan. It came into existence in the winter of 1975 when several persons in the arts and media felt the need to give expression and visibility to the art and media of our raza. Work on the Journal began in the fall of that year. We take art and media to mean the gamut of print, pictorial and broadcast enterprises which entertain, educate, inform society. Information and expression are premium commodities and La Raza has been denied these valuable tools. As such, the Collective has set for itself the following goals:

1. To organize, create, and utilize various artistic/media resources, both public and private, for the enrichment, education, and enlightenment of the Spanish-speaking population of the State of Michigan.

2. To provide for the financial, intellectual, and physical support of the unique Spanish-speaking artistic/media needs.

3. To serve as a model for the Spanish-speaking peoples in their struggle to end stereotypes in the arts and media by the projection of a Raza aesthetic.

4. To document the continuing Spanish-speaking culture through public exhibits, publications, films, archives, and other media projects.

5. To serve as an instrument for the training of those Spanish-speaking individuals and groups in their specific artistic/media pursuits.

6. To serve as a facilitator, both private and public, between the general population and the Spanish-speaking when there are educational concerns regarding the arts and media.

Through the Raza Art and Media Collective Journal, the organization hopes to offer an outlet for articles, poetry, reviews, art work, and other material by Raza contributors. The Journal shall be a forum for the exploration of the Raza aesthetic.

Anna L. Cardona
Michael J. Garcia
Sixi Gonzalez
George Vargas
S. Zaneta K.
Vargas Zaragoza
Vargas

On the Masthead

The ancient Mexicans worshipped duality and myth. Life was death; gods were human and animal. Central to this philosophy was the wholeness of the universe.

Drawing on these many beliefs, rethinking myths, and delving into theistic psyche, George Vargas created this masthead figure.

Inspired by a scene from the Codex Fejervary-Mayor, Vargas mixed myths, symbolism, and illusion to define this raza figure. The scene depicts the Mixtec god, Ometecuhil, in a role as supreme deity breathing life into a man/woman (the skull) via the fire-butterfly.

The Vargas drawing is in reality a skillful interpretation of parts to create an illusionary whole. What appears to be wings are representative of a Quetzalcoatl dualism—two plumed serpents. Topping the figure are antennae which could be those of television and radio.

Replacing the traditional crossedboned skull with the crow quill and the paintbrush, the artist points to literature and art as representative of raza strength.

This skull rests on an artist’s palette of colors of the imagination. Equally symbolic is the symmetry employed. The figure can be divided and redivided. But in the center is the omnipresent eye (television, god, CIA?). Aztec legend tells of the four worlds and suns with the fifth sun, “quinto sol,” as the unifying center. The fire-butterfly is surrounded by an aura of figure “8’s”—the symbol for infinity and for the mathematical brain teaser, the Mobius strip.

Given the importance of myth, literature, arts, and the media within the movement we can consider the figure as a worthy symbol of future endeavors.
Raza Art

"It is impossible, I feel, in this time when communications are so open, to set out deliberately to make an art which is Mexican, or American or Chinese or Russian. I think in terms of universality. Art is a way of expression that has to be understood by everybody, everywhere. It grows out of the earth, the texture of our lives and our experiences."

Rafino Tamayo, would seem with these words, to have taken a stand against the feasibility of a national or ethnic art; yet these very words provide the raison d'être for raza art. To say that the texture of life experienced on Manhattan’s upper east side is understood in Adrian, Michigan; San Antonio, Texas; or as close as Fox Street in the Bronx is a simplification of reality. To say that the experiences of these places are readily understood in New York galleries would be a distortion of the truth. The fact of the matter is that although there does exist a universal core of human experience, this core has been covered over, built upon, torn apart, taken from some and given to others. Traditionally the Chicano and Puerto Rican, along with other people of the Americas, have been denied the legitimacy of their experiences and have been told to identify with nothing. Any identifiable product of the melting-pot fallacy. The raza artist has like the Black artist revolted against this cultural disenchancement and has reacted in ways similar to that described by Ralph Ellison.

"By climbing out of the melting pot and recapitulating my Puerto Rican past, I had the possibility of arriving at an authentic Puerto Rican presentation. I can envisage a future that would free me and other Puerto Ricans from the oppressive colonial notions which have left us with counterfeit identities."  

Those who would promote the development of an art along ethnic lines contend that from a common experience there does emerge a unique way of seeing and visual expression. On the other hand, it is argued that an unlabeled work of art defies identification according to specific groups. Although the latter viewpoint would appear to hold true at the present time, it is necessary to point out that it is helpful to examine several factors contributing to this. It should be remembered that the raza artists are products of the American educational system. As such, those who pursue art educations should be equipped with an inter-
national visual vocabulary and technical background, history, media, and instruments. This international visual vocabulary is one which claims not to concern itself with nationality or ethnicity. Expressions which derive from this are excluded from art historical study or considered a lower form of aesthetic expression. Therefore, one hears the criticism that raza art is political propaganda; that the implication is that it immediately sets itself apart from fine art. Art for art’s sake appears to be the mother force behind much art education and criticism.

Felipe Reyes, a Chicano from San Antonio, worked with a group of artists in 1967 called Galerias Almanza. These Chicano artists gathered over a period of several months to hear lectures by Chicanos on techniques of drawing and organization of the picture plane. Several series of pencil drawings resulted from this. In an interview with Reyes on March 20, 1975, he claimed that in working with this group he saw and felt that Chicanos had a certain way of drawing and that developments made as a result of the lectures were incorporated by the artists into their work. It is significant, therefore, that this potential system is a contributing factor to the erosion of national and ethnic boundaries in art. Furthermore, an educational system to encourage the development of diverse artistic formulae for the highly possible potential of Chicanos is not a qualitatively peculiar to different minority groups would emerge. This diversity would be an enrichment of art in integrated systems.

Folk art is an area in which the erosion of national and ethnic boundaries is not as strongly felt. For example, it is generally acceptable to speak of American Indian folk traditions. Both schools have unique stylistic features which are the personal concerns of individual artists. This fact supports the contention that communication and involvement with the mainstreams of culture results in an equalization of the artistic vocabulary. Chelo Gonzalez Amecuzco of Laredo, Texas, is one of the Chicanos who has not received a formal art education; nor does she claim familiarity with cultural forms. For many years produced tilepoint, ballpoint pen drawings on paper and cardboard. Her drawings of god-like figures are set before dazing linear patterns and bear no ties to current art movements. Her isolation, similar to that of the traditional folk artist, has maintained the intuitive purity of her form.

This is not to say that raza artists should retreat from the larger world in which they live. In most cases this approach would be not only artificial but professionally and economically disastrous. In actuality, since the late 60’s there has been a reorientation from their former isolation into activist roles. The involvement of raza artists in the socio-political movement came from a recognition of the similarity between problems identified by the movement and those faced by themselves as artists. The question as identified by Reyes became, “How can we as artists contribute to the movement?” The answer was found through the organization of art work around issues of la causa. As a result of this there exists a corpus of Chicano art while having superficial relations to the pop, conceptual, and poster movements in American art, has at the same time a base in the reality of the Chicano experience.

Chicano and Puerto Rican art will of necessity be disparate and will of necessity partake of its mestizo polarity. Whereas the art of the 60’s was socially oriented, recent years have seen the development of a respect for differences of ideology, process and approach. This respect is now broadening and deepening dimensions for more valid communication.

"There is a resistance, from the Chicanos, against assimilation into a “pure” Mexican and public American society. Dissatisfaction with the process of synthesis of these cultures in varying dosages as suits personal and group tastes, with the idea that it never loses its identity as a culture of synthesis and independence."

The concept of a culture under siege is one which all minority groups in America share. In order to share in this social process, the idea that they are entitled, they have in the past been forced to reject their biculturalism. In order to combat this, raza artists and others have proposed the process of cultural succession with the hope that through this program the Chicano will graphically develop. The tension between the two groups is feasible, and a new cycle of cultural exchange is a possibility. The general public is gaining recognition of the need for a raza art movement and the need to develop a consciousness of the cultural past and to encourage the newer movements.

Chicano art is becoming a part of the national and local networks, the Federal Communications Commission, the advertising industry, the foundations, and with Chicano programs.

The range of Chicano diversity has yet to be reached by the major television and public broadcasting networks. But the educational television stations "Carrascolendas" and "Villa Alegre" have come closest to this ideal. Their positive dealings with biculturalism, bi-culturalism, and barrio life stand out in the "wasteland."

Solutions lie with the national and local networks, the Federal Communications Commission, the advertising industry, the foundations, and with Chicanos.

Cost is a primary consideration. Financing a national television network should be a priority. Regardless of whether the networks change, Chicano must consider this. Here would be the outlet for responsible brown television programming. Local talent and issues must be ceded. More Chicano need be hired. These and those already employed will produce relevant brown shows.

The ratings game must never be allowed to affect the status of Chicano programming. Chicano programs should be diverse to reach all brown audiences. Here, the FCC should be gauged by an Anglo audience. Raza is not an imitation of other cultures. It is a mosaic and does stand for multi-culturalism.

A more activist stance by the Federal Communications and public broadcasting networks and affiliates to hire more Chicanos. Likewise, the FCC must become more conscious of Chicano stereotypes. More licenses should be revoked because of discrimination in hiring and promotion.

If enough opposition is generated, advertisers will be compelled to terminate sponsorship of offensive programs. Boycotts of these sponsors can be successful. Advertisements which point out the importance of Chicano consumers would be a very powerful weapon.

Foundations have played a singular role in funding those few shows which have been a credit to raza. Their support should not be allowed to falter. The federal network should take the lead and reward all agencies involved in producing acceptable television shows. Tax breaks for networks would help boost Chicano input into public and commercial television.

Perhaps the television would make possible Chicano financial control of the networks.

A fund realized from a license fee on all new television receivers could be tapped. Federal legislation mandating all networks to set aside funds for the establishment of a minority network would be a step in the right direction.

Legislation appears to be the most potent tool in combating commercial television insensitivity. This cannot be construed as censorship but as legislation allowing Chicano access to commercial networks.

Television and the entire media institution must be thought of as a priority. Television standards are set by agencies dealing with the Chicano as the ridiculous, the criminal, and the perpetually diseased one. More brown programs and bodies must counter this affront through media, journalistic, and broadcast organizations.

Media can no longer be considered peripheral. Raza must educate itself to the power and impact of commercial television. The resources, talent, and audience await the true birth of the Chicano on commercial television.

Jesse Gonzales

Notes


These are the words to the music. The tune is the type that remains in your head, floating, in limbo. Music from cactus and buzzards. Tones emitted from cactus when the eagle lands, snake in mouth. The land with its soft sighs, near gasps, in the pocket of the sun. The moon steals its position, a ball player at Monte Albán, kicking shadows, elbowing light, denying time's short brunette frames.

The steamy worries, the whispering children who hang like frozen stalactites with their heads cradled in their arms, their feet and legs together into nothing. The water drips off of, landing, sounding off sound waves that sink into walls of caves, music sponges. S. Zeneta Kosiba Vargas

(Jose Gonzales)
Commercial Television and the Chicano, 1975

In October 1975 the A. C. Nielsen Company, a national television ratings organization, released a special analysis of its October-November 1974 ratings in which Chicanos were left out as members of "non-white" television viewing households. Nevertheless, "Chico and the Man," a show with a "Chicano lead," was ranked as an extremely popular show among both non-white and white households.

These two items should surprise no one. Commercial television is simultaneously ignorant and deliberate in its dealings with Chicanos. What passes for Chicano fare on the national airways is not a reflection of Chicano life, culture, or reality. There is a Chicano viewing audience which would appreciate raza programs.

A glance at the "TV Guide" magazine will alarm viewers because of the dearth of truthful raza related shows. There are presently few national programs which purport to have either Chicano actors, portrayals, themes, or locales. An example of these shows are "Chico and the Man," "Marcus Welby," and "Joe Forrester." Public networks currently carry two excellent children's shows, "Villa Alegre" and "Carrascolendas."

"Chico and the Man" stars neither a Chicano nor does the locale suggest East Los Angeles. Elena Verdugo portrays the young-Chico receptionist in the "Marcus Welby" series. The violent barrio is the setting for the humane and understanding policeman, "Joe Forrester."

Past television series are just as guilty in portraying the Chicano as the ridiculous, criminal, and the helpless. Would "Zorro," "The Cisco Kid," or "High Chaparral" win any Chicano awards?

Given this scarcity of Chicano shows; this criminal, violent, and subservient image; this utter disregard for Chicano intelligence, we can only assume that commercial television broadcasters have bestowed a non-entity status on raza.

Surprisingly, television has accomplished this through the situation comedy, the western, the police story, the medical story—fictional stories! Raza fares no better when the news commentary concentrates on poverty, drugs, and ethnic celebrations. While it is important that these problems and events be disclosed, they do not represent the full totality of Chicano life.

Chicanos number approximately 9 million almas. With television ownership as high as 95% of the population, this hopeless situation must be challenged and rectified. Raza can no longer abide by such media treatment as it can no longer entertain past injustices.

Not only does this treatment give added fuel to those who would rather keep Chicanos underfoot, it also causes intellectual damage to both raza and the general population. Numerous educational, psychological, and sociological studies have underscored the importance of image as a factor in brown success-failure statistics.

El Pozo de los Enanos:
For those who swear they’re not to blame

Forgetting the compromises of the day through stars
we come down from the loft of special skies
Arriving by taxi, impersonating angels with folded wings
immaculately groomed yet having no recollection of doing such a thing

We enter a dead rectangle, fully staffed and with maid service
where we find drama all over, hanging from giant Gingko trees in delicious colors

Turning from side to side to see and be seen by faceless people
who outnumber themselves two to one
who look at chairs and open doors forgetting who they are and
what they are

We see them through the obscure and elusive voices that shout
supposed triumphs over disconnected phones to the shadows
of hungry women representing perfection but not quite
formal that kill the very thing that they stand for

Today and Tomorrow are the same: A blank check
Time is a dream: the eyes of Aporainyte’s Chinese cats;
each blink a second, each glassy stare a millennium
Distant cries at sea mingle with the accusing laughter of the
"Make it happy" dwarf dressed like a Spanish man who leaves
down to let people touch his deformed hands or to bless infants

Through a window a passing locomotive presses
its pouting lips on the forehead of the lost tribes
tired of raising the wind that attempts to identify us by name
as three years ago Pretends to love us so much

We Become me, me becomes her
She disappears and reappears as we
and among influenced minds on a frog somewhere between
demurred shock and Lake Catemaco we fall asleep and dream
together hoping our dream becomes a realization
because it is too late to point a finger at life
Zaragosa Vargas
(Ni es o es)