

Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations

In the 1970s, secular Day of the Dead celebrations were initiated in the United States as a way to communicate messages of Chicano identity. As the US Latino community became more ethnically diverse in the 1980s and 1990s, new Latino populations participated in these public festivities, creating pan-Latino celebrations. At the same time, non-Latinos began to embrace Day of the Dead as an alternative way to remember the departed. The observance of the holiday in new ways and by new groups of people has sparked negotiations around ownership and meaning, illustrating that hybridity and authenticity are complexly related rather than oppositional concepts.

Introduction

WHILE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL globalization occur with growing velocity, trans-culturalism, or the shaping of cultures by interactions with other cultures, is alternately praised and lamented, raising questions about the meaning, authenticity, and ownership of cultural practices. Day of the Dead/El Día de los Muertos, one of the most widely observed Latino celebrations in the United States, exemplifies these dynamics. As part of multicultural educational curricula in schools and universities and the subject of annual exhibits in museums, art galleries, and community centers across the country, the celebration attracts many thousands of participants each year. Yet, all this is relatively recent. Before the 1970s, the celebration as we know it was not widely observed in the United States. Most Mexican Americans knew little about Mexico's Indigenous Día de los Muertos practices, observing, instead, popular Catholic All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day rituals. After providing a brief history of Day of the Dead in Latin America, this paper will discuss the birth and growth of secular Día de los Muertos celebrations in the United States—"invented traditions" that emerged as a key expression of the Chicano¹ Movement.

Blossoming in California and the American Southwest in the 1970s—a time of widespread social justice activism by disenfranchised populations throughout the United States and the world—the Chicano movement comprised young Mexican American artists and intellectuals who were inspired by black civil rights activism,

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the American Indian movement, the women's liberation movement, and the anti-Vietnam war movement. The Chicano movement addressed a broad cross section of issues affecting the Mexican American community, including farm workers' rights, Native American land rights, educational opportunities, and voting and political rights. Chicanos identified strongly with the anti-colonial liberation struggles taking place around the world (e.g., in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Vietnam, and Africa) and proclaimed solidarity with these movements for self-determination. They also aimed to confront negative stereotypes of Mexicans in the mainstream US media through the creation of protest art or *arte contestatario*—literary, visual, and performance art that celebrated Mexican American histories and experiences while challenging racist norms in the portrayal and treatment of Mexicans (Gomez-Peña 1986:86; 2005; Ybarra-Frausto 1996). An early example of this was the itinerant bilingual theater troupe, El Teatro Campesino, which performed free public theater to rural and urban audiences (particularly Mexican American farm workers), portraying the daily realities and struggles of Mexican Americans while educating Latinos about their legal rights and the collective efforts taking place to combat racial injustices (Huerta 1977; Broyles-González 1994). Political transformation through collective organizing and public art were major themes of the Chicano movement, deeply affecting the form Day of the Dead would take in the US context.

The Political Potential of Cultural Rituals

In Latin America, most observances of Day of the Dead would be classified as “folk” culture, which cultural studies scholar John Fiske defines as “the product of a *comparatively* stable, traditional social order” [emphasis in the original] (1989:169). This refers to beliefs and practices arising from the organic life of a community, not intended for promotion to a larger audience. A folk belief related to Day of the Dead, for example, is the widespread conviction in Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Bolivia, and elsewhere that one's well-being depends, in part, on respectfully remembering the dead. Whether people construct elaborate shrines for the dead or simply lay flowers on family graves, these rituals are rooted in a common sense of moral obligation to the deceased. Meanwhile, in the secular context of US society (and the museums, galleries, community centers, and commercial areas where Day of the Dead activities now occur), these celebrations emerged in non-religious spheres as a form of popular culture. The term “popular” here refers to cultural practices that are derived from folk culture, commodified for consumption by mass audiences, and utilized to signify new meanings. This does not mean that Chicano-style Day of the Dead rituals are devoid of spiritual significance, but that they routinely occur in secular contexts as “art,” “ethnic culture,” or “political expression,” and are not primarily undertaken as acts of religious devotion.

Because they involve ritual *and* occur ritually each year, US Day of the Dead exhibits and ceremonies are forms of “ritual communication”—a term that refers both to viewing communication processes as rituals and to seeing rituals as an important form of communication (Carey 1989; Rothenbuhler 1998). Ritual communication focuses on the projection of community ideals via creative public expressions, examining the

role of ceremonial presentation and participation in the structuring of people's lives (Dewey 1927:183–4). Noting that “the archetypal case under a ritual view of communication is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality,” James Carey argues that this form of communication can have powerful consequences in terms of consciousness-raising and solidarity building (Carey 1989:18). Scholars writing about folklore and cultural studies have emphasized that folk rituals are not simply “entertainment” to distract people from politics, but communicate important messages about identity and political struggle that help shape individual and collective practice (Paredes 1993; Cadavál 1985; Limón 1983; Lipsitz 1990). Much current thinking about the political importance of folk rituals is influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci and E. P. Thompson. Gramsci believed that folk practices had the potential to challenge hegemonic beliefs and bring about the birth of a new culture. Thompson felt that folk practices were contexts in which working-class people defined and expressed their own values, which could be antagonistic to the overarching system of domination and control (Limón 1983:42). More recently, Jack Santino has developed the concept of “the ritualesque”—in which the performative use of symbols in public festivities—images, music, movement—are deployed with the aim of effecting social change (Santino 2011:62). Building on the work of Linda Pershing (1996) and Victor Turner (1977a, 1977b, 1982), Santino notes that the performative use of symbols during public rituals and events can provide opportunities for alternative visions of the world that are crucial to the process of social change.

As we shall see, US Day of the Dead celebrations often present alternative visions of the Latino experience aimed at inspiring social change. The cultural identity expressed and reproduced during these celebrations illustrates Renato Rosaldo's concept of “cultural citizenship,” whereby people organize their values, practices, and beliefs about their political rights based on a sense of cultural belonging, rather than on their formal status as citizens of a nation. Rosaldo contends that cultural citizenship develops during a range of public activities and performances through which historically oppressed populations exert their place within the larger civic arena (Rosaldo and Flores 1997).

Concepts of Hybridity

United States Day of the Dead events are not simply Latin American celebrations transferred to a new location. They are hybrid formations that communicate vastly different meanings than do celebrations with the same name in Latin America. The term “hybridity,” a process of selectively combining elements of cultural practices and beliefs to make meaning, has been the subject of intense academic debate. From colonial times until the present, related terms such as miscegenation, *mestizaje*, and creolization have been used to describe processes of racial, linguistic, and cultural mixing, tending to emphasize the assimilation of autochthonous cultures into colonizing cultures. In contrast, Homi Bhabha (1994:36–9) deploys the term to describe cultural contact between the colonizer and the colonized that yields an interdependent relationship between the two, creating a “third space” that negates the dominance of the colonizer. The hybrid subject does not become the colonizer nor remain the colonized, but

emerges as “something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both” (1994:13). While attractive for its emphasis on the agency of historically oppressed populations, this position has been criticized for not adequately accounting for vast military, political, and economic inequalities between aboriginal cultures and colonizers. Writing specifically about Latin America, Néstor García Canclini notes that hybridity is a complex and often painful interaction that occurs as part of the political and economic conflicts of modernity. Yet, it is not simply the imposition of the “strong” upon the “weak.” Without losing sight of the power inequalities that underlie processes of hybridity, Canclini emphasizes the need to understand the obliqueness with which power may be exercised and the reciprocal borrowings that take place in the midst of differences and inequalities. The value of hybridity, he argues, is that it reminds us that no identities are self-contained or ahistorical, allowing us to understand ways in which communities imagine themselves and construct stories about their origin and development (García Canclini 1995).

Noting that hybridity is primarily a *communicative* process, Marwan Kraidy focuses on the agency of the subjects of hybridity: “The means and ability to communicate are an important determinant of agency in intercultural relations that form the crucible of hybridity” (Kraidy 2005:152). While hybridity has the potential to mitigate social tensions, Kraidy maintains that discourses of hybridity have historically served ideologies of integration and control rather than pluralism and empowerment (47–54). The term “hybrid,” now routinely applied to everything from automobiles to McDonald’s menus, is so ubiquitous, he observes, that it loses its ability to help us understand the dynamics of power involved in cross-cultural communication. Kraidy argues for the need to focus on the historical, sociopolitical, economic, and discursive contexts in which hybridities take shape, asserting: “Attention ought to be paid to hybridity’s ability or inability to empower social groups to have influence over the course of their lives. . . . The value of a theory of hybridity is the extent to which it emphasizes human agency” (151). United States Day of the Dead celebrations exemplify an emphasis on the human agency of a historically subordinated group to shape the way its identities, histories, and experiences are portrayed in the public sphere, expressing “the polyvalence of human creativity that is necessary for hybridity to fulfill its social and political potential” (161).

Methodology

Data for this paper was collected from October 2000 through November 2009, as part of a book project about US Day of the Dead celebrations.² Methodologies included an extensive review of scholarly literature on European All Souls’ Day activities, Latin American Day of the Dead celebrations, and the Chicano Movement; archival research of Day of the Dead exhibit materials at museums and Chicano art galleries; ethnographic observation of more than one hundred Day of the Dead events in the United States; and 78 formal, tape-recorded interviews with Chicano artists, teachers, staff at art galleries and community centers, and diverse Latino and non-Latino celebration participants. During the above time frame, I attended altar exhibitions, collective altar-making ceremonies, street processions, public vigils, craft workshops,

film screenings, poetry slams, and other Day of the Dead activities in California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, taking over 2,000 photographs. Because US Day of the Dead activities typically extend throughout the months of October and November (as opposed to just two major days of celebration, as in Latin America), it was possible to attend numerous exhibits and events each fall, often attending the same exhibit multiple times. In some cases, I was invited to sit in on planning meetings held prior to events. Additionally, LexisNexis, ProQuest, and the *Los Angeles Times* news databases were used to retrieve newspaper and magazine articles and radio and TV transcripts about Day of the Dead activities occurring in the United States from 1972 through 2009. Most of the Chicano artists and activists I interviewed preferred that their names be published. In cases where anonymity was requested, names have been withheld from quotations.

Background on Day of the Dead

Celebrated annually on November 1 and 2 in Latin America, the two-day observance, known colloquially as “The Day(s) of the Dead,” is a syncretic fusion of Roman Catholic All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day practices together with pre-Columbian Indigenous rituals for honoring ancestors. While observance of the holiday in Latin America varies from country to country and from region to region *within* countries, key ritual practices include sprucing up family gravesites by weeding, cleaning, and repainting them; refurbishing gravestones and crosses; adorning graves with flowers, decorations, and candles; constructing memorial shrines in homes or at gravesites; preparing special foods and beverages for the holiday; praying to and on behalf of the deceased; and attending Catholic Mass. In heavily Indigenous regions of Latin America, such as southern Mexico, the Mayan areas of Central America, and the Andean regions of South America, families engage in lengthier cemetery rituals, which can include singing, dancing, picnicking, and/or placing specially-prepared foods for the dead at family graves; holding nocturnal vigils to await the visiting spirits; playing ritual games and, in areas of Guatemala, flying kites to welcome the souls to earth (Buechler and Buechler 1971; Buechler 1980; West 1989; Carmichael and Sayer 1991; Coluccio 1991; Bade 1997; Vergara and Abilio 1997; Lara Figueroa 1998, 2003; Marchi 2009). Many Indigenous peoples create special altars for deceased relatives, replete with flowers, candles, incense, mementos, and special foods. Ritual foods include *tamales* in Mexico and Central America; special bread for the dead known as *pan de muerto* in Mexico or *guaguas* in the Andes; and holiday beverages such as the agave-based *pulque* in Mexico, the corn drink, *atol de maíz*, in Mesoamerica, and the berry-based *colada morada* in the Andes. In Mexico, skull-shaped sweets made of molded white sugar and decorative colored icing have become an internationally recognized symbol of Day of the Dead.³

In the worldview of the Aztecs, Maya, Olmecs, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Aymara, Quechua, and other agricultural-based aboriginal peoples of the Americas, maintaining harmony between the worlds of the living and the dead was a crucial spiritual belief before the arrival of Europeans to the hemisphere. Festivals to honor the dead via the construction of harvest altars were held throughout the calendar year in conjunction with harvest cycles, as the dead were thought to have powers to enhance or thwart

agricultural and reproductive fertility. It was believed that the spirits of the dead and the deities were always present among the living and had to be cared for on a daily basis, most especially during remembrance holidays, in order to ensure both family and community well-being (Buechler 1980; Nutini 1988; Bade 1997; Garciagodoy 1998; Lara Figueroa 2003). These centuries-old rituals for honoring the ancestors were so deeply rooted in Latin America's Indigenous populations that the Catholic missionaries who arrived after Columbus found it impossible to eradicate the "pagan" practices. In dynamics of forced religious conversion and Indigenous cultural resistance that have occurred throughout the global Catholic diaspora, native rituals for remembering the dead were "tolerated" by missionaries and relocated to correspond with the Roman Catholic liturgical dates of November 1 and 2 (All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day).⁴

This resulted in hybrid Indigenous and Catholic spiritual practices, such as the tradition of creating *ofrendas* or harvest "offerings" for the deceased during the period of All Souls' Day. In conjunction with this Catholic holy day dedicated to remembering and praying for souls in purgatory, Indigenous peoples maintained the belief that family spirits visited earth at this time to partake of special foods and other oblations provided in their honor. Failure to prepare a sumptuous feast for the ancestors was believed to risk their wrath. To this day, elements commonly placed on Day of the Dead altars in Mexico, Central America, and South America include Indigenous foods such as maize, squashes, grains, fruits, legumes, tortillas, and fermented corn and grain beverages offered to the dead in pre-Christian times. In ancient Mesoamerica, marigolds and *copal* incense made of pine resin were integral elements of altars for the dead, along with valuable commodities such as salt, cacao, shells, and other forms of monetary currency—all of which are still placed on altars made by Indigenous peoples today. These pre-Columbian elements are typically combined with Catholic iconography such as images of favorite saints, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, crucifixes, rosary beads, statuettes of angels, and devotional candles emblazoned with Catholic images. Photos of the deceased may also be placed on contemporary altars.

While Christian Europe held finite and frighteningly apocalyptic formulations of death, including medieval anguish about the end of the world, the eerie figure of The Grim Reaper, and notions of hell as a place of excruciating torment (Aries 1981; Boase 1972; Kastenbaum 1989), many pre-Columbian cultures in Latin America viewed the afterworld as a desirable province from which the dead could easily visit relatives among the living (Carrasco 1990). In contrast to official All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day observances, filled with thoughts of suffering and mournful supplications to free souls from their purgatorial incarceration, Day of the Dead celebrations in Indigenous regions of Latin America manifest feelings of happy reunion between heavenly and terrestrial relatives. As one Guatemalan explained, "Day of the Dead here is similar to Thanksgiving in the US, because people travel across the country to be reunited with family members, living and dead."⁵

Harvard University historian of religion David Carrasco states that Day of the Dead is "one of the most meaningful yearly celebrations . . . throughout Latin America" (Carrasco 1990:142). It is, therefore, a point of cultural continuity for ethnically, racially, and economically diverse Latino populations living in the United States. While

not all people of Latin American heritage observe Day of the Dead,⁶ most recognize November 1 and 2 as a period of the year when the dead are remembered via certain rituals. A Puerto Rican resident of San Diego explained, "In Puerto Rico, we don't celebrate Day of the Dead in the way that the Mexicans do, but we do go to the cemetery and bring flowers. Like a lot of people, my mother and grandmother always had a little altar in the house, year-round, so I can relate to the sense of devotion that is felt for certain saints or people we've lost." A Brazilian American noted: "I grew up in the back country of Brazil, in a very traditional type of atmosphere, folkloric, you might call it. So for us, dealing with this is an extension of our own backgrounds. Even though we celebrate it differently than Mexicans, it is something we know something about, and our cultural and aesthetic tastes are drawn to it."⁷ As shared cultural practices, public rituals of altar making, walking together in street processions, and holding candlelight vigils and related activities can stimulate feelings of empathy and solidarity among diverse Latinos, creating a sense of "imagined community" or "horizontal comradeship among people who have never met" (Anderson 1991).

A Chicano Ritual Is Born

Since at least the 1890s, Mexican American families in the US Southwest have visited local cemeteries in conjunction with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day to clean and decorate family graves (Gosnell and Gott 1989; West 1989; Turner and Jasper 1994). Because they were predominantly Catholic, most Mexican American families attended Mass, which is obligatory for Catholics on All Saints' Day and optional on All Souls' Day. Until the 1970s, these customs resembled the remembrance customs of other Catholic ethnic groups in the United States and did not include Indigenous practices such as making harvest-laden altars or burning copal incense.⁸ The expression "El Día de los Muertos" was not in common use among the Mexican American community, which instead used Catholic terms such as "Todos Santos"/All Saints' Day and "El Día de las Ánimas"/All Souls' Day, that emphasized "saints" and "souls" rather than "the dead." Nor were *pan de muerto* or sugar skulls part of Mexican American traditions at that time. John Gonzalez, whose father was the superintendent of cemeteries for the Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio, Texas, from the 1940s through the 1970s, observes:

Our home was on the grounds of perhaps the best known Catholic cemetery here, San Fernando Archdiocesan Cemetery No. 2, in the West Side barrio. Day of the Dead was an annual observance in my backyard. I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and lived in the cemetery until the early 1970s. We never called it "Day of the Dead." It was always "All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day." What I observed was nothing like nowadays. Today . . . there are more Day of the Dead arts and crafts and other influences from Southern and "interior" Mexico. The stylized skulls and skeletons are relatively new icons. At our San Antonio cemeteries, in the time frame mentioned above, there were no such artifacts or influences. The observances were simple. They involved bringing flowers (marigolds and mums) to the grave, tidying up around the grave and maybe having a picnic where people sat around for hours as other relatives came by. . . . The high point was an All Souls' Day Mass on the cemetery grounds, usually led by the Archbishop.⁹

Carmen Lomas Garza, a Chicana artist involved in creating some of the earliest US Day of the Dead public altar exhibitions, recalls observing All Souls' Day in Kingsville, South Texas, as a child in the 1950s and 1960s: "On November 2, we would all go as a family and take our picnic lunch and work clothes and gardening tools and go to the cemetery and clean off the graves, clean off all the weeds, and decorate the graves." Like Gonzalez, she notes that sugar skulls were not part of these festivities: "I didn't see any skeletons or skulls or anything like that at the cemetery. It was mostly flowers and candles. I don't remember people using copal incense, either."¹⁰ Researchers at the Southwest Folklore Center at the University of Arizona have also noted that in the Arizona/Mexico border region, prior to the 1980s, Mexican American customs on November 1 and 2 did not include skull imagery, pan de muerto, or elaborate public altar-making practices (Griffith 1995:12–7).

The 1970s was a period in which many racial minorities in the United States were attempting to reclaim their cultural roots—languages, clothing, art, music, religious rituals, and other ancestral traditions that had been lost in processes of slavery, colonization, reservation systems, and forced assimilation. Since Latino Studies programs did not exist in universities at the time, many Chicanos conducted independent historical research to learn about Mexico's cultures and traditions (Morrison 1992:222; Romo 2000; Marchi 2009). Referred to as Neo-Indigenism (a movement by Latino activists to reaffirm and celebrate the contributions and achievements of the pre-Columbian civilizations of the Americas), the pageantry and spectacle of Mesoamerican Indigenous rituals, religious symbols, and spiritual beliefs became a major influence on the development of Chicano iconography (Carrasco 1990; Romo 2000). Chicano artists and educators, most of whom had grown up in the United States and nearly all of whom were unfamiliar with Indigenous Día de los Muertos rituals (Venegas 2000:47; Romo 2000; Marchi 2009), traveled to southern Mexico to study the Indigenous cultures they associated with their ancestral roots. Then as now, southern Mexico was renowned for having the country's largest concentration of Indigenous peoples. Then as now, it was the poorest, most underdeveloped region of Mexico, and its inhabitants were considered by those farther north to be the custodians of Mexico's authentic traditions.

An early goal of the Chicano Movement was to create a cohesive community identity out of a Mexican American population that was diverse in terms of class, race, ethnicity, and political views, in order to foster a sense of unity to confront struggles for educational, economic, and political equality. Deeply moved by the aesthetics and metaphysics of Día de los Muertos rituals among Indigenous communities in Mexico, Chicano artists adopted this celebration as a symbol of Chicano identity that privileged Mexico's Indigenous ancestry over its European (Romo 2000; Marchi 2009). They subsequently brought Day of the Dead traditions to the barrios of California. The rituals they chose to celebrate were selectively adopted from a variety of Day of the Dead traditions existing in Mexico, and distinctively Catholic aspects, such as saying the rosary for the deceased, were omitted in favor of exotic rituals associated with pre-Columbian times, such as creating harvest altars. While the Indigenous peoples whose rituals served as models for Chicanos considered El Día de los Muertos to be a Catholic fiesta, Chicano celebrations were (and are) secular, both because Chicanos wanted to distance themselves from a religion so closely connected with colonialism,

and because they wanted to make the cultural aspects of the holiday available to diverse US populations through workshops held in publicly funded schools and non-profit organizations.¹¹

Most of the young Chicanos who initiated US Day of the Dead exhibits in the 1970s were no longer practicing Catholics and many felt resentment toward the Catholic Church for its historical connections with colonialism, imperialism, and sexism. Yet, while Chicano observances were not religious, they reflected hybrid aspects of what Tere Romo calls “Chicano spirituality” (Romo 2000), incorporating both Catholic and Indigenous symbols. Iconography such as crucifixes, Bibles, rosary beads, and pictures of the saints, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary were often arranged on altars in self-reflexive ways, together with Aztec calendars, clay figures of Aztec or Mayan deities, or other Indigenous symbols. As anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz-Adler notes, a symbol such as the Virgin of Guadalupe has different meanings for “an atheistic politician than for a proclerical one, for an Indian than for a worker, for a shantytown dweller than a university professor” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:312). Regardless of their personal feelings about Catholicism or Indigenous spirituality, Chicano artists saw themselves as part of a larger community for whom these symbols had historical meaning. The ways in which they mixed Aztec, Mayan, and Catholic iconography both honored and critically reflected upon the historical roles that these elements played in the creation of Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano identities. Chicano “altar installations” (the term used by artists to describe altars produced in institutional spaces) were showcased in art galleries, community centers, schools, and museums, comprised of mixed media such as sculpture, oil paints, silkscreen, mobiles, collage, computers, televisions, sound systems, video footage, and interactive websites. Altars and gallery spaces (walls, floors, and entire rooms) became key media for communicating messages of Latino cultural affirmation and political consciousness.

An innovative component of Chicano celebrations was the inclusion of Aztec ceremonies and *danza*, a pre-Columbian form of dancing-in-prayer to communicate with the spirit world. Expert *danzante* Macuilxochil Cruz-Chavez, who founded the San Francisco Bay Area group Danza Xitlalli in 1982, learned danza as a teen in her native Hidalgo, Mexico. She discusses the evolution of danza in Northern California Day of the Dead celebrations, illustrating how Day of the Dead in the United States is a performative fusion of distinct aspects of Mexican culture:

Danza has been around for thousands of years. But not in the form of doing performances for the public. . . . When I lived in Mexico, people didn’t dance on Day of the Dead. When I came here, people weren’t doing it. I connected danza with the way I celebrated Día de los Muertos in my house, involving food on the altars, like I did in my home. I started to connect the two customs—danza and Día de los Muertos. Now the groups here think that all danza groups dance for Day of the Dead, and have *always* danced on Day of the Dead. But that’s not the case. Others have copied us and now many danza groups dance on Day of the Dead.¹²

Mario E. Aguilar, who began studying danza in 1978 and is the founder of the San Diego troupe, Danza Mexicayotl, concurs: “Doing danza on Día de los Muertos is a

totally Chicano creation. In Mexico, people traditionally wouldn't dance on Día de los Muertos because they were doing family stuff at home and in cemeteries."¹³

Tere Romo, a Chicana curator who has organized Day of the Dead exhibits in California, Chicago, and elsewhere since the early 1970s, explains that within the political context of the emerging Chicano Movement, Day of the Dead celebrations were "a momentous statement of cultural affirmation" (Romo 2000:20). For many Latinos, these events represented the first time in their lives that they saw aspects of their culture, previously denigrated as "superstitious" or "ignorant," acclaimed in the mainstream public sphere as artistically valuable and philosophically profound. At the time, public approbation of Latino culture was rare within US art institutions, educational canons, and the mass media. If Latino heritage was publicly acknowledged at all, it was Spanish rather than Indigenous ancestry that was lauded. For decades, in both Latin America and the United States, Eurocentric racism had categorized "Indian" heritage as a shameful impurity that relegated Indigenous peoples and mixed-blooded mestizos—the majority of the Latino population—to inferior socio-economic status vis-à-vis those who looked European or "white." As Chicana artist Yolanda Garfias Woo notes, "I grew up [in California] in a time when Latinos were still changing their last names in order to get better jobs and promotions. If you were light skinned and could pass for something else, you did, because it was easier and you had more opportunity."¹⁴ Nancy Chárrega, who holds annual Day of the Dead craft workshops at her fair trade store, Casa Bonampak, in San Francisco's Mission district, discusses similar experiences: "Mexicans are a fusion of Indian culture and Spanish culture, and as a product of colonization, we have sort of this unconscious psychology ingrained in us that we should hate the Indian aspect of ourselves, and that the European aspect is better. So we really struggle with that and really undervalue our culture."¹⁵ By privileging Indigenous Día de los Muertos rituals, Chicano Day of the Dead celebrations emerged as a concerted rejection of Eurocentrism.

The first secular US Day of the Dead celebrations occurred in 1972, organized separately by artists at Self-Help Graphics, in Los Angeles, and La Galería de la Raza, in San Francisco (Romo 2000; Morrison 1992; Marchi 2009). Self-Help Graphics, a community-based Latino visual arts center in East Los Angeles, hosted a lively Day of the Dead street procession in which people dressed as skeletons and walked to a nearby cemetery. Art historian Sybil Venegas notes that none of the Chicanos who helped organize this first ceremony were personally familiar with Day of the Dead, so they took their cues from the three founders of Self-Help Graphics (Mexican artists Antonio Ibañez and Carlos Bueno, and Italian American nun Sr. Karen Boccalero) who were familiar with the celebration. She notes: "While these artists were initially unfamiliar with El Día de los Muertos, they were undoubtedly attracted to its potential to generate cultural awareness, ethnic pride, and collective self-fulfillment for the East Los Angeles community" (Venegas 2000:47). Through the influence of Ibañez and Bueno, Chicano artists were introduced to aspects of the festival such as sugar skulls and Indigenous-style altar making. Self-Help's Day of the Dead procession became an annual event, growing over time to include music, Aztec danza, giant skeleton puppets, sculptures, banners, "low rider" cars, decorated floats, and more. In later years, performances by El Teatro Campesino were presented as part of Day

of the Dead activities. Self-Help also sold Day of the Dead art, mementos, foods such as *atol de maiz* and *pan de muerto*, and held free craft workshops on how to make sugar skulls, skeleton masks, and altars.

In the same year, independently, the Chicano art gallery La Galería de la Raza, located in the heart of San Francisco's predominantly Latino Mission District, mounted the city's first Day of the Dead altar exhibit. Organized by artists René Yáñez and Ralph Maradiaga, together with other artists, including Carmen Lomas Garza and Yolanda Garfias Woo, the exhibit and related educational activities evolved into annual community traditions. La Galería's Day of the Dead exhibits ranged from Indigenous-style altars to high-tech video displays and websites, to cross-cultural installations done by students and artists from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. This small gallery had a profound influence on the future shape of Day of the Dead celebrations in the United States, both in encouraging hybrid experimentation with and "mainstreaming" the altar format (Romo 2000). In 1981, La Galería organized a small Day of the Dead procession with about 25 people who walked around the block holding candles. As a woman born in Ecuador and raised in the Mission described the earliest processions: "They were very quiet and spiritual. People prayed and held photos of deceased family members."¹⁶ Since then, the procession has burgeoned into an exuberant annual manifestation of thousands. It includes Aztec blessing rituals and danza groups, colorful banners, sidewalk altars, chalk art, giant skeleton puppets, Cuban Santería practitioners, and a Jamaican steel drum band on wheels. It now attracts an estimated 20,000 participants spanning all ages, races, and ethnicities—making it the largest Day of the Dead procession in the United States.¹⁷ The procession is not only pan-Latino, but pan-American, reflecting the many diverse cultures coexisting in San Francisco (and the United States). Inspired by La Galería and Self-Help Graphics, community centers, schools, libraries, museums, folk art stores, city parks, and commercial districts throughout California, the Southwest, and later, the rest of the United States, developed annual Day of the Dead programming in the months of October and November.¹⁸

Further Hybridizing a Hybrid

Foremost for Chicanos was the integration of culture, art, and politics, not simply for the sake of making art, but for the goal of creating community and progressive political change. Chicano-style Day of the Dead altar-making, street processions, and ceremonies were "invented traditions"—newly created practices of a ritual or symbolic nature, aimed at inculcating certain values and norms to help establish group cohesion and identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Although this term often connotes a falsification of history or manipulation from "above" for the benefit of ruling elites, Chicano Day of the Dead events exemplified creativity from "below." Here, cultural traditions were re-created not to provide a dominant group with "the sanction of precedent, social continuity or natural law," as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992:2) describe, but rather to offer a marginalized population resources with which to counter decades of discrimination from the dominant society (in the form of segregated and underfunded schools, substandard housing, exploitative employment practices,

police brutality, unfair treatment in the judiciary system, and near invisibility within mainstream cultural institutions and politics).

Rather than merely reproduce the rituals of Mexico in California, Chicano artists reconfigured the celebration to make it relevant to their lives and experiences in the United States. They created altar installations symbolically reminiscent of Indigenous altars, incorporating marigolds, copal incense, sugar skulls, and candles, yet fused with elements of US popular culture, (e.g., Hollywood movie memorabilia, comic book heroes, record albums) and political expressions (i.e., feminist art, anti-war bumper stickers, or posters in solidarity with the United Farmworkers Union). They transformed Day of the Dead altars from media originally dedicated to family members who were personally known to the altar makers into tributes honoring individuals and groups not necessarily known by the altar makers. In doing so, they converted the holiday into a commemoration of the collective “ancestors” of all US Latinos—beloved Latino actors, singers, writers, artists, revolutionaries, and other popular culture icons (e.g., Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Che Guevara, Cesar Chavez, Celia Cruz)—as a way to educate the public about the historic contributions of Latinos to the world.

In an even more radical break from Latin American Day of the Dead traditions, Chicanos utilized the holiday’s focus on remembrance to criticize dominant US power structures by creating altars that raised public awareness about socio-political causes of death disproportionately affecting Latinos and other people of color. Such altar installations have commemorated California farm workers poisoned by pesticides (drawing attention to corporate labor and environmental abuses); Latin American migrants who have died trying to cross the United States-Mexico border (drawing attention to the inhumane living and working conditions that lead migrants to cross, as well as ineffective US government immigration policies); urban youth victimized by gangs and drugs (drawing attention to public and private disinvestment in poor urban communities); factory workers killed in industrial accidents; victims of US-funded wars in Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan; the “death” of the environment; the “death” of organized labor; the “death” of arts and education funding; and other political issues (Marchi 2009). In all of these cases, a performative use of symbols is purposely employed in a celebratory atmosphere to create public awareness of social injustices, inspire empathy with victims, and promote changes to the status quo. Illustrating “the ritualesque,” such activities illustrate “the porous and contingent nature of ritual and festival” (Santino 2011:62).

In the United States, art galleries, schools, community centers, and other public secular spaces replaced churches, cemeteries, and private homes as sites of Day of the Dead rituals.¹⁹ Traditional prayers for the dead were replaced with poetry and spoken word events. Chicano festivities combined adaptations of old traditions, such as grave decoration, vigils, and street processions, with new rituals such as craft workshops, public lectures, and documentary screenings about Day of the Dead. All of these activities were (and are) primarily meant to construct and perform cultural identity, rather than fulfill moral obligations to the dead. However, similar to Day of the Dead celebrations in Latin America, these ritual activities created

important opportunities for the cultivation and maintenance of social relationships. As anthropologist Bonnie Bade notes of the Mixtec communities in Oaxaca, Mexico, Day of the Dead is a time for “formally celebrating the support network ties of family, kin, and community and maintaining access to the economic, political, social, and psychological capital they represent” (Bade 1997:8). In Latin America, rituals such as refurbishing gravesites, constructing altars, or preparing special foods for the holiday require the collaboration of extended networks of family and friends who come together to pray for the deceased, visit each other’s altars to pay respects to the dead, share festive foods, and reaffirm collective identity and solidarity. In the United States, people also develop and reinforce a sense of shared community as they gather to plan Day of the Dead celebrations (a process requiring months of meetings and preparatory activities) and engage in altar making, vigils, processions, craft workshops, and other communal activities.

Claims for Public Recognition

While Day of the Dead rituals in Latin America were religious celebrations organized by individual families and church parishes, Chicano celebrations were secular art and culture events organized and funded by non-profit organizations. From their inception, they were meant to contest mainstream attitudes of Latino inferiority, showcasing and legitimizing Mexican traditions in educational and cultural institutions, and granting them official status as “art.” Anthropologist Arlene Dávila notes that, prior to the 1970s and 1980s, prestigious museums and art galleries in the United States typically shunned the work of US Latino artists, who were considered neither truly “American” nor “Latin American.” Their representations of magical realism, neo-indigenist styles, experimental modern art, or revolutionary expressions were considered jarring to the “legitimate” standards of Western classical art (Dávila 1999). Chicano Day of the Dead exhibits helped open up such institutions for US Latino artists, garnering financial resources and public space in which to celebrate Latino culture. Access to public space is a crucial element of contemporary cultural politics, and public rituals are as much symbolic statements to outsiders about a group’s social and political presence as they are consolidations of internal values and meanings for insiders (Baumann 1992; Orsi 2002). The creation of a public sphere via Day of the Dead rituals and art provided a significant aperture for the recognition of Latino culture by the mainstream US public, including the arts community, public school districts, journalists, universities, public libraries, local elected leaders, small and large businesses,²⁰ and the general population.

While the celebration helped draw positive attention to Chicano artists, it also brought positive attention to Latino immigrants, who are even more marginalized by mainstream society than US-born Latinos. Cadavál describes how a Day of the Dead celebration at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, allowed local Nicaraguan, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Ecuadorian immigrants to “take over” social space in one of the nation’s most prestigious institutions—historically the realm of the (mainly white) upper middle classes. Although the holiday was not widely ob-

served in DC in the 1980s, she notes that its celebration provided an opportunity for ethnically diverse Latinos to collaborate amongst themselves and gain attention from the mainstream (Cadavál 1985:186). Mary Ann Thiem, the coordinator of Oceanside, California's Day of the Dead festivals during the years 2002 to 2006, similarly notes the respected position of Latino immigrants during the event:

Day of the Dead brings a lot of people together who might not normally work together. The planning takes almost a year. There are lots of meetings. So we have business people, artists, Mixtec people, designers, teachers all working together. . . . There's people who speak Spanish and people who speak English and people who speak Mixtec or Zapotec. . . . On the day of the event, everyone is working together.²¹

These rituals have helped create a sense of community among Mexican Americans and other US Latinos and gained them a measure of attention and admiration in the wider cultural sphere.

Beyond California

Because of their unique and "exotic" appeal, early California Day of the Dead events attracted media attention from local newspapers and television stations. Yolanda Garfias Woo, who was invited to do a Day of the Dead exhibit at the prestigious De Young Museum in San Francisco in 1975, remembers that all three major TV networks covered the opening of the exhibit. She notes, "It was the first time a major museum was interested in Día de los Muertos, something so ethnically *outlandish*. . . . It was great because since Galería [de la Raza] was also doing a Día de los Muertos exhibit at the same time, we got invited to do a lot of TV programs. . . . This was a real turning point for the community, as well as for me, in terms of being public."²² Day of the Dead celebrations soon spread to other areas of California, with similar art exhibits and festivities becoming popular among Mexican American communities in Texas, Chicago, and the Southwest. However, the holiday was relatively unknown in the rest of the United States until the early 1990s.

From the mid 1980s onward, as new waves of Latino immigrants (the majority of whom were Mexican and Central American) traveled both *to* and *within* the United States, following job opportunities that drew them far beyond the traditionally distinct geographic settlements of earlier US Latino communities, new arts, educational, and social service organizations emerged to serve them. Such organizations provided administrative support, financial resources, and public spaces in which to celebrate Latino culture, helping make Day of the Dead events the norm rather than the exception in cities across the country. Today, Día de los Muertos celebrations occur in East Coast cities such as New York, Boston, and Washington, DC; in globalizing "heartland" towns in places such as Nebraska and Kansas; and even in Alaska and Hawaii. Because Day of the Dead is a ritual event with which people of various Latin American backgrounds can identify,²³ diverse populations such as Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, Ecuadorians, and other Latinos participate in celebrations,

interweaving their regional traditions in “a pan-Latino American Day of the Dead model” that began to appear in the early 1980s (Cadavál 1985:181). Honduran and Bolivian immigrants have held Day of the Dead activities featuring their native foods and dances in Cleveland, Ohio; Chilean immigrants have erected Day of the Dead altars in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to remember those who disappeared during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet; and Guatemalans have created altar installations in Oakland, Boston, and Miami in memory of the 100,000 Mayas killed in the Guatemalan military’s “Scorched Earth” campaign in the 1980s. Guatemalan kite-making workshops have also been held at Day of the Dead celebrations in California, Chicago, and New York. And, the Day of the Dead celebration held annually since 2004 in New Brunswick, New Jersey (where I work), has included altar installations and performances by Indigenous Mixtecos from Oaxaca, Indigenous Maya Mam from Guatemala, Peruvians, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Costa Ricans, and others who now comprise New Jersey’s growing Latino population. The greater diversity of Latino participants is reflected in news headlines that increasingly describe the holiday as “Latino” or “Hispanic” rather than exclusively “Mexican”:

The spirits awakened for Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, on Saturday, as Hispanics around Houston gathered at cemeteries to reunite with their loved ones. (Lopez 2003)

The Mexican and Central American tradition of Día de los Muertos dictates that the souls of the dead return every year to visit relatives. (“Mr. And Mrs. Bones Request the Pleasure of your Company” 2008)

Día de los Muertos isn’t celebrated only in Mexico, but in several other Latin American countries as well, including Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia. (Olvera 2003)

Altar making, walking together in processions, holding vigils, and other related ritualistic activities can stimulate feelings of empathy and solidarity, creating communicative space for the development of “a distinct Latino sensibility, a social and political discourse, and a Latino aesthetic” emerging from the collective experiences of being Latino in the United States (Flores 1997:264). At the same time, these public rituals illustrate the negotiations for public recognition taking place between newcomer Latinos and those with longer histories in the United States. For example, a 2002 Day of the Dead exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California featured Guatemalan and Salvadoran installations along with Mexican ones. Instead of calling the celebration a “Mexican” tradition, as the museum had done in previous years, the publicity materials described it as “Mesoamerican.” The exhibition featured altar installations “that explore the Days of the Dead as a Mesoamerican tradition of shared spirituality among the people of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and their descendants here in California.”²⁴ This expanded definition of Day of the Dead occurred as a result of advocacy done by Oakland’s Central American community. A Guatemalan-born artist, raised in Los Angeles, who worked with the predominantly Mexican American Day of the Dead planning committee to organize the museum’s Day of the Dead exhibit, describes the kinds of negotiations that are taking place:

Living in California, of course, there's the Chicano experience. But not very often is the Central American Maya experience recognized. You always get the Mexica-Aztlán-Chicano experience. For me, it was a real priority to have [the Maya] voice heard within this institution, too. . . . It's hard though. It's definitely a push to get that voice heard. Even just changing the language, because now, instead of saying it's a "Mexican" tradition, we're saying "Mesoamerican" tradition. . . . Internally within the committee, it was a push to get them to do this. There's always resistance when you try to change anything. . . . I guess if you lived in New York, everyone would assume you're Puerto Rican. Here in California, if you're not Mexican, you're sort of invisible.²⁵

In addition to diverse Latino populations participating in US Day of the Dead rituals are growing numbers of non-Latinos. People of Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, East Indian), Native American, African American, Italian, Irish, Jewish, Middle Eastern, and other backgrounds now make altars at Day of the Dead art exhibitions, festivals, or in their homes, attend workshops to make Day of the Dead crafts, and walk in related street processions. Many of these people learned about Day of the Dead via the educational work carried out by Chicano artists in art galleries, schools, and museums. Another educational vehicle has been the mass media, teaching the public about the holiday by advertising (and explaining the meanings behind) altar exhibits, sugar skull workshops, vigils, and processions. National news organizations such as the Associated Press, National Public Radio, *US News & World Report*, *The New York Times*, and local newspapers and TV news stations have helped to "mainstream" what was once a fringe Chicano artistic expression. Popular travel publications such as the American Automobile Association's *Horizons* and *Westways* magazines, and the Elderhostel Annual Program promote Day of the Dead excursions to New Mexico, Texas, and California, while lifestyle magazines such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Travel and Leisure*, and *Martha Stewart Living* have featured articles on the holiday. Day of the Dead celebrations and imagery have been featured in episodes of prime-time television shows such as *Beverly Hills 90210* (1994 season); Disney TV *Lizzie McGuire* (2001 season); HBO series *Six Feet Under* (2002 season) and *Carnivale* (2003 season); and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2009); the hit video game *Grim Fandango* (1998); and Hollywood films such as John Sayles's *Silver City* (2004) and Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* (2005). As of April 16, 2013, the celebration was the subject of nearly 1,400,000,000 non-profit, educational, personal, and commercial Internet websites geared toward an English-speaking audience.²⁶

Recognizing the power of the media to educate the general public about Latino culture, event organizers have welcomed press coverage of the celebration, both as a way to promote the tradition and to prevent misunderstandings of it. Given the unfamiliarity of mainstream US audiences with non-Western cultural practices and belief systems in the 1970s, a celebration of "the dead," replete with "offerings," smoldering incense, and other unfamiliar rites, was initially misinterpreted by some as the handiwork of Satan worshippers. In response to the 1976 Day of the Dead exhibit at La Galería de la Raza in San Francisco, for example, the word "necrophiliacs" was scrawled on the front windows of the gallery.²⁷ People who did not understand the tradition accused the Galería staff of being members of a death cult. Organizer

René Yañez notes: "The Irish captain of the Mission Police Station refused to give me a permit to hold the Day of the Dead procession. He called me a 'devil' . . . [and] said, 'Over my dead body!' People thought we were a death cult. They made references to Charles Manson."²⁸

Along with non-Latinos disturbed by what they perceived to be sacrilegious communing with the dead, were Mexican Americans and other Latinos who were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the Indigenous aspects of the holiday. Even today, there are Mexican Americans who do not identify with the celebration of El Día de los Muertos. When she first began teaching school children about Day of the Dead, Yolanda Garfias Woo was criticized by both Anglo co-workers and a Mexican American school superintendent: "I was criticized by the staff for teaching 'witchcraft,' even though the teacher next door to me one year during Halloween was standing in her doorway, wearing a long black gown with a pointed witch's hat, and she said to me, 'You know you can't do that in your classroom because it's witchcraft.'"²⁹ Later, when Garfias Woo conducted a teachers' workshop about Day of the Dead, she learned from the teachers that the school superintendent, an upper-middle-class Mexican American, had adamantly resisted the teachers' request for the workshop: "He had told the teachers that it was barbaric and that only the poorest areas of Mexico, only the uneducated people did it, and that it wasn't part of mainstream Mexican culture and had no place in the school curriculum."³⁰ Given such misunderstandings and resistance among both non-Latinos and Latinos, Chicano artists worked hard to clarify that the celebration bore no relation to zombies, witchcraft, or the devil. Communicating the proper meaning of Day of the Dead was important not only in terms of creating a positive representation of their cultural identity, but also in terms of acquiring institutional support from foundations and commercial sponsors, making it possible to expand activities to new sites and larger audiences.³¹

Today, a cross section of Mexican Americans and other US Latinos from various ethnic, racial, class, political, and generational backgrounds embrace the tradition; however, there are many who do not. As a second-generation Mexican American office worker in his late thirties commented: "I don't celebrate such holidays. Truthfully, it scares the living daylights out of me. Just the weirdness of it. Can you *imagine* people actually celebrating the *dead*?!"³² Similarly, a forty-year-old San Diego hairstylist who spent her childhood in Coahuila, Mexico, before moving as a teenager to San Antonio, Texas, expressed perplexity:

I'm a dedicated Catholic, very active in the Church. Growing up, we never celebrated Day of the Dead. We never even heard about it. I don't even really know what it is. It's kind of funny how we people from Mexico don't know about Day of the Dead, but people say it's a Mexican thing. No one in my family ever celebrated it, not even my grandparents. No one I *knew* celebrated it, and I lived in a very Mexican neighborhood. My kids celebrate it now in school though. They go to the Spreckels School, which is bilingual. They make masks and do other things. At first, when they came home talking about Day of the Dead, I didn't respond too positively. I didn't know why the school was teaching my kids about this cult and I didn't like the idea. I thought it was something weird. But they told me it was our Mexican heritage. Well, I never heard of it. I still don't know what it is, exactly.³³

Institutional Culture

That US Day of the Dead celebrations are held in mainstream cultural and educational institutions has transformed folk culture into a form of official culture, used in different ways by different populations. In the process, traditions are altered and adapted. Most museums and galleries do not allow real candles to be lighted on altars, for fear of fire. Incense cannot be used, or it would trigger fire alarms. Organic materials such as real flowers and foods are usually prohibited to avoid bugs, rodents, or mold that could damage other museum collections. Creative solutions are implemented by artists, such as deploying strategic spotlights and electric candles, creating realistic-looking papier-mâché foods, and using silk or paper flowers. Smaller art galleries, community centers, schools, and outdoor parks and courtyards do not have the same restrictions and often allow more flexibility.

Museums benefit economically from the crowds attracted to Day of the Dead exhibits, but they simultaneously perform key educational and legitimizing functions for Latino culture, popularizing it among wide audiences. Such institutional validation can help minority populations resist the social pressure they have historically faced to abandon ethnic traditions and assimilate Anglo norms. In addition, it provides opportunities for Latinos, particularly youth who attend such exhibits on school field trips or with their families, to see Latino culture esteemed by the larger society. It also creates connections between Latinos and museums. A Guatemalan American in her mid-twenties explained:

I live two blocks away from here [the Oakland Museum of California], but I never stepped foot in this institution until I came to the Day of the Dead celebration they have here. . . . If you come from somewhere where they don't take you to museums, you don't always think of going to museums. . . . So I went, and I was amazed. . . . What was amazing to me was how a public institution took something that was so personal and practiced in the home and turned it into a public interpretation. . . . So I started to be a volunteer here. Then a job opened up and I got a job here.³⁴

Barbara Henry, Educational Curator for the Oakland Museum of California, notes: "We know that the Day of the Dead event brings in Latinos, and then once they know about the museum, they come back for other exhibits. We have done surveys that ask if people have come to any previous museum events, and most of the time, they check off Day of the Dead. Four of our staff members have started as volunteer guides at our Day of the Dead exhibit."³⁵ The exhibit designer at the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard University shared a similar story. When he recruited local Latino youth to help create an altar exhibit, relationships began between museum staff and the teens, launching the artistic career of one youth who did not previously consider himself an artist.³⁶

However, mainstream institutional support and mass media coverage, alone, do not explain the appeal of the celebration to diverse groups. In a society famed for its rugged individualism, many contemporary Americans find themselves longing for emotionally satisfying community-building experiences to offset feelings of isolation that are common to modern life. Day of the Dead celebrations help fulfill this longing by

providing a public medium through which to express repressed emotions regarding the loss of loved ones. Non-Latino Day of the Dead participants I interviewed frequently noted a dearth of opportunities in mainstream US society for publicly remembering deceased loved ones. A Korean American from Los Angeles said, "Americans tend to be morbid and depressed about death, while the Latino culture honors their ancestors and celebrates their life through their death."³⁷ An Irish American from Boston who had recently lost her father said, "Making the altar is very healing. It makes a connection with the people who have gone before us and affirms what they did in life."³⁸ Feelings of gratitude for the opportunity to process feelings about deceased loved ones were frequently expressed by attendees of Day of the Dead events, such as the following respondent: "During Day of the Dead, there's . . . an incredible solidarity, a completeness of people coming together to celebrate their loved ones and their own emotions, which rarely happens here. It's a time to acknowledge that we're all human and are dealing with some pretty heavy emotions."³⁹ Others, such as this Anglo-Saxon native of Kentucky, stated that participating in Day of the Dead helped mourn the loss of family members: "I loved the somber yet celebratory tone of the event. I took the time to reflect on the loss of a favorite aunt who died unexpectedly that year. I hadn't been able to go to her funeral. My experience that night gave me some much-needed closure on her death."⁴⁰ Some respondents noted with sadness that most Americans now die in hospitals, often without family members present. Others called US funeral rituals "impersonal" and "unfulfilling" in contrast to what they felt were more personalized, supportive, and healing rituals of Day of the Dead.

Debates around Hybridity and Authenticity

But, how do Chicanos feel about the participation of diverse Latinos and non-Latinos in Day of the Dead events? Most respondents expressed pride that the celebration is now known across the United States. However, some expressed mixed feelings about the impact of non-Latinos on the celebration, concerned that they are misinterpreting and altering the rituals in ways that stray too far from the original tradition. The word "tradition" is regularly used in discussions of Day of the Dead, even though there is not one but many traditions emanating from diverse geographical regions and Latino populations. In the US context, what does "tradition" mean for a celebration that is relatively new? Does it mean recreating, as closely as possible, the types of altars made by Indigenous Mexican families? Does it mean designing artistic and radical altar installations for the purpose of political critique? Does it mean keeping the celebration within the Latino community?

The annual Day of the Dead procession in San Francisco's Mission District, the most famous such procession in the United States, is a site of debates around these questions. First organized in 1981, former director of La Galería de la Raza, René Yañez, notes: "By the third year, it became massive, with thousands of people."⁴¹ The procession now attracts some 20,000 participants annually, at least half of whom appear to be non-Latinos.⁴² In addition to local residents and school children, it now includes stilt walkers, jugglers, bagpipe players, steel drummers, and political banners condemning human rights abuses, wars, and other sociopolitical causes of death.

Expressing the resentment that some Latinos feel toward the large non-Latino presence in the procession, a fifty-three-year-old native of Ecuador who grew up in the Mission District told me that she no longer attends because she feels the procession is “too gringo.” A forty-two-year-old native of El Salvador who has lived in San Francisco since she was seventeen was also turned off by the procession’s metamorphosis: “I stopped going for a number of years. But then we started again because my daughter’s school participates. The kids dress up like skeletons and make a giant skeleton puppet and her friends and teachers are there, so we go.” Some San Francisco Latinos I interviewed shared the feelings of the following Chicana artist:

When René started the processions at Galería de la Raza, they were real. It was somber, sad, and beautiful, like the processions that happen in Mexico. . . . But in San Francisco, everyone who wasn’t part of the tradition jumped in with their drums, jumped in with their caricatures, cartoons, skates, and puppets that have no meaning to the procession. So it turned into a kind of carnival. It has no meaning. Not in a real sense. . . . It’s just cool and popular to be there.⁴³

Another Chicana artist explained: “People come from all over the Bay Area, which is a good thing, but . . . perhaps unintentionally when people like something, they begin to change the very essence of what it is.”⁴⁴

Commenting on the participation of non-Latino artists in Day of the Dead altar exhibitions, a Chicana artist in her mid-sixties stated: “The only thing that worries me is when I think that the person doing the installation actually misunderstands what [Día de los] Muertos is. It concerns me only because I don’t want the tradition to get lost. It was so hard to find it, to get it in the first place.”⁴⁵ The above comments come from people who remember a time before Day of the Dead was popular in the United States, a time when Latinos were routinely treated as second class citizens by the dominant society. As cultural midwives of a US ritual practice originally intended to honor Mexican culture, these artists felt a strong sense of ownership regarding appropriate and inappropriate expressions of the tradition. However, there are divergent views within the Chicano community about what constitutes “appropriate” and “inappropriate.” These include debates not only about the impact of non-Latinos on Day of the Dead, but also about the repercussions of artistic expressions by Latinos who have taken the rituals in unconventional directions. Some feel that US celebrations should mirror the solemnity of rituals in Indigenous Mexican villages, while others feel they should reflect the cultural fusion of peoples and experiences found in the United States. Yañez, considered “the godfather” of Day of the Dead in the United States, has welcomed non-traditional interpretations of Day of the Dead from the onset, curating unique and provocative exhibitions, such as his famous “Rooms for the Dead,” held at the Mission Cultural Center and Yerba Buena Cultural Center, and “City of Miracles” held at the SomArts Cultural Center.⁴⁶ Receiving both admiration and criticism for his work, he notes: “Some people think it’s too far out. . . . They want to see paper cuts [*papel picado*⁴⁷] and traditional altars.” When he began inviting people from different cultures to participate in Day of the Dead exhibits, Yañez received negative reactions from some of his Chicano peers:

I got a deluge of objections from people in the community who wanted to keep it Latino. First it was Chicano and Mexican only, and I started opening it up to other Latinos and there was an objection to that. Then the objection went. Then I opened it up to other people and there were more objections and debates. I started feeling pressure from people, mostly academics, who were saying, "You should keep it strictly Latino, Chicano, Mexican American." I wasn't comfortable with that, because part of the process and evolution that happened was that children from all over the city would come see the Day of the Dead in their schools and with their families. And when those kids were growing up and coming to me and saying, "I want to participate," I didn't feel comfortable telling them, "No you can't participate. You're Black."⁴⁸

Like any other community, the US Latino community is heterogeneous. People have a variety of views about Day of the Dead and a variety of spiritual, social, educational, and political reasons for participating. And like any other cultural form dislocated from its original context, this celebration takes on vastly different meanings in its new context, reflecting the intersections and interactions of participants. Some Latinos object to the introduction of new elements in Day of the Dead celebrations, believing that authentic traditions can be identified and should be preserved. They equate cultural change with assimilation and cultural extinction. Others feel that Day of the Dead has survived since pre-Columbian times precisely because it has adapted to changing cultural environments. They argue that incorporating new elements increases the celebration's contemporary relevance and is crucial for its continued survival. Chicano intellectuals and artists who adopted the celebration as adults are often more stringent about maintaining pure "traditions" than people who grew up with the custom in Latin America. For example, while plastic jack-o-lanterns and orange and black Halloween decorations are periodically seen today on altars made by Indigenous families in Mexico, as well as on those made by recent Mexican immigrants in the United States,⁴⁹ many Chicano artists express alarm at such cultural mixtures. They consider these elements manifestations of cultural imperialism, given the growing national presence in Mexico of US chain stores such as Walmart, Costco, K-Mart, J. C. Penney, and CVS Pharmacy since the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Meanwhile, the above-mentioned Mexican families consider plastic pumpkins and other Halloween toys attractive additions to their altars. One Chicana artist, who visited southern Mexican schools to view Day of the Dead altars, expressed the following dismay:

I got to one classroom and I said to the young man, "There's something wrong with this altar, do you know what it is?" And he said, "No, I can't see what you mean." And I said, "You've picked up the Halloween colors. Why is your altar done in orange and black?!" He said, "Oh, Maestra, because it's very popular here." I said, "Honey, you've got the wrong colors! Those are Halloween colors. You shouldn't be including them in your altar."⁵⁰

For the predominantly college-educated Chicanos who popularized Day of the Dead celebrations in the United States, mixing elements of US and Mexican popular culture within Day of the Dead altar exhibitions was liberating. It allowed them to

express both Mexican and US aspects of their lived experiences, promoting a unique Chicano identity distinct from European and US Anglo identities they associated with colonialism and imperialism. Many of these artists view Halloween figures on altars as a form of cultural domination that must be resisted. Meanwhile, for the predominantly working-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans who place Halloween elements on their altars, this might also be considered a form of liberation. Particularly for Mexicans hailing from desperately poor areas of southern Mexico, celebrating Halloween and incorporating Halloween symbols on their Day of the Dead altars may be a way of feeling included in a pastime that is not only one of the biggest holidays in the United States, but is also now widely celebrated in Mexico by those who can afford costumes and candy. For poor, rural, and Indigenous peoples who are socially and economically marginalized in both Mexico and the United States, placing pumpkins, plastic ghosts, or Halloween candy on Day of the Dead altars can be a way of expressing their improved material conditions and participation in mainstream “modern” society, while also maintaining their cultural traditions. In a different way than the Chicanos of the 1970s, these immigrants may thus be resisting marginalization and striving to be seen as people who “count” in the national fabric.

At the same time, there are Chicano artists who prefer celebrating Halloween to Day of the Dead, resenting what they feel are rigid and exoticized discourses about racial difference. They wince at the automatic association of Mexicans with sugar skeletons and spirits, and eschew common assertions, immortalized by Mexican writer and Nobel Prize laureate, Octavio Paz, that Mexicans are intrinsically “more connected with the dead” than other populations.⁵¹ As one artist stated emphatically, “I *hate* Day of the Dead! I *only* do Halloween. With Halloween, you have much more freedom to do whatever you want.”⁵² This artist held annual Halloween art exhibits in his well-known gallery as a way to reject common assumptions that all Mexicans create Day of the Dead altars each fall. David Avalos, a Chicano artist and professor of visual arts at the California State University at San Marcos, notes that people in differing social, political, economic, and historical locations desire to express [or not express] Day of the Dead in their own way: “Even young people of Mexican ancestry here in the United States bristle at the constraints they feel are imposed on them by an older generation. They want to make art that reflects and informs their Chicano identity in ways that are different than some recipe handed down from 1970.”⁵³

New immigrants and new generations of Latino artists who have grown up seeing Day of the Dead celebrated in US schools and communities, approach the event from a very different perspective than “old school” Chicano activists. While maintaining respect for the groundbreaking work of earlier generations of Chicanos, many of the younger generation seem less concerned with the gatekeeping of authenticity. In fact, a group of young Latino artists enthusiastically praised the very San Francisco procession scorned by older Chicanos, expressing excitement rather than concern at its non-traditional aspects. In contrast to the middle-aged Chicana who said, “Everyone who wasn’t part of the tradition jumped in with their drums, jumped in with their caricatures, cartoons, skates and puppets that have no meaning to the procession,” a

Chicana artist in her early twenties who has helped organize the Mission District's Day of the Dead procession exclaimed: "Last year, we had people dancing all night! We had fire dancers and people sharing food with one another. A lot of musicians came out, bagpipe players and drummers. It's so cool . . . people of all ages and cultures . . . people really get *into* it. Wearing all kinds of costumes, using all kinds of creative props, music, anything you can think of!"⁵⁴ The same young artist also discussed feeling a "pull" from older Chicanos to adhere to "tradition," while feeling an inner desire to embrace the multiple cultures that constituted her world: "People have views of how it should be. . . . You have your elders, whom you need to respect, who have their rituals and their understanding of the way it should be. . . . For me, being Latina, it's been a bit of a struggle. I'm of Mexican descent, but I don't speak very good Spanish. So sometimes I'm accepted by the community, sometimes I'm not." Regarding the differing factions and opinions about Day of the Dead, she continued: "There's a lot of political bullshit that's deeply rooted in artists that have been here for like thirty-five or forty years—since we've been alive!—that I can't even begin to understand."⁵⁵

Ironically, while Chicano traditionalists strive to maintain the Mexican authenticity of US renditions of the celebration, Mexicans note how "un-Mexican" they are. As a native of Mexico City, who first saw Chicano altar exhibits in San Francisco in the mid 1990s, told me: "What happens in California with Mexican American, Chicano and Latino artists is really different. It's not Mexican. It's not Latin American. It's a whole different thing."⁵⁶ Carlos Von Son, also from Mexico City and a professor of Spanish at the California State University at San Marcos, felt similarly when he first observed Chicano Day of the Dead celebrations:

Mexicans sometimes laugh when they see the cultural celebrations we do over here . . . because they feel they're not authentic. . . . Being honest, I felt the same way when I first came to the US. My instinct was to correct [Mexican American] people for the way they spoke Spanish, or tell them they were making quesadillas the wrong way. When I would see Day of the Dead celebrations here, I would say, "Don't use those elements that are foreign to the way it is in Mexico." But it didn't take me long to realize that these things are not wrong. It's not a degeneration of the original. . . . I started looking more closely at the changes and loving the way that culture gets adapted to new surroundings.⁵⁷

Tomás Benitez, a Chicano artist and the former director of Self-Help Graphics, observed that the cultural diversity of Chicanos, themselves, naturally leads to diverse interpretations of Day of the Dead. Benitez is part Irish (and still keeps in touch with relatives in County Cork, Ireland), while his son is half Jewish. They celebrate Day of the Dead as well as Hanukkah and Passover. "That doesn't take away from my Chicanismo, it adds to it," Benitez states. "Day of the Dead is the same way." Noting that racial and cultural diversity have been integral parts of US Day of the Dead celebrations from their beginning, he states:

Let's not forget that our experience, which is only about thirty years old, is predated by an experience in Mexico that was several hundred years old. So we're already

knocking off. What we're talking about is the authenticity of how Chicanos celebrate it. Which means there's a flexibility to it to begin with. . . . From the get-go [at Self-Help Graphics] we were a mixed group of Chicanos with a Franciscan nun who was an Italian girl with a Jewish stepfather and a couple of other nuns from other places. Right away we had exchanges with Black organizations and Asians and an Australian group. That's hybridization of culture.⁵⁸

Along similar lines, René Yañez feels that opening Day of the Dead to a variety of people and forms of expression keeps it germane to the lived experiences and socio-political reality of Latinos and everyone else who participates:

Death doesn't discriminate. As a Chicano-Latino curator, we started Day of the Dead to create alliances of Chicano culture and work together with other people. I've worked with people from Chinatown. I've worked with Black groups in Oakland. I've worked with mainstream groups. This allowed me to learn about how other cultures think and feel and where we fit in the scheme of things. Because if you're going to be a Chicano curator and not learn from other cultures, then you're very isolated, and not being relevant to your own culture. . . . Irish, Korean, Japanese, African people all bring something to the table. Other Latinos bring something to the table. It's a chain reaction.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Chicano adaptations of Day of the Dead have circulated to Mexico, influencing expressions of the celebration there. In the 1970s and 1980s, Chicano artists traveled to Mexico City to speak to urban audiences (who were still largely unfamiliar with or disdainful of "Indian" Day of the Dead rituals at that time), conducting workshops and book talks about the celebration. Ironically, as they were embracing Day of the Dead, Halloween was gaining popularity in Mexico. Artist and visual arts professor Amalia Mesa-Bains, who created an altar at one of the earliest Day of the Dead exhibits at La Galería (and many subsequent altar exhibits around the United States since), notes: "There was this strange moment where Mexicans were celebrating Halloween and Chicanos were celebrating Day of the Dead. A number of Chicanos began to go back to Mexico and assist in reclaiming the tradition there. . . . In Mexico City and other large cities where there was much more dominance from the US . . . most contemporary Mexican artists were not interested in those traditions because to them they seemed rather old-fashioned. And so we Chicano artists actually valued something that contemporary Mexican artists did not."⁶⁰

The influence of Chicanos on Mexican expressions of the celebration has been acknowledged by both Chicanos and Mexicans involved in the art scene. Sculptor Guillermo Pulido, who moved from Mexico to California in the late 1980s, noted the "transformation" taking place with Day of the Dead in the United States, and felt there was a "recycling of influences back and forth" (Morrison 1992:362). An educational curator at the Mexican Museum of San Francisco, who moved to California from Mexico in 1997, expressed similar feelings: "It's felt that Chicano celebrations inspired more politicized and artistic experimentation with altars in Mexico."⁶¹ Curator Tere Romo has stated that Chicanos "forever changed the tradition not only in the United States, but in Mexico, as well" (Romo 2000:31). Yet, the impact of

Chicano Day of the Dead celebrations has not been limited to the United States and Mexico. According to Tomás Benitez, Chicano artists were invited to create Day of the Dead exhibits and teach altar-making workshops in Scotland in 1994 and 1996: "We did an exchange with the Glasgow Print Studio. People asked us why, and we said, 'Well, we're hooking up with the Scottish. They're like the Chicanos of England.'" ⁶² More recently, Chicano-style Day of the Dead celebrations and exhibits have been held in Canada, New Zealand, England, Ireland, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Japan, and Australia. ⁶³

Conclusion

Day of the Dead in the United States illustrates the contradictory struggles over the meanings of "authenticity" and "hybridity." As anthropologist Martin Stokes notes, while from a critical perspective, the language of hybridity is often used in opposition to discourses of authenticity, the two concepts are complexly entangled. He writes, "If anything is authentic now, it is hybrid genres, organically connected to the social life and cultural aspirations of particular localities" (Stokes 2004:60). Folklorist Regina Bendix notes that quests for cultural authenticity often stem from a profound longing for meaning in a demystified, hyper-rationalized society. They aim to recover phenomena whose loss is realized only through modernity, and whose recovery can be undertaken only through modern methods and resources (Bendix 1997). Because they are oriented toward the past, notions of authenticity embody a conservatism that shuns new concepts, practices, or participants as illegitimate. In so doing, discourses of authenticity uphold the fallacy that cultural purity, rather than hybridity, is the norm (Bendix 1997:8–9). For people who have felt their ethnic culture devalued and threatened, maintaining cultural practices that reflect a perceived faithfulness to the past can feel urgent. For others who inhabit different generational, social, or national locations (such as young Latinos who have benefited from the political, educational, and artistic legacies of older Chicanos, or recent Mexican immigrants who do not feel a need to prove their "Mexican-ness"), there may be less concern about adhering to set traditions.

Conversations and negotiations over Day of the Dead ("growing pains," as one respondent called them) are ongoing and ultimately productive, as they can enhance intra-ethnic and intergenerational understanding. It is most useful to think of authenticity as the quality of an experience, and the feelings it evokes. Most Latinos interviewed for this project agreed that the intentions people bring to the rituals—a spirit of remembrance and respect for the dead—is ultimately more important than the format of the activities or the ethnic/racial backgrounds of participants. United States Day of the Dead celebrations have helped mitigate certain social tensions, building bridges among diverse groups of Mexican Americans, between Mexican Americans and other Latinos, and between Latinos and non-Latinos, even as they have incited conversations and negotiations over meaning and ownership. In the process, participants experience and express forms of human creativity and agency that represent hybridity's social and political potential.

Notes

1. The term Chicano/a is used as a marker of self-determination and ethnic pride by a subset of Mexican Americans dedicated to progressive political organizing work and/or the creation of politically meaningful public art.
2. Marchi (2009).
3. For more on the fascinating history and meaning of sugar skulls in Mexico, see Brandes (1997).
4. Similar syncretic Day of the Dead celebrations developed in Haiti, the Philippines, Native American communities in North America, and other agrarian-based societies that experienced forced Catholic conversion.
5. Personal discussion with resident of Morales, Izabál, Guatemala, November 5, 1999. The family reunion aspect of Day of the Dead has also been noted by Carmichael and Sayer (1991), Garciagodoy (1998), Greenleigh and Beimler (1991), Bade (1997), and Rogers (2002).
6. Evangelical Christians, in particular, consider Day of the Dead altar making to be pagan idolatry and protest Day of the Dead activities in US schools and other public spaces. Non-Catholic Latinos may consider Day of the Dead “too Catholic.” Mainstream Catholics may consider it “too Indigenous.” Others may consider it “backwards” or “superstitious.”
7. Personal interview with Claudio DeLucca, San Diego, California, April 24, 2003.
8. Grave decoration and picnicking in cemeteries on All Souls’ Day was common among US Catholics of Italian, Polish, Irish, and other ethnic backgrounds through the mid-twentieth century.
9. Personal communication with John Gonzalez, San Antonio Bureau Chief, *The Houston Chronicle*, June 13, 2005.
10. Personal interview with Carmen Lomas Garza, San Francisco, California, May 25, 2006.
11. Chicanos I interviewed usually referred to Day of the Dead as “Indigenous” rather than Catholic, while Indigenous Mixtecs and Mayas I interviewed called the celebration “*muy Católica*.” In Latin America, people who make Day of the Dead altars in their homes are Catholic, whereas in the United States, people of any religion and no religion may create Day of the Dead altars.
12. Personal interview with Macuilxochil Cruz-Chavez, October 18, 2004.
13. Personal interview with Mario Aguilar, November 26, 2007.
14. Personal interview with Yolanda Garfias Woo, San Francisco, California, June 6, 2003.
15. Personal interview with Nancy Chárraga, San Francisco, California, June 5, 2003.
16. Personal conversation, San Francisco, California, November 5, 2002.
17. According to estimates by organizers and local newspapers.
18. Today, internationally prestigious cultural institutions, such as the Smithsonian in the nation’s capital and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, have Day of the Dead programming.
19. Most Chicano celebrations were not held in cemeteries. Occasionally, if a cemetery was near a community center or art gallery, it might be chosen as an appropriate site to hold certain Day of the Dead activities. But, unlike in Latin America, where such rituals routinely took place in cemeteries where participants’ family members were buried, Chicanos rarely had family buried in the cemeteries where they created ceremonial activities. Instead the cemetery was an artistic setting.
20. See Marchi 2009 for a discussion of the commercialization of Day of the Dead.
21. Personal interview with Mary Ann Thiem, Oceanside, California, July 8, 2003.
22. Personal Interview with Yolanda Garfias Woo, June 6, 2003, San Francisco, California.
23. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Peru classify Day of the Dead as a national holiday on which banks, government offices, businesses, and schools are closed. In Mexico, Costa Rica, and Argentina, the holiday is popularly observed but not designated an official bank holiday.
24. From Romo’s curatorial statement in the “Espíritu Sin Fronteras” exhibit guide, published by the Oakland Museum of California and distributed to patrons from October 12 to December 1, 2002.
25. Personal interview, Oakland, California, June 3, 2003.
26. A Google search was conducted on April 16, 2013, using the search term “Days of the Dead.”
27. Personal interviews with Tere Romo, June 2, 2003, and Carmen Lomas Garza, May 25, 2006, San Francisco, California.

28. Personal interview with René Yañez, San Francisco, California, June 3, 2002.
29. Personal interview with Yolanda Garfias Woo, San Francisco, California, June 6, 2003.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Almost all of the gallery curators and community center staff I interviewed had binders or, in some cases, compact discs of collected press coverage of their organization's Day of the Dead events. These displays included newspaper and magazine articles and/or transcripts of radio and TV coverage received. Such media coverage was routinely used as supporting material for grant applications and press packets, indicating the importance of the mass media for the visibility and financial support of US Day of the Dead activities.
32. Personal communication with San Francisco resident who preferred anonymity, June 13, 2005.
33. Personal conversation with Berta Gomez, San Diego, California, April 12, 2001.
34. Personal interview with informant who preferred anonymity, June 3, 2003, Oakland, California.
35. Personal interview with Barbara Henry, June 3, 2003, Oakland, California.
36. Personal discussion with Sam Tager, December 16, 2003, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
37. Personal communication, Los Angeles, California, May 2, 2001.
38. Personal communication, Boston, Massachusetts, July 12, 2001.
39. Personal interview, San Francisco, California, June 5, 2003.
40. Personal e-mail communication, April 21, 2001.
41. Personal interview with René Yañez, San Francisco, California, June 3, 2002.
42. During her ethnographic fieldwork in San Francisco in the 1980s and 1990s, Suzanne Morrison noted: "Non-Latinos initially approached the November 2 procession through the barrio as 'semi-tourists' but are now full-fledged and enthusiastic participants. In fact, every year that I have been present [1984–87, 1990–91], Anglos have constituted the majority of the processants" (Morrison 1992:2). When I attended the Mission procession during the years 2001–04, at least half of the participants appeared to be non-Latinos.
43. Personal interview, June 2, 2003, San Francisco, California.
44. Personal interview, June 5, 2003, San Francisco, California.
45. Personal interview, June 6, 2003, San Francisco, California.
46. "Rooms for the Dead" (1990–93) transformed the concept of altars into themed rooms for the dead. Yañez invited Latinos, Anglos, blacks, Asians, and others to create room installations. In "City of Miracles" (2001) he pushed the room concept a step further, developing the idea of a dreamlike labyrinth of rooms and passages, complex theatrical lighting grids, and brilliant sheaths of cloth wafting in a gentle breeze. Yañez has consistently recruited non-artists as well as artists to create altar installations, an innovative approach not taken by most curators. He notes: "I'll ask housewives, and go to hospitals and recruit nurses and different people to make altars, who wouldn't normally participate." Personal interview, René Yañez, San Francisco, California, June 3, 2003.
47. Intricate, brightly colored tissue paper cutouts made to adorn homes, churches, schools, and town squares for festive occasions, including Day of the Dead, in Mexico and Central America.
48. Personal interview with René Yañez, San Francisco, California, June 3, 2003.
49. Personal observation of Day of the Dead altars made in family homes in Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico, in 1990; Tijuana Mexico from 1999–2005 and altars made by Mexican immigrants at community centers in California from 2000–05. The fusion of Halloween symbols with Day of the Dead altars in Mexico is also noted by Carmichael and Sayer (1991).
50. Personal interview, San Francisco, California, June 2, 2003.
51. See Paz (1981:47–64).
52. Personal conversation, November 5, 2002.
53. Personal discussion with David Avalos, February 11, 2005.
54. Personal interview, June 5, 2003, San Francisco, California.
55. Personal interview, June 5, 2003, San Francisco, California.
56. Personal interview with Salvador Acevedo, June 3, 2003, San Francisco, California.
57. Personal interview with Carlos Von Son, San Marcos, California, July 29, 2003.
58. Personal interview with Tomás Benitez, June 5, 2004, Los Angeles, California.
59. Personal interview with René Yañez, San Francisco, California, June 3, 2003.

60. Personal interview with Amalia Mesa Bains, July 24, 2007.
61. Personal interview with Salvador Acevedo, San Francisco, California, June 3, 2003.
62. Personal interview with Tomás Benitez, Los Angeles, California, June 5, 2004. Another Day of the Dead exhibit at the Royal Museum in Edinburgh, Scotland, was noted in Lambert (2000:17).
63. According to the gallery program of the Naughton Gallery at Queens, in Belfast, Ireland, a "Mexican Día de los Muertos" exhibition, shown previously in Mexico and Spain, was exhibited at the Naughton Gallery from November 28 to December 11, 2004. <http://www.naughtongallery.org/naughtongallery.php?page=58&exhibition=28&PHPSESSID=4390b194cf334200>. The LexisNexis database yields various news articles in *The Toronto Star*, *The Toronto Sun*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), *The Times* (London), *The Guardian* (London), *The Daily Post* (Liverpool), *The Dominion Post* (Wellington, New Zealand), and other newspapers about Día de los Muertos exhibits and celebrations in Canada, England, Ireland, Australia, the Czech Republic, Japan, and New Zealand. In July 2011, a colleague e-mailed me photos of Day of the Dead art on display at La Casa di Frida gallery in Rome.

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