# Introduction

The only hope for a Revolution, lies in getting Elvis Presley to become Che Guevara.
—Phil Ochs via El Vez

In the summer of 1995, El Vez, the "Mexican Elvis," along with his backup singers and band, The Lovely El Vettes and the Memphis Mariachis, served as the master of ceremony for the first show ever of its kind to take place at the Mark Taper Forum: *Diva L.A.: A Salute to L.A.'s Latinas in the Tanda Style*.[1] Directed by Diane Rodríguez and Luis Alfaro, the codirectors of the Mark Taper Forum's Latino Theater Initiative, the show brought a variety of Latina artists to an enthusiastic audience. The *tanda* was a long overdue public acknowledgment of local Latina talent.[2] The likes of Marisela Norte, Diane Rodríguez, Rita Moreno, Hilos de Plata/Silver Threads (a Mexican folk dance group whose members range in age from sixty-six to eighty-eight years), and others graced the stage designed by the well-known Chicana artist Patssi Valdez. The night was remarkable because the directors not only acknowledged the Latino performance past by invoking and translating into English the *tanda* form, so popular with Spanish-speaking audiences before World War II, but also honored the present by centering women artists on stage, while recognizing an approaching future of Latino performance by including María Fatal, a popular Los Angeles-based rock en español band.

This performance, and others like it, lies at the core of this book. It is the lens through which an examination of contemporary transnational social dynamics comes into focus. Using Chicano/a and Latino/a popular culture (spoken word, performance art, comedy, theater, and music), in the following pages I argue that the role played by this work in the construction of new cultural forms and identities is considerable. The increasing circulation and reception of Chicano/Latino popular culture

within and beyond the hemisphere, in places like Vancouver, British Colombia, Mexico City, London, and Berlin, demonstrate a growing appeal that cannot be overlooked.[3] Moreover, an analysis of Chicana/Latina popular performance culture is crucial to understanding the impact of globalization on contemporary national and local culture and constitutes "part of an emerging paradigm of local histories" within Latinos studies, "whose raison d'être is to deal with global (epistemic) designs."[4] It addresses some of the most compelling social questions of our historical moment, those regarding shifting conceptions of national culture, citizenship, sexuality, and identity. This book is a study of themes across genre. As one reads it, it becomes clear that an analysis of ethnicity/race or nation cannot be fully achieved without an account of power relations structured by gender, sexuality, and desire. This analysis advances, in important ways, the theoretical foundations built by Chicana and women-of-color feminist theorists, whose pioneering work on theories of intersectionality is very much engaged with this scholarship.

The particular Chicano/a and Latino/a performance texts selected for this study are important because they construct transnational imaginaries within the Americas that are shaped by a particular historical moment, politics, and humor. In addition, the talented artists discussed have produced their work with an artistic sensibility animated by the creative and critical energies fueled by punk D.I.Y. (Do-It-Yourself) aesthetics. Punk aesthetics and its counterpart, hip-hop, emerged, in part, as a response to the crushing privatization of neoliberal economic policies. The strain of punk aesthetics illustrated in this book can be seen as a direct response to the neoconservative queer bashing and anti-immigrant hostility that the artists discussed in these pages have faced in their everyday lives. The interdisciplinary frame of this study allows for an exploration of the ways in which Chicana and Latina diasporic performances and resignifications of the subject-citizen and noncitizen reproduce or alter national identities. Each of the artists included is U.S.-born (except for those in the Canadian Latino Theater Group), and much of their work illustrates the differences and negotiations that exist between U.S.-born Chicanos and Latinos and recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

This analysis of popular performance culture serves as a launching point to examine the way that the themes, iconography, and sounds of Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural practices resonate in both the northern and the southern reaches of the hemisphere within the framework of a critical transnationalism. This critical transnationalism considers what

Angie Chabram-Derneresian calls "geopolitical and linguistic complexities" within "Las Américas," complexities "that arise from making strategic connections with others in the Americas."[5] This conceptual framework calls for a nuanced understanding of the cultural effects of late-twentieth-century neoliberal economic restructuring on the continents of North, Central, and South America.[6]

More specifically, narratives found in Chicana/Latina popular performance culture in the 1980s and 1990s register a demographic and political shift that provides the conditions for the current explosion of U.S.-Mexican-Canadian border culture, as well as the cultural conditions leading up to the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. This Agreement engendered a "transnational imaginary" that strengthened the preexisting ties of Mexican immigrants to the United States and Canada, as well as U.S. Latinos' cultural ties to Latin America.

In the following pages, the reader is introduced to the lives and work of a number of highly talented and creative artists: Luis Alfaro, recipient of a MacArthur genius award and a performance artist, playwright, director, and Director of New Play Development at the Mark Taper Forum; Marisela Norte, the poet laureate of Boyle Heights and the East L.A. ambassador of culture, best known for her spoken-word CD *NORTE/word*; Marga Gomez, a popular performance artist and the daughter of a Puerto Rican father and a Cuban mother, best known for her solo performance piece entitled *A Line around the Block*; El Vez, an incredible Chicano Elvis Presley translator; Jim Mendiola, a film director whose 1996 D.I.Y. film, *Pretty Vacant,* which was inspired indirectly by the punk pioneers Alicia Armendariz Velasquez and Teresa Covarrubias, earned him a Rockefeller Foundation Intercultural Media award; and the Vancouver Latino Theatre Group, a theater company formed by the playwright and actress Carmen Aguirre, whose innovative work focuses on the experiences of Latinos and Latinas in Canada.

The work of these artists, and others like them, offers a rich and largely untapped reservoir of material from which to understand the complex dynamics of race, class, gender, and sexuality. These artists, and the work they produce, are part of a long history of Latino theater and performance in the United States that took a dramatic turn in the 1980s as it moved away from the dominant forms of cultural nationalism that had, until then, dominated the work of Latino artists. In examining this performance history, we can see these artists confronting the ideas of the

Latino artists who came before them, as well as their own Latino communities. At the same time, their struggle with the expectations and notions of the dominant U.S. culture is revealed. The performance criticism that emerges from their powerful work is one that taps "mainstream" popular culture while simultaneously intervening and disrupting the status quo. In other words, these artists are quite innovatively reshaping the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. What results is nothing less than a highly sophisticated, and completely underexplored, rethinking of identity politics from which the larger discussions of American studies, Chicano and Latino studies, and gender studies can benefit greatly.

Travel and humor are two themes that play an important part in the pages that follow. Images of travel, crossing, and destination abound throughout the narratives of the artists examined in this book as they invent critical travelogues of local and distant destinations. I use the trope of travel cautiously here, making sure not to assume its transparency, recognizing Caren Kaplan's reservation that metaphors of travel are gendered.[7] In the context of this study, however, the artists' use of travel imagery functions as "guerrilla metaphor," working toward the "destabilization of a single view of history" and place.[8] The artists suggest that marginalized Western subjects employ travel as a metaphor and social practices as a critical tool; these artists remind us about the polyvalence of the word "travel." Travel is a variation of travail, which means to work extremely hard. In fact, these artists' representations of travel activate a series of associations linked to the obsolete meanings of the word, such as to harass, to torment, to torture, to trouble, to labor, to toil. The etymological root of "travel" is the old French *travaillier* and suggests the Spanish word *trabajar,* to work. In the United States and Canada, the Latino diaspora travels to labor, to toil for industries that depend on these workers to maintain profitability, and endures various forms of harassment and torment simply to make a living. This book examines how artists document the contemporary conditions of the Latino diaspora through what I've called a critical travelogue. Equally important is the labor their work performs as it travels throughout the "floating borderlands" to audiences within and beyond the United States.[9]

Although acknowledging that their point of origin is important, these artists are much more focused on a politics of destination. They are inventing alternative routes, trying to get to places they've never been. Through their rides, trips, tours, they are making global moves to con-

struct alternative worlds. They are getting their word out using alternative circuits and media, creating alternative forms of travel. Deploying the metaphor of travel as toil, these artists mark the class and gendered inflections of transportation. Some artists, such as Marisela Norte, even write on the bus.

For some artists, the traveling of their art acts as a stand-in for them, while others actually perform their work around the globe. Throughout all of their works, anecdotes of travel prevail. Often their narratives address the difficulty of travel for particular subjects, as well as a nostalgia and the desire for it.

The work examined throughout this book also reveals a highly significant and original use of humor via bilingual word play as an aesthetic strategy. This humor, which is often utilized to work through moments of crises and to reimagine status quo power relations within and beyond national borders, has not yet been afforded adequate critical attention. The artists in this study have turned to what the scholar Carl Gutiérrez-Jones calls "engaged humor." Gutierrez-Jones argues that "engaged humor" is a long-standing form of Chicana cultural literacy.[10] As the critic Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez so aptly puts it, "they poke fun at cultural icons and institutions, revision traditional values and practices, and perform subjectivities in process as part of claiming agency and empowerment."[11] Contemporary Chicana/o and Latina/o performance and spoken-word artists and musicians continue this tradition and provide interpretive tools for reading hybridity in U.S. culture. Inventing hybrid forms of popular culture that are seriously playful, the artists, with their narrative, help create the conditions for audiences to become cultural critics themselves. The classic Chicano visual icon of two masks, one laughing, one crying, can be seen as an allegory for this critical use of humor.

An analysis of popular culture and cultural politics and the intersection of the two are a major component of this study. Popular culture constitutes a terrain where not only are ethnic and racialized, as well as gender, identity contested, reproduced, and transformed, but also the struggle for and against social equality is engaged. As Stuart Hall contends, "popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance."[12] Cultural politics as played out in this study presents an entry point for understanding the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance. Discourses produced by the dominant culture in popular

cultural production created a conceptual blueprint about Chicanas and Chicanos specifically, and Latinos in general, that continued to be reproduced and contested into the twenty-first century. On the other hand, these artists engage with that same popular culture in ironic ways and invent forms of popular culture that transform those blueprints.

Like Hall, the artists of this study take seriously the stakes of popular culture in everyday life. And, like Hall, this study is interested in the politics of representation within popular culture. This interest goes beyond discussions of what constitutes "good" or "bad" representation of Latinos through popular culture. Instead, this study focuses on ways that Chicanas and Latinas intervene, contest, or reproduce "already" circulating representations of "latinidad."

This book seeks to contribute to an exciting conversation advanced by a surge of scholarship on media culture and latinidad by scholars and critics such as Arlene Dávila, Angharad N. Valdivia, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, and Chon Noriega by examining an alternative popular culture that has not achieved mass or mainstream appeal.[13]

Given that our historical moment is one of shrinking public outlets for the circulation and discussion of alternative and oppositional perspectives, these contemporary artists' reworkings are significant in that they open a discursive space—on the terrain of popular culture—that enables both critique of the status quo and dialogue concerning progressive social transformation. These artists interrogate the reactionary assumption that American national and cultural belonging and identity are (or should be) equated with exclusionary notions of whiteness. And, as we shall see, their engagement with pop culture is subversive to the degree that it has hope for an America that has yet to live up to its democratic possibility. These artists place their cultural production in the service of this ideal.

In addition to constructing individual and collective identities, popular performance culture, as a hybrid form, often articulates social and historical conflicts and allows those who have little access to ways of intervening in the dominant modes of representation (film, television, print) to represent themselves in their own terms. Popular culture in general, and Latino popular culture specifically, is a social and artistic phenomenon through which major cultural and political debates, conflicts, and social expressions about identity, gender, sexuality, community, and nation are staged and performed.

Since cultural politics determine both the meanings of social practices and which groups define these meanings, and because cultural politics in-

volve the struggle over what and whose images of social life will be validated on mainstream television and radio (and what images should remain unseen), it becomes especially important for those who come from traditionally aggrieved groups, and who are determined to transform relations of social inequality, to pay attention to them. As Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon explain:

> [C]ultural politics are also concerned with subjectivity and identity, since culture plays a central role in constituting our sense of ourselves. The forms of subjectivity that we inhabit play a crucial part in determining whether we accept or contest existing power relations. Moreover, for marginalized and oppressed groups, the construction of new and resistant identities is a key dimension of a wider political struggle to transform society.[14]

Questions of subjectivity and identity also invoke thorny questions of cultural authenticity. Put simply, "identity" can be understood as how one perceives oneself, while "subjectivity" can be seen as how one imagines oneself in relation to others. In her groundbreaking writing on Chicana/o representational practices, *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture,* Rosa Linda Fregoso questions the existence of an "authentic" immutable cultural identity and argues against the production of an ethnic (specifically Chicano) identity built on "a political model of subjectivity grounded in a notion of a fixed self."[15] In this formulation, cultural identity appears as an authentic essence, located in a core subject, whose identity is one of "being," an identity that was the basis for the male-centered subject of Chicano cultural nationalism.

In contrast, Fregoso understands identity as a formation: One becomes a "subject in process" and is never a "fixed self." This understanding allows one to recognize that the production of cultural identity is dynamic and subject to historical, geographical, and political change. Thus, what was once considered to constitute Chicana and Chicano identity is not completely lost in the past but does in some way inform the construction of a future identity, though it does not necessarily determine it. Fregoso's argument assumes that categories of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality are never biologically given—not inborn, immutable characteristics—but are instead shaped by history and are constructed through the stories people tell about them. This assumption allows people (subjects) in their capacity as artists (and as

everyday people) to reshape cultural, gendered, and political identity. The artists included in this study have created narratives that reshape Chicana and Latina identity by figuratively "cutting (old) labels out."

I use the term "Chicana/Latina" throughout the book, but with a certain wariness of conflating the two separate terms. Each term emerges from a particular history. However, both terms are useful, if at times contradictory. The conception of "Latinos as a monolithic cultural group, one that shares the same language and geographical space, and that struggles for the same political goal," has been disproved many times over.[16] Yet, the artists identified as Chicana or Latina in this book share a progressive sensibility. For the purposes of this study, the term "Chicana" is never fixed and takes on various meanings in particular contexts. Here, "Latina" is used as an umbrella term that refers to a diverse group of hyphenated identities of Latin American descent living in the United States or Canada (Cuban American, Puerto Rican, Colombian American, Colombian Canadian). "Chicana" is usually specific to the southwest and usually refers to those of Mexican American ancestry and is associated with a history of struggle for civil rights. This study includes the work of Luis Alfaro and Jim Mendiola under the rubric "Chicana," since they both acknowledge the influence of Chicana feminist thought on their cultural production. Of course, this is a somewhat ironic use of categories, because these artists, especially Marisela Norte, as stated earlier, often seek to "cut the label out" of identity categories.

The multiple narratives examined in this book contain protagonists who are subjects in the process of "*becoming.*" As they inhabit multiple subject positions both as women who refuse traditional marriage and men who refuse traditional forms of masculinity and as border-crossing laborers, they enact what Fregoso discusses at length as "an alternative formulation of cultural identity."[17] This alternative formulation resists a strictly defined Chicana and Latina identity. The tension these writers thematize as their protagonists resist the pushes and pulls of the Chicano and the dominant cultures fuels their ambivalence about the two, yet their identification with aspects of multiple cultures (Latino, Chicano, Mexican, and African American) allows them to turn to what Fregoso so aptly describes as "the ambivalence of cultural identity into a politics of political identification." That ambivalence leaves room for the construction of something else.

This study's analytical frame is grounded in the currents of border feminist studies, Chicana/o studies, and transnational cultural criticism. I began this project more than ten years ago. As I worked on the long process of writing, an innovative new body of scholarship examining queer performativity emerged. Ground-breaking scholars, including Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Alicia Arrizón, David Román, José E. Muñoz, Juana Alicia Rodriguez, and Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez, who centrally locate their research in queer/performance studies, have begun to bridge these studies to ethnic studies.[18] I, too, share their aspirations. This study modestly attempts to bridge two largely disinterested fields: performance studies and Latino studies. Equally important, it connects recent discussions concerning the categories of race to those dealing with the categories of class, gender, and sexuality that are foregrounded in the writings of recent theorists of popular culture and identity. This study assumes that these key categories are not "natural" or inherently fixed. The study also assumes that, like the category of race, the categories of class, gender, and sexuality are social formations. These various categories are reproduced by discourses and practices—that is, by regimes of representation—that maintain the illusion that they are immutable and have no relation to social context.[19]

Each chapter of the book examines different executions of cultural politics. From chapter 2 on, punk as an aesthetic sensibility runs throughout the chapters. However, for some of the artists, punk sensibility is located less in formal expression than in attitude. This punk sensibility shaped the post-1980s wave of a particular articulation of Chicana and Latina cultural production, one ironic and stylized but still critical of social relations, especially those that marginalized Latinos and Queers.[20]

Chapter 1 provides the popular performance culture context for the body of the book. This chapter discusses the historical context of the Spanish Fantasy Heritage, as well as its formation and modes of distribution. It also examines the ways in which Spanish Borderlands history converged with popular images of the Spanish Fantasy Heritage. The convergence of these two discourses as "set[s] of rhetorical and interpretive strateg[ies]" exemplifies Michael Omi and Howard Winant's conception of the "racial formation" process. This analysis provides a local context for the emergence of "Latin" imaginary and images that most mainstream audiences are familiar with. It is these images that the artists in this

book are contesting through their construction of a transnational imaginary, one critical of a fantasy heritage that fixes Latinos in an idyllic nation-based past. The use of historical examples seeks to make clear how and why the current boom in Latino popular culture has not appeared out of nowhere but instead emerges from, yet contradicts, a complex set of social relations. Because this history is not generally well known and is difficult to access, chapter 1 provides the setting for subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 begins at the U.S.-Mexico border and explores the formation of feminist transnational identities in the context of Los Angeles in the 1980s through the work of the award-winning and self-described listener-supported poet Marisela Norte. My analysis focuses on how Norte's writing projects a transnational imaginary that humanizes the daily trials and triumphs of a transnational female work force caught in the web of economic exploitation and dysfunctional personal relationships. *NORTE/word,* the compact disk recording of spoken-word narratives for which Norte is best known, weaves complex tales about immigrant and other women and girls on the "outside"—women and girls outside the home, outside loving relationships, outside adequate education and health care systems, and outside the mass media. Moreover, *NORTE/word* is at once a subtle and eloquent critique of power relations that attempt to limit the possibilities of Latinas and a loving homage to the city of Los Angeles and the Latinas themselves who keep the city running even as their "stockings lay defeated after hours of crossing and double crossing." Norte's dark humor and her mastery of irony work in combination to create a powerful cultural critique. What emerges from her struggle to represent Chicana experience is a particularly useful form of cultural politics, one that wages its battle on the terrain of popular culture.

Chapter 3 situates the work of the playwright and performance artist Luis Alfaro (a MacArthur "Genius" award recipient) in relation to the histories of Chicano theater and within the Chicana feminist debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Alfaro's critique of continuing racist, sexist, and homophobic cultural practices is illustrated and examined through an analysis of his published plays, live performances, and spoken-word compact disk *Downtown* (all of which re-vision the Spanish Fantasy Heritage). Although Luis Alfaro's texts focus on the urban experience of Los Angeles, his work sketches the heterogeneity of the Latino communities in the border region. By exploring internal hierarchies and conflicts among long-established Chicano families and recently arrived Mexican

immigrant families, Alfaro's performances explore the intimate effects of the transnational imaginary as it structures family relations. This chapter's focus on Los Angeles is key, given that historically the city has been one of the most important centers for the production and consumption of Latino performance because of its high concentration of Latino residents and its status as one of the most transnational cities in Las Americas. The chapter also includes an analysis of Alfaro's performance reception outside the United States. Images in Alfaro's performance art work against the grain of a narrow vision of cultural nationalism whose central paradigm of the Chingón/chingada, according to David Román, "inscribes inflexible definitions of masculinity and femininity." Alfaro constructs new visions of masculinity that move beyond structures of traditional male dominance.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion of the Latino community's heterogeneity elaborated in the two previous chapters and addresses issues of Puerto Rican and Cuban American performance. The analysis here focuses on the Puerto Rican and Cuban American Marga Gomez, a former member of the "Chicano comedy" group Culture Clash, and her performance piece entitled *A Line around the Block*. Gomez's piece, which recounts the life of her Cuban immigrant father, a master of ceremonies in New York's "Latin" theater during the 1950s, also alludes to past performers' negotiations of the Spanish Fantasy. In addition, it discusses the influence of Latin American and Spanish-language vaudeville on the contemporary English-speaking Gomez and her representation of how memory reconstructs the transnational flow of popular culture among Cuba, Puerto Rico, New York, and San Francisco. It also explores her collaboration with California-based Chicano comic troupes. In *A Line around the Block,* Gomez intervenes in the dominant discourse that assumes that the term "Latina" is synonymous with the term "heterosexual" as her performance moves back and forth between Latina and lesbian discourses of identity and comedy.

The questions examined in this chapter were provoked by an interview I conducted with Gomez in 1994. This chapter seeks to bring together seemingly disparate narrative forms. Part genealogy, part textual analysis, part ethnography, it situates the work of Gomez in a context of the Latino performance tradition (one that she simultaneously embraces and rejects); examines questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality, and nation as articulated by Gomez's cultural production and interview; and opens a space within this study to locate my own role as scholar/ethnog-

rapher/cultural critic/fan in examining Latino cultural production, especially around issues of language and hybrid identities. It also allows me to acknowledge my own participation in the discursive construction of new Latina subjects. I take my cue on this subject from the scholars Pat Zavella and Ruth Behar. In the end, like its subject, this chapter is hybrid.

Chapter 5 registers the confluence of cultures now accelerating in the wake of post–World War II global demographic, political, and economic shifts that illustrates that the United States is only one site among many where popular culture, national identity, and gender dynamics were (and are) in the process of being reconfigured by the constant back-and-forth flow of people, culture, and capital across multiple national borders. This chapter focuses on the filmic rendering of this reconfiguration through an analysis of Jimmy Mendiola's award-winning 1996 independent film, *Pretty Vacant,* its representation of a 1990s Chicana feminist punk aesthetic, and its connection to young punk women in East Los Angeles during the 1970s and 1980s. As such, this chapter examines the effect and the reception of the translocal circulation of a musical genre and movement—in this case, British punk (shaped by working-class British and Afro-Caribbean immigrants) and Mexican punk—on the formation of a transnational Chicana subjectivity. These musics, and the film *Pretty Vacant,* imagine and desire cross-cultural relations, what Lisa Lowe characterizes as horizontal affiliations, a process by which marginalized groups recognize shared stakes in the struggle to create counterhegemonic practices and communities, in a national and international context. In addition, the film functions as a visual allegory for the way Chicana feminists and artists, as women of color, at the turn of the century, have turned a critical eye on the public sphere and, in doing so, have envisioned new subjects and subjectivities, as well as mapped out affiliations, with racialized-as-nonwhite women within and across national borders. Ultimately, the film challenges nationalist conceptions (of both the dominant culture and ethnic communities) of gendered identities and completely disrupts the Spanish Fantasy Heritage. The theatricality of *Pretty Vacant* makes it an appropriate subject for a book that is based primarily on performance art.

Chapter 6 examines the Chicano performer El Vez's use of appealing and familiar forms of popular music to make provocative statements about citizenship, immigration, undocumented labor, and sexuality. Here, analysis of lyrics and interviews are key. While El Vez works through and against icons of the Spanish Fantasy, his popularity in Eu-

rope points to the ways Chicano and Latino performance resonates across national borders and exceeds in significance as a local and regional art form. It also explores how Chicana feminist thought informs El Vez's brilliant use of humor and sexuality to critique homophobia and sexism. Finally, it considers Robert Lopez, the artist who created and performs El Vez, as a Chicano artist who participated in the development of Los Angeles/Hollywood punk music, which gave rise to artists such as El Vez and informed the spoken word and performance art community.

The epilogue follows Chicana popular performance up to Canada and argues that the transnational circulation of Chicano images and sounds compels scholars to examine more closely their relation to Latino diaspora communities *north* of the U.S. border. Latino Canadian youth culture reinterprets imported images and sounds to construct a counternarrative about North American Latinos living in *Las Américas*. Unexpectedly, yet quite appropriately, it is through Chicano popular culture (for instance, El Vez's lyric "Don't call us Hispanic, 'cause we ain't never been to Spain") that the Latino Theater Group of Vancouver, British Columbia (composed of Canadians with origins in Mexico, Guatemala, and Chile), finds the language and interpretive tools to shape alternative representations of Latino Canadian youth. The Latino Theater Group employs U.S.-based Chicano and Latino popular performance culture to underscore how their own aesthetics and gendered experiences speak to the way that cultural production travels and resonates throughout our hemisphere and succeeds in completely rejecting the Spanish Fantasy Heritage.

## *Note on Methodology*

This study has a modest goal—to put a thus far neglected history of Chicana and Latina alternative culture on the map. In no way do I suggest that the analysis presented here is either comprehensive or definitive. Instead, it is the first step in a recovery process. In addition, the goal is not necessarily detailed accuracy regarding Chicana subculture. In certain sections of the book, the reflections of particular artists shape the narration of this neglected history. Some readers may object to what could be considered the spin of a very few artists, especially in discussion of Chicana punk. Because no institutional archive of Chicano/a punk aesthetic yet exists, I have made an effort to contact those who are considered the

main players in this scene. To reconstruct this history, I had to rely on the testimonies of the artists themselves (in addition to the few archival documents I encountered). To forestall criticism that interviews are used to make absolute-truth claims, I acknowledge that each interviewee has a subjective point of view on the scene. As I conducted the interviews, for example, it became clear that the very nature of punk aesthetics was messy and chaotic and that its politics were not always consistent but were always experimental. A small archive is now growing at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and one of the contributions of my book is to bring this material to the fore.

This book suggests that analysis of spoken-word performances, performance art, music, and film is complementary, yet different from the literary analyses that are prevalent in Chicano/Latino studies. Since popular culture is one of the most powerful realms where images of Latino/as are generated and regenerated, there is much to be learned from exploring the strategies of contemporary artists as they use their work to critique cultural representations and expectations. The chapters that follow examine how contemporary Chicano artists have inserted themselves into the national and transnational imagination by launching cultural critiques through popular culture, critiques that privilege the process of *mestizaje* and hybridity. The scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba notes that until fairly recently, "Chicano/a popular culture did not exist as an academic category of analysis."[21] Her scholarship has helped to open this category of analysis, and my book broadens it by juxtaposing Chicana and Latina popular culture.

Though the artists examined in this book may not reach as massive an audience as pop stars such as Ricky Martin, Selena, or Shakira, analysis of their work is crucial, for it provides us with a map of alternative paths that may lead to alternative futures.

One final note. "The Loco-Motion," the 1962 hit single by Little Eva, inspired this book's title. This 45rpm record my mother (also named Eva) played for her growing daughters was one of the few artifacts she saved from her East Los Angeles teenage years. This book is a tribute to my mother, and to the women and men who navigate the *locura*, the madness of social inequality via their ingenuity. "*Que loca*" ("what a madwoman") is a phrase that can describe the artists in this book. Yet their artistic originality both critiques the limits of social equality and provides models for exploding those limits. So allow yourself to do the loca motion with them in search of better futures.