

Heterogeneity in California Chicana/o Muralism

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Willie Herrón's mural, *The Wall that Cracked Open* (1972) (See Fig. 1-2), critically influenced the practice of mural-making in California. The artist executed this mural at a time when more laudatory images of Chicana/o nationalist ideology were prevalent in various barrios and neighborhoods throughout California. The struggles of the Chicano Movement had created a generation of politically conscious artists who decided to take messages of social justice and equality to the streets through the use of the public mural. But Herrón not only challenged the prevalent nationalist aesthetic of the time, he called attention to the wall as a physical and discursive site of cultural signification. Functioning as a meta-mural, *The Wall that Cracked Open* underscored the constructedness of mural imagery. Herrón unraveled the illusions behind visual representations and stressed the two-dimensionality of the wall surface. In doing so, the artist was implicitly putting into question the validity and so-called "reality" of mural imagery connected to the Chicano Movement. This work also functioned as a metaphor for what began happening to Chicana/o muralism already in the early 1970s. "The wall that cracked open" that Herrón referred to in this wall painting operates in this article as a metaphor for the disintegration or coming-apart-at-the-seams that muralism began to undergo as an art form. The signs of this transmutation became evident when Chicana/o muralists became more introspective and self-reflective about their own practice, and their aesthetics became increasingly heterogeneous.

In this mural, Herrón painted an illusionistic crack on the wall that revealed various faces trying to break away from the mural's confines; these included, as described by Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino, "a gang-victimized bleeding young man, fighting youth, and a crying grandmother."^[1] The mural's location, a back alley in City Terrace, East Los Angeles, established a direct connection between muralism and the creative expressions of graffiti artists and/or taggers. Furthermore, Herrón created his composition around the pre-existing graffiti calligraphy on that wall and, as a symbol of respect, subsequent taggers inscribed their *placas* [signature graphic] around Herrón's design thereby establishing an informal collaboration between the two. The artist painted *The Wall that Cracked Open* as a reaction to his younger brother's brutal stabbing in that very alley. The mural then was the result of the artist's visceral reaction to this near tragedy. Though Herrón's brother survived the attack, the theme of death and despair saturated the mural.

The use of muralism as a viable form for political and cultural expression certainly was not an unquestionable creative choice for Chicana/o artists. While this particular art form

seemed to most appropriately fit the ideals of the Chicano Movement, the notion that all Chicana/o artists painted murals became increasingly contested as early as the 1970s. When I spoke to Chicana artist Yreina Cervántez in the fall of 2000, she voiced to me her concern for what she saw to be the backlash against muralism carried out by many Chicana/o artists who felt their own artistic production had become a cliché. Though it is true that most of these artists worked in a variety of forms, murals seemed to be the identifying artistic vehicle to generate a political consciousness during the Chicano Movement. The questioning of the prevalent Chicano mural aesthetic ushered a general attitude of self-critique and contemplation on the part of Chicana/o artists regarding the validity of their creative endeavors. Simultaneously, the mural's form and content were inadvertently pushed to a greater diversification and heterogeneity in the atmosphere of growing transnationalism and globalization that characterized the last three decades of the twentieth century. Responding to the post-modern predicaments of the actual urban environments that inspired the early Chicana/o murals associated with *el movimiento*, [the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s] Chicana/o artists had to modify the medium so that it could accommodate itself to the ever-changing reality of the public spheres. This growing heterogeneity, however, prevented art historians like Shifra Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto from providing static definitions of Chicana/o muralism that agreed with the pre-existing vocabulary formulated around contemporary art.

Indigenism, as an aesthetic and ideology, became the starting point for a greater heterogeneity in Chicana/o creative expressions. Drawing from José Vasconcelos's notions about the formation of a cosmic race, Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about Indigenist identity as a crucial element of the new *mestiza's* cultural and social consciousness: "Indigenous like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding under a variety of conditions."^[2] Anzaldúa stripped mestizaje of the essentialism that Vasconcelos had advocated and reformulated it to include the previously marginalized experiences of women and lesbians.

Originating within the fields of science and technology, heterogeneity is often defined as the state in which a whole can only exist when different or dissimilar parts hold together its structure. In Post-Colonial Studies, heterogeneity and hybridity have often been used interchangeably or in conjunction with one another. Within this context, the concept refers to the expressions in colonized societies that display elements from multiple cultural origins. Post-Colonial writers Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out how hybridity is "a strength rather than a weakness" and that the phenomenon "stresses the mutuality of the [colonizing] process."^[3] But the subtle distinction between hybridity and heterogeneity rests on who exhibits these traits. In other words, hybridity assumes that it is the colonized, *not* the colonizer, who is transformed; heterogeneity, on the other hand, does not imply such an assumption. While hybridity often requires a colonial or post-colonial setting, heterogeneity thrives in more generalized environments of cultural exchange.

Michel Foucault has described the nature of knowledge as an intrinsically heterogeneous one. He explained that the breadth of human knowledge, no matter how diverse and seemingly contradictory, is contained within what he called an archive, that is, "a complex volume, in which heterogeneous regions are differentiated or deployed, in accordance with specific rules and practices that cannot be superposed."^[4] If we apply his

vision of knowledge to culture then we can propose that cultural expressions too co-exist and interact in function of one another where no one manifestation takes precedence over the other. Moreover, cultural critic Nelson García Canclini, though captivated by the presence of hybridity in Latin America, found that “the study of cultural heterogeneity [provided] one of the routes to explain how oblique powers can infiltrate liberal institutions [...], how democratic social movements affect paternalist regimes and how these transact with one another [my translation].”^[5] Given that using the word "colonization" when it comes to discussing the status of Chicanas/os vis à vis U.S. dominant culture is often problematic and reductive, speaking of heterogeneity in their work is more suitable when discussing the free flow of cultural capital across different social and cultural spheres.

The changes in the social and cultural context during the last three decades of the twentieth century also gave rise to a different generation of Chicana/o artists. While most of the artists who participated in the early phases of the Chicana/o mural movement like Manuel Cruz and Antonio Bernal were largely self-taught community artists, many of those who came of age in the 1980s and 90s had earned Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts from reputable universities, as was the case of Yreina Cervántez and Alma López both of whom graduated with art degrees from UCLA and UC Irvine, respectively, while Yolanda López graduated from UC San Diego. Many Chicana/o artists did feel ambivalent and sometimes downright negative about their own education. Judy Baca, for instance, felt that when she returned to East Los Angeles from college, her art degree became irrelevant.^[6] Nonetheless, through their education their worldview was inevitably altered. Perhaps the most notable difference seen in the work of the likes of Cervántez and Baca was their treatment of local versus global concerns. The site-specificity of many community murals was complicated by the broader perspective that these artists acquired in college. Their new attitudes did not necessarily do away with the local concerns that affected life in the barrio; quite the contrary, artists were now ever more conscious of how national or global phenomena affected the unique experiences of the barrio. Their experience in academia gave them a more comprehensive vision regarding how the local interacted and conversed with the universal.

Though the Indigenism formulated by many Chicana/o artists seemed to be almost synonymous with a specifically Mexican subjectivity, this aesthetic loosened the rigidity of the Chicano nationalist canon. In the same way in which Indigenism for thinkers like José Vasconcelos and Alfonso Caso offered a kind of springboard for discussions about mestizaje, Indigenism for Chicanas/os provided a framework through which to address their simultaneous sensibilities and overlapping identities. Moreover, many Chicana/o artists were influenced by the government-funded modern Mexican mural movement of the 20s and 30s which was heavily informed by Indigenist aesthetics. Both mural phases, the Mexican and the Chicana/o periods, sought to include the community in its greater diversity into the national culture.

Political and cultural currents like the Chicano Movement and its accompanying nationalist mural renaissance fall within a movement/post-movement dynamic. The rise of cultural phenomena like the Chicano Movement is often characterized by unusually innovative and creative responses to oppressive and/or marginalizing systems. The often radical character of *el movimiento*, however, prevented other equally disempowered groups

from partaking in its activities thereby creating a post-movement.^[7] The reactionary and often marginalized Chicana/o post-movement sought to re-define and contest the goals of the “original” movement, in particular its nationalist proclivities, as explained by Ramón García:

From traditional Mexican culture, Chicano nationalism extracted the glorious image of the Aztec, the Mexican revolutionary and Aztlán, transforming them into myths. That these mythologies would later reveal themselves an ineffective and politically bankrupt should come as no surprise, for as Roland Barthes has postulated, myth is always on the side of power and ideology, and not on the side of history or reality.^[8]

Speaking in more general terms, even though a post-movement can often propose diametrically opposed discourses to those of the movement, its very existence is dependent or relative to the latter. In many cases, post-movements tend to emerge when movements become institutionalized or dogmatic. But certainly the more interesting and cutting-edge examples of post-movements are those that occur almost immediately after the onset of the movements themselves. Such was the case of Asco, an artistic collective from East Los Angeles whose name loosely translates into English as “nausea” or “disgust”^[9] and whose primary form of artistic production was the street performance. Founded by Harry Gamboa Jr., Willie Herrón, Patssi Valdez and Gronk in 1972, Asco, as pointed out by Howard Fox, “operated more or less within the Chicano movement, but as the *enfant terrible* of the family.”^[10] Though they were conversant with artists who were associated with the Chicano Movement, they never really felt part of this phenomenon. Gronk in particular expressed his anxiety about the artistic and cultural isolation they felt in East Los Angeles:

We didn’t have the same kind of Marxist agenda or sensibility [that other Chicana/o artistic collectives had]. It was more spontaneous [for us]. Instead of having to take [inspiration] from the streets and put it in our work, we were in the streets doing work.... We were just a rumor to a lot of people for the longest time, and sort of thought of us as drug addicts, perverts. All kinds of names were hurled at us by other Chicano artists.... But we were not accepted by the mainstream art gallery kind of Westside thing either. So we were on our own to develop our own way.^[11]

By the early 1970s Asco was already contesting what had become the trademark artform of the Chicano Movement, muralism. In a staged interview that took place at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1975, Herrón and Gronk expressed with satiric humor their views on the status of muralism:

NEWORLD: What’s your definition of art?

GRONK: Antonin Artaud: “No more masterpieces!”

HERRÓN: I don’t have one. I’m not that old.

NEWORLD: What would you like to see?

HERRÓN: People taking murals less seriously. I’d like to see Siqueiros come back to life in City Terrace [East Los Angeles].

GRONK: As a bumblebee.

HERRÓN: I’d like to receive Orozco’s left arm in the mail by Gronk.^[12]

The tongue-in-cheek tone of this exchange seemed like a blasphemy to those who revered muralism's ostensible capability to politicize a community. Not only were Herrón and Gronk contesting the importance of muralism to Chicana/o artists, but they were also poking fun at the Mexican muralists and their reputation as the predecessors to the current mural movement. They also found the nationalist aesthetic often attached to muralism to be out of touch with the everyday lived reality of the streets, as explained by Gronk: "I don't do Virgins of Guadalupe. I don't do corn goddesses. I can only do what I'm about, and I'm an urban Chicano living in a city."^[13] Asco were not so much seeking to ridicule muralism, but rather to elevate it "from a static medium to one of performance,"^[14] as stated by Harry Gamboa himself. The group's irreverent attitude toward the state of artistic production in East Los Angeles made them perhaps one of the most astute critics of an artform they themselves had practiced (both Gronk and Willie Herrón had executed murals prior to and after joining Asco.)

On Christmas Eve, 1972, Herrón, Valdez, Gronk and Gamboa took to the streets of East L.A. to stage their performance later titled *Walking Mural* (See Fig. 3). Taking place on Whittier Boulevard, three members of Asco paraded down the street in very distinct guises: Valdez was dressed as the Virgin of Guadalupe, Gronk as a Christmas tree and Herrón as a "multifaced mural that had become bored with its environment and left," as described by Gamboa who photographed and filmed the event.^[15] Aside from lamenting a mural's perceived physical and discursive stagnation, in this particular performance the members of Asco removed the mural from its site specificity and turned it into yet another icon (or cliché) associated with the Chicana/o culture alongside the Guadalupe and the Christmas tree. To further transgress muralism as a consecrated artform, the group included three protruding heads on the surface of this walking mural, one of which was Herrón's own; the effect lent a sculptural quality to the piece that defied the flatness commonly associated with murals. These faces also rather humorously resembled the tripartite face that symbolized mestizaje, an image often seen in Chicana/o community murals.^[16] With this street intervention, Asco had lampooned various icons that were dear to the Chicano Movement and its accompanying artistic renaissance. Though performance art would be championed by the likes of the Border Arts Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo from the Tijuana/San Diego border region later in the 1980s, in the early 70s the artform was introduced to the California Chicana/o art scene by Asco. The group articulated performance as the diametrical opposite to muralism. While they saw murals as static, performance was dynamic and fluid; while murals possessed a history that dated back thousands of years, performance, as a *visual* artform, was a relatively new phenomenon. In most aspects, wall paintings were more closely associated with the Chicana/o Indigenist aesthetic, but performance included an element of ritual that seemed not unlike indigenous forms of cultural expression in the American continent.^[17]

Chicana artists as early as the 1970s also redefined muralism and its prevailing nationalist vocabulary and reinscribed them with feminist readings. Judy Baca has been at the forefront of this initiative. Her work has been critical in reformulating the Chicana/o Indigenist aesthetic commonly seen in murals and in developing new media to make murals. The founding of the UCLA César Chávez Digital Mural Lab within SPARC in 1996 introduced computer technology to the practice of community muralism.^[18] Functioning in conjunction with Chicano Studies in UCLA, the lab became the site of a class entitled

“Beyond the Mexican Mural – Muralism and Community Development” taught by Baca herself. The lab is equipped with high-speed computers, printers and scanners, and possesses its own server for the storage of images which can be accessed remotely with a password. The murals are generally created with the latest version of the Photoshop software which allows Baca and her students to use a combination of pre-existing imagery and original artwork seamlessly together in the same composition. The SPARC digital murals are generally printed on mylar which makes them easily portable. While many Chicana/o muralists have been concerned with the conservation of their work, a digital mural can be reprinted should it become destroyed. The cost of reprinting a mural, however, usually runs in the thousands of dollars, as explained to me by Enrique Gonzales, the SPARC Lab Technician.^[19]

The introduction of digital technology to the community mural scene has, nevertheless, problematized the practice of mural-making. From the standpoint of several Chicana/o artists, the power of community muralism is most concretely felt during its actual on-site production when artist and community collaborate and interact. Digital murals, however, are made in the comparatively more isolating environment of a computer lab. Gonzales insisted to me that the SPARC digital murals are also made in the community context. Not only are they produced in collaboration with the UCLA students who take Baca’s class, but they are also made in consultation with various community members through the internet. If modern mural movements came to be synonymous with community making then digital murals radically re-defined concepts of community. No longer bound by considerations of space, place, and time, digital murals appealed to a community defined only by their input into the creation of these computerized images.

Another aspect of digital murals that seems to counter prevailing notions about community muralism is that they are not made *in situ*, that is, they are specific to any particular neighborhood or area thereby severing that connection with space and place that other murals have. If digital murals have a connection to a particular space, it’s a fluid and porous one; it is the shifting place of wherever these murals may be installed or it is the ambiguous domain of cyberspace given that lower resolution versions of these murals can be easily accessed through the SPARC official website (www.sparcmurals.org).

By using digital and information technology for community muralism, Baca and her students understood the heterogeneous relationship between the social and the technological to which certain cultural critics alluded. For example, sociologist Mike Michael observed how discussions about technological developments usually ignored the social circumstances that brought them about subsequently realizing that “the social and the technological cannot be easily disentangled or distinguished...[and that] technologies are shot through with social relations, and vice versa.”^[20] Moreover, Baca’s use of this technology can be regarded as the indirect outcome of globalization near the end of the twentieth century. Globalization, which was certainly aided by the advent of information technology, has been the result of capitalist and post-colonial institutions of power extending their reach across national borders. David Lyon has argued that these institutions, nevertheless, “tend to have a negative effect on the indigenous development of Third World communities. Their presence all too often benefits only metropolitan elites rather than rural subsistence farmers or migrant shanty town dwellers.”^[21] In California itself, people of color too were excluded from the benefits of globalization and the information era. In fact, southern California was the unsuspecting

neighbor but also complicit partner of the *maquiladora* industry in Tijuana where entire communities still continue to work for meager wages.

By using tools that have been traditionally denied to marginalized communities, Baca turned the tables on the world order ushered in by globalization. She used the strategies of the oppressor, so to speak, to empower the oppressed. A similar tactic had been used by native Mexican groups like the Zapatistas in Chiapas whose first communiqués and political manifestoes were transmitted via the internet much before their activities were known to the mainstream press. Baca tapped into a relatively recent yet powerful tradition of indigenous groups utilizing technology to further their political causes.

One of the first undertakings that Baca embarked on with her students at the Digital Mural Lab was the *Witness to LA History* project, begun in 1997. Similar to her *Great Wall of Los Angeles*, this initiative sought to create a series of digital murals dealing with the experiences of cultural minorities during key historical moments of the city. The students were not only expected to collaborate in producing the imagery, they also conducted research to obtain material about the different facts of the city's history. One of the most poignant murals of the series is the one that celebrates Los Angeles indigenous history entitled *Toyoporina*. Composed entirely of pre-existing imagery, Baca and her students utilized Photoshop to layer together the different levels of history they were seeking to restore. The mural is a tribute to Toyoporina, a young Native American woman who, at the age of 23, organized an uprising against the San Gabriel Mission in southern California during the 19th century.^[22] Using the image of an anonymous Tongva Indian woman to stand in for Toyoporina, Baca and her students placed her centrally in the composition amidst a backdrop of Franciscan monks. According to the UCLA students who worked on the project, the friars are there to represent “the constant scrutiny and dehumanization of the native people.”^[23] Toyoporina's body reveals tattoo-like images borrowed from a conquest codex showing the hanging bodies of executed Native Americans. What might have been seen as anachronistic at the height of the Chicano Movement - creating an Indigenist work of art utilizing state-of-the-art technology – here Baca and her students present it as the perfect marriage between form and content.

Another series that came out of the SPARC Digital Mural lab was the *Los Angeles Tropical* project in 2000. The idea for the series emerged out of the continuing efforts to clean and conserve Siqueiros's *America Tropical* mural in Olvera Street.^[24] Baca and her students were cognizant of this particular mural's importance to Mexican-American history in Los Angeles. The often frustrating efforts to renovate the mural led by the Getty Institute and conscientious conservators and historians like Shifra Goldman, Jesús Salvador Treviño, Jean Bruce Poole and Luis Garza echoed the disappointments experienced by the city's Mexican populations. Inaugurated in August of 2000 during the Democratic convention,^[25] *Los Angeles Tropical* was part of a mural center built at the bottom of the stairway that leads to Siqueiros's famous wall painting, now part of the city's historic downtown area.^[26] Wall-size prints of the city were produced and mounted on the walls of the entryway that would lead to *America Tropical*. The series not only illustrated how Siqueiros's work and activities were intimately connected to the history of Los Angeles but also how Baca's own work belonged to the same artistic genealogy as that of the celebrated Mexican School.^[27]

The centerpiece for the *Los Angeles Tropical* series was placed on Wall 1 of the aforementioned entryway and was entitled *Siqueiros*. Again utilizing the layering tool of Photoshop along with documentary photographs, Baca and her students took *Siqueiros*'s image of the crucified Indian from *America Tropical* and presented it as an allegory of the difficulties suffered by the city's ethnic and cultural minorities. Rather than using an older image of the mural, the artists chose to show this section of the mural as it currently appears in its faded and withered state. Using the magic of digital technology, the silhouette of the Indian here seems to be carved out of the very stone that makes up the wall. The glowing figure of *Siqueiros* himself appears behind the wall resembling a sort of secular saint, as he is busy at work on one of his murals, presumably *America Tropical*. *Siqueiros*'s crucified Indian as well as his contribution as an artist/activist operates here as transnational and transhistoric symbols of cultural and political resistance. The backdrop then reveals an aerial image of Los Angeles with the L.A. River at its center. Scattered through the urban landscape, we find various scenes belonging to the city's past: workers toiling in sweatshops, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans being forcibly deported from the U.S., crowds standing in breadlines, etc.^[28] But amidst all the despair, we see a sign of hope; the water of the L.A. River which is often very dry has been digitally restored to a deep blue and plentiful stream capable of nurturing the city from its misfortunes.

As Chicana/o artists sought increasingly diversifying means by which to express themselves, their visual vocabulary became more familiar to a larger community. There was also a great diversity of individuals who were not Chicanas/os, but were nevertheless familiar and cognizant of the significance of Mexican culture within the United States. These two phenomena often led to the migration of artistic forms, iconographic motifs and thematic context in and out of the Chicana/o cultural context. What were once considered to be specifically Mexican themes became more general signifiers of universal concerns. These discursive and aesthetic migrations were sometime the result of counter-hegemonic alliances among marginalized or politically conscious groups or just the outcome of the growing diversity within formerly Chicana/o or Mexican urban areas, as the case of the Mission District in San Francisco. Such was the case of *Madre Tonantzin*, a mural executed by Anglo-American artist Colette Crutcher on the corner of Sánchez and 16th street (See Fig. 4-6). The artist first made the mural in 1990 using only two-dimensional media for its creation, namely acrylic paint on wood. After a few years of being exposed to the elements, the mural began to deteriorate. Since this work was so well-loved and admired by the local residents, Crutcher decided to restore the mural. With the help of the NORCAL Waste Systems Artists-in-Residency Program and the support of the Sanitary Fill Company, the artist was able to gather the necessary resources for *Madre Tonantzin*'s restoration. But given her recent interest in the value and significance of recycling materials as a viable way to preserve the environment, Crutcher incorporated the practice into *Madre Totantzin*. "My interest in recycled materials stems from an innate thriftiness, disgust of the wastefulness of our society, and a love of the unexpected," she would later explain. Using scrap metal, mosaic as well as fiberglass and cast-resin, Crutcher transformed the flatness of her original design into a three-dimensional and sculptural mural in 1997.^[29]

Crutcher has commented that one of the reasons she enjoyed working with recycled materials was that, when re-used, these take on a new life. The idea seemed appropriate to the artist since *Madre Tonantzin* had enjoyed its new life when it was being restored. The theme of new life was also fitting for the mural's subject matter. Tonantzin was the Mother of Gods to the Aztecs, often evoked during childbirth and healing rituals. A shrine was erected in her honor on the hill of Tepeyac in what is now Mexico City. As it is commonly known by Mexicans on both sides of the border, Tepeyac was also the site where, during the colonial era, an Aztec Indian by the name of Juan Diego had his legendary vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe, her very first appearance on Mexican soil.^[30] Mesoamericanists and Colonialists alike observed that Tonantzin and the Guadalupe were subsequently evoked interchangeable by the Indians. In the same way that the worship or *orisas* in Cuban *santería* was revived in the veneration of Catholic saints, the Guadalupe's appearance in Tepeyac was regarded by Mexico's indigenous peoples as a second coming of Tonantzin.

Though in the 1960s and 70s it might have seemed anachronistic for a non-Chicana/o artist to work with themes associated with Mexican culture, the ever growing heterogeneity that has characterized cities like San Francisco during the last decades of the twentieth century made *Madre Tonantzin* the logical consequence of the times. Crutcher was inspired to do a mural about Tonantzin through her contact and counter-hegemonic alliances with Latina/o groups in the area. The artist had been an active member of the Coro Hispano de San Francisco, a chorus group dedicated to the performance and dissemination of Latin American and Iberian music. Her idea for *Madre Tonantzin* came from a song the Coro Hispano sung written by an Indian who had studied music with Catholic priests in Colonial Mexico. The song was dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe and Tonantzin simultaneously and it displayed the musical influence of both Spanish and Mexica cultures; in essence, it was a hybrid and syncretic song. Crutcher sought to achieve a similar aesthetic with her mural. Moreover, the artist created *Madre Tonantzin* with a specific patron in mind, namely Juan Pedro Gaffey, director of the Coro and owner of the house with the wooden fence on which the mural was painted.^[31]

Madre Tonantzin's iconography and style was the combination of the artist's imagination and research - especially during the renovation phase in 1997. Crutcher depicted the Mesoamerican goddess with her arms extended open. Here she is in control of the world's four elements: water, earth, fire and air. With her right arm she commands the flight of birds (air) and the blazes of underground molten strata (fire) while with her left she oversees the currents of the marine world (water) and the dynamics of the planet's vegetation (earth). Snakes stand in as her hair making Tonantzin here look like a cross between Medusa and the Coatlicue of Tenochtitlán who wore a skirt of writhing snakes. The presence of the snakes is also significant given that in Mesoamerican iconography these signify fertility thus echoing the theme of a renewed life Crutcher was exploring. Also like the Tenochtitlán Coatlicue, Tonantzin here wears a necklace made of hands, hearts and skulls. Her mosaic in-laid earrings depict images of the sun and moon alluding to the Mesoamerican concern with the duality of day and night. But the artist also makes Tonantzin's connection to colonialism's Christian legacy by placing a sculptural image of the *guadalupana* herself being held by the archangel Saint Michael in keeping with traditional representations. Crafted from sheets of metal,

Tonantzin radiates the same holy rays of light that emanate from the Virgin of Guadalupe. Crutcher, however, heightens this image's heterogeneity by including Oceanic-like pictographs imprinted on her body and by using an overall color-scheme reminiscent of Tibetan art.^[32]

In addition to the iconography, in *Madre Tonantzin* Crutcher included some textual definitions or English translations of Nahuatl words associated with Tonantzin. These definitions indicate that the artist hoped to educate a broader audience about ancient Mexican culture and spirituality. But these inscriptions also function as textual complements to the image itself; they extend the meaning of the mural's iconography. The references in the text to other Aztec goddesses like Chicomecohuatl, Coatlicue or Tlazolteotl speaks of their relationship to Tonantzin but also of the importance of female deities in Mesoamerican cultures. The mural's location in a rather ethnically-diverse area of San Francisco and the mostly European-American cultural background of the artist also makes this image a more general statement about women's agency and empowerment in the spiritual world. If heterogeneity refers to those elements that consist or are made up of dissimilar parts, then *Madre Tonantzin* displays a heterogeneous aesthetic because it reflects the coming together of various cultural spheres. Moreover, the mural was constructed with different forms of creative expression, namely the textual and the visual (and even the visual here is assembled through mixed media.) The work's heterogeneity is also representative of a multicultural feminism that has emerged on a global scale. The feminism of the 1960s and 70s was harshly criticized for excluding the contribution of women of color and of the so-called Third-World as well as for collapsing all feminine sensibilities and experiences into one. Multicultural feminism, on the other hand, rises from the real-life social and cultural contacts between different groups, as clarified by Ella Shohat:

As a situated practice, multicultural feminism takes as its starting point the cultural consequences of the worldwide movements and dislocations of peoples associated with the development of "global" and "transnational" capitalism.... The relational feminist approach demands moving beyond nation-bound and discipline-bound teaching, curating, and organizing.^[33]

The growing heterogeneous environments of urban centers like San Francisco have fostered multicultural feminist expressions like the one seen in *Madre Tonantzin*. The mural stemmed not from assumptions about the culture of the Other, but rather from the concrete familiarity and contact among different groups, relations that often present themselves in cities like San Francisco. In this mural, Tonantzin becomes a general allegory of cultural survival in the face of adversity. Since she is reincarnated and takes new form in the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe, she is also an allegory of overlapping and fluid identities and thereby appeals to communities other than that of women of color.

Post-colonial critics like Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha have observed that heterogeneity and hybridity often function as strategies of cultural survival for colonized populations. Artists working within community contexts in California exercised the heterogeneity in their work. Though ideologies like multiculturalism tended to homogenize and do away with cultural specificity, artists engaging in counter-hegemonic alliances were seeking to establish social relations in which the different participating entities could function effectively. California's cultural history has been claimed by numerous groups thereby making

the area one of the most politically contested regions in the United States. Given such a history, the state became an ideal platform for heterogeneous relations. But instead of proposing a dominant cultural model to represent California, various community artists pushed a multi-faceted and polyvalent image of the state, one that reflected the cross-cultural currents of everyday life.

With the increasing heterogeneity in Chicana/o Indigenist murals, the history of community muralism in California comes full circle. Though heterogeneity seemed to dissolve the categories that previously defined muralism, the medium underwent a transformation that fulfilled some of the objectives laid out by the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 70s. Nationalist imagery in Chicana/o murals had two principal goals from the onset: to legitimize the Mexican presence on U.S. soil, and to assert alternative and oppositional cultural expressions from the margins of dominant society. With the growing transnational and cross-cultural trends that have affected social relations in public urban spaces - where muralism often takes place - the distinction between the margin and the center was obscured. For instance, Chicana artist Juana Alicia's mural *Sanctuary* (1999), located at the San Francisco International Airport, exemplifies how many Chicana/o artists whose mural work was formerly confined to the barrios are now showcasing their work in mainstream venues. Without denying the existence of inequalities along racial, gender and class lines, the question of who commands official culture and who resides on the fringes of this culture can no longer be easily determined. In the urban context, the Indigenist murals created primarily by Chicana/o artists greatly contributed to cultural heterogeneity in California. The mainstreaming of Mexican art and culture constitutes one of the reasons why major museums like the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American Art and the Los Angeles County Museum are now exhibiting and collecting work by Chicana/o artists.

^[1] Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino, "Murales del Movimiento: Chicano Murals and the Discourses of Art and Americanization," in *Signs of the Heart: California Chicano Murals*, eds. Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993) 97.

^[2] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987) 103.

^[3] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 183.

^[4] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1972) 128.

^[5] Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1989) 15.

^[6] Information taken from a presentation delivered by Judy Baca at the University of Southern Indiana (Evansville, Indiana) April 20, 2002.

^[7] The concept of the post-movement was first introduced to me by scholar of U.S. Latina/o literature Rolando Romero.

^[8] Ramón García, "Against *Rasquache*: Chicano Identity and the Politics of Popular Culture in Los Angeles," *Critica: A Journal of Critical Essays* (Spring 1998) 3.

^[9] The idea for Asco's name came from a joint exhibition Gronk, Willie Herrón and Patsi Valdez put together. In it, they showed what they considered their worst work and appropriately titled it "Asco."

- They later kept the name for the artistic collective they would later form. Harry Gamboa Jr., *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 32.
- ^[10] Howard N. Fox, "Tremors in Paradise 1960-1980," in *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 227.
- ^[11] Jeffrey Rangel, "Oral Interview with Gronk, Los Angeles, January 20 & 23, 1997," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- ^[12] Gamboa 33.
- ^[13] "Oral History Interview with Gronk."
- ^[14] Gamboa 32.
- ^[15] Gamboa 79.
- ^[16] For a more detailed discussion of the tripartite face in Chicana/o community murals, see Chapter 2 of this volume.
- ^[17] Asco's choice of performance as an art form was surely informed by the popularity of the medium in the contemporary U.S. and European art scene. Modern art historian H.H. Arnason explained that by the "1970s so many artists embraced performance that it has been called the art form characteristic of the period." Nevertheless, like much Chicana/o artistic production
- ^[18] Baca has recently finished establishing a digital mural lab in Durango, Colorado, and is currently beginning motions to found one in Guadalupe, California, the site of her 1990 *Guadalupe Mural*.
- ^[19] All the general information about the SPARC Digital Mural lab was furnished by Enrique Gonzales during a conversation with the author at SPARC on July 25, 2000.
- ^[20] Mike Michael, *Reconnecting Culture, Technology and Nature: From Society to Heterogeneity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 18.
- ^[21] David Lyon, "The Information Society," in *Globalization: the Reader*, eds. John Beynon and David Dunkerley (New York: Routledge, 2000) 205.
- ^[22] The UCLA César Chávez/SPARC Digital Mural Lab (website), www.sparcmurals.org/product/dmln.html
- ^[23] Ibid.
- ^[24] For more information on David Alfaro Siqueiros's *America Tropical*, see Chapter 1.
- ^[25] Conversation with Enrique Gonzeles.
- ^[26] Cynthia Lee, "The Writing on the Wall," *UCLA Magazine* Fall 2000) 3.
- ^[27] To view how *Los Angeles Tropical* was laid out inside the entryway leading to *America Tropical*, see the foocial SPARC website at www.sparcmurals.com to download a QuickTime movie recreating the setup.
- ^[28] Lee 4.
- ^[29] All the information in this paragraph was obtained from a phone conversation held between the author and Colette Crutcher on June 15, 2002.
- ^[30] Castro 230.
- ^[31] Conversation with Crutcher. Since its execution, *Madre Tonantzin* has become the image that graces the main page of the Coro Hispano's website (www.corohispano.org).
- ^[32] Crutcher had come in contact with Tibetan art through an exhibition that had made its way to San Francisco while she was painting *Madre Tonantzin*.
- ^[33] Ella Shohat, ed. *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998) 1.