



Figure 1. Teddy Sandoval, untitled photograph, ca. 1970s. Image courtesy of Paul Polubinskas.

Introduction

The People of Paper/La Gente de Papel

Robb Hernández and Tatiana Reinoza

Immersed in paper-based border craftwork, Teddy Sandoval's black and white photograph shows a candid shot of an outdoor festival at Plaza de la Raza in 1970s Los Angeles (fig. 1). Flourishes of *papel picado*, rosettes of *papel de flor*, and streamers of *papel crepé* descend upon the picture plane, welcoming the viewer into an intermediation between body, paper, and camera. Inside a covered stand, women wait for customers in an open market, their *fruta fresca con chile y limón* neatly arranged over a table whose naperly mirrors these large decorative actors. Adapting barrio street photography, a social realist idiom evocative of what Colin Gunckel calls the "Chicano/a photographic," Sandoval situates viewers in a vivid paper environment that (re)claims the ethnic cultural landscape and deliberately obscures the differences between subjects and objects, between works of fiction and works on paper (2015, 377). The sculptural paper forms organize Latino social relations, threaten the camera frame, and refuse to concede their privileged roles to those of human subjects. The *vendedora* at the center glances to her right and beyond the frame, perhaps glimpsing, in her peripheral vision, the young man who contemplates the delicate honeycomb ridges of paper *piña* ornamentation. In these vivid sightlines of a Chicana/o *joie de vivre*, paper behaves, performs, reads, and records.

Much like Sandoval's inquiry into these paper muses, the contributions to this dossier examine Chicanos' and Latinos' profound understanding of and intimate relation with the role/roll of paper. Paper, perhaps more than any other medium, has played and continues to play a critical role in Chicano and Latino cultural production and political life. Political posters, *calendarios*, *lotería* cards, Día de los Muertos woodcut prints, religious souvenirs, weeklies, tear sheets, poetry chapbooks, political pamphlets,

and even piñatas—all offer a wealth of creative expression that speaks to the important way paper functions in Chicano/Latino everyday life. More than this, paper is also a “substrate,” in Carlos Jackson’s terms (257), on which scholarly field formations like history, English, art history, studio art, journalism, comparative literature, and, indeed, Chicano studies base self-definition, analysis, and methodological coherence. The resultant archive exerts scholarly weight through what Richard Cox calls the “romance of the document,” a predisposition for the “hard evidence” of public records (2006, 1). And while digital humanists, performance scholars, and heritage studies professionals (among others) are challenging this paradigm by recentering critical questions over the intangible, ephemeral, and immaterial, we suggest another line of inquiry.

Rather than discern cultural meaning from print media alone, we intensify the material consequence of paper itself. More than a discursive text, paper is an expressive agent, a social mediator, an exteriorization of *latinidad* concretized in printed matter. The material implications of this epistemic shift call for consideration of the physical, ontological, and technological power of paper as a principal source of analysis. An example is seen in Chiapas, Mexico, where the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional launched paper airplanes across barbed wire fencing into the Mexican Army’s barracks, sending soldiers hundreds of protest messages in letters and poems (Lane 2003, 130). Also, following Central America’s decades-long civil wars, historian Kirsten Weld (2014, 2–3) describes the arduous process of recovering 75 million pages of records in Guatemala, exhuming *los desaparecidos*, the disappeared, from long-hidden police

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archives. Mounds of 250,000 ID cards endured heat exposure and water damage, surviving because “the top of the pile [transformed] into a tough papier-mâché crust that protected the others beneath” (2). The corrosive shell gave protection to what she terms the “paper cadavers” buried within. Accordingly, this dossier asks not what paper is but what paper can *do*.

Encouraging a reassessment of the productive ways in which material culture theory, archival theory, object biography studies, print culture, and book history can dialogue with Chicano/Latino studies, we propose a return to Aztlán’s printed matters with an eye toward paper. By magnifying the *material* in material culture, we trouble Kantian human-object divisions, widening the possibilities of paper’s agency to include “act[ing] on people, and [being] acted upon by people, for the purposes of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity” (Woodward 2007, 3). This is not to say that the “social life of things,” in Arjun Appadurai’s terms (1986, 1), is not familiar terrain for fields like material culture, museum scholarship, historical archaeology, and cultural heritage studies. Questions about the physical object world are essential here. However, *latinidades* rarely intercede in this scholarship, and when they do, *papeles* are not the material agent central to the analysis. Despite evidence to the contrary in visual and literary culture, seldom does Chicano/Latino studies voyage into “the *things* that the body relates to and blends in with—in short, the material components of the world it is *being in* . . . [giving] the impression that in these disciplines, the human body is the only flesh of the world, and that this lived-in body roams the ground rather unconstrained by other types of beings” (Olsen 2010, 7, italics in original).

From a literary standpoint, Sandra Cisneros’s polemic short-story collection *The House on Mango Street* exemplifies the way “things appear to us not only from where we are but also from where *they* are and from *what* they are” (Olsen 2010, 133, italics in original). In “Minerva Writes Poems,” Minerva, confronted with a dismal home life and abusive husband, seeks refuge in bits of paper. As her children sleep, “she writes poems on little pieces of paper that she folds over and over and holds in her hands a long time, little pieces of paper that smell like a dime” (Cisneros 1991, 84). With Esperanza, the story’s protagonist, Minerva shares her private writings in solitary moments, anticipating what the Latina Feminist Group calls *papelitos guardados*, those carefully guarded papers that are “tucked away, hidden from inquiring eyes,” evoking “the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times” (2001, 1). These *papelitos* are powerfully charged actors, an emotive

prosthesis, remaining elsewhere, extant in the process of “tuck[ing] away” inside hands, memories, and safe places. They activate discrete channels for Latina writing held close to the skin at the body’s edge.

For this dossier, we borrow the title of Salvador Plascencia’s debut postmodern novel *The People of Paper* (2006), a conceptual piece that struggles with its narrative voice against characters acting inside and outside the text. They threaten to overwhelm Plascencia’s literary authority, much as the sculptural paper forms test the edges of Sandoval’s photograph or *papelitos* loom in the crevices of domestic space in Cisneros’s stories. For our purposes, we enable *gente de papel* to further explore how paper, ink, body, and prose often blur the boundaries in the distinct print ecology of Chicano/Latino culture. After all, *papel* has no easy English translation. The Latina Feminist Group enumerates its many connotations as “protected documents, guarded roles, stored papers, conserved roles, safe papers, secret roles, hidden papers, safe roles, preserved documents, protected roles” (2001, 1). *Papel* can refer to the materiality of the page, the public function of records, a continuous scroll of parchment, an inventory of official letters, and the theatrical position of playing a part whereby the relationship between language, text, and performance is enunciated all at once. We occupy this slippage in the material dexterity, indeterminate definition, and multiple meanings of *papeles* and thus bring together scholarly contributions that reimagine *gente de papel* in its many permutations.

From a visual culture perspective, the heterogeneous experiments on paper in this dossier present particular obstacles to the ideological constructs of aesthetic autonomy and “quality” in their ability to border-cross the spheres of art and politics, author and audience, materiality and dematerialization, as well as life and death. The nebulous and loaded value of “quality” denotes aesthetic excellence, but it is often predicated on the taste and values of a dominant social group. While “quality” might reflect the look and feel of a work of art or literature, including materials and processes, it can also pose questions about the identity of the maker—their education, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship to mainstream institutions and publishing outlets. Contributors to the dossier contextualize these diverse practices (from popular poetry on printed broadsides to posters made in community workshops) without resorting to the exclusionary notions of “quality” precisely because such notions have kept many scholars from a sustained engagement with the often precarious, anonymous, participatory, and DIY orientations of Chicano/Latino cultures of paper. Such exclusions often unleash a ripple effect of epistemic violence

that not only disqualifies a particular work but also renders unworthy an entire corpus. As critic Alicia Gaspar de Alba notes in her monograph study of the exhibition *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, “the Quality question ends up passing judgment on an entire group of people, a way of life, a historical reality” (1998, 166–67). Exposing the machinations that link quality to a theory of aesthetics that regards European culture as pre-eminent and other cultures as primitive or antimodern, these authors reveal that “words like ‘autonomy,’ ‘individuality,’ and ‘personal experience’ are not givens” in the modernity/coloniality paradigm (168). This, therefore, necessitates another set of analytics for *latinidades*’ paper expressions.

The contributors to this dossier are guided by the following questions: How did the proliferation of Chicano/Latino social protest movements encourage the generation of paper, and vice versa? How did the scarcity of media materials enable self-affirming DIY visual and literary practices and other measures of aesthetic value? Moreover, how has paper materialized the collective and cultural experience of being Chicano/Latino in the United States? In methodological terms, if we concede that a *cultura de papel* has been essential in shaping Chicano/Latino subjectivities, how has the transition to digital technology and the utopic promise of paperless libraries restructured the Chicano archive, posing challenges for future studies of Aztlán’s printed matters?

These questions grew apparent during our efforts to finalize the ambitious art program for this dossier. Contributors faced the difficult task of securing high-resolution image reproductions that satisfied the requirements of contemporary academic publishing based on digital software dimensions and specs. Ironically, several contributors, struggling to convert images for digitization, returned to analog formats, because many Chicano/Latino works on paper have not survived the transition to online information technology platforms. For instance, Tatiana Reinoza returned to spools of poorly photographed back issues of *¡Basta Ya!*, seeking crisp representative copy from aged microfiche. Robb Hernández’s unexpected find of Teddy Sandoval’s *Rosa* (1976) in the late artist’s private archive was not without complication. Nonextant, it only exists in a “lo-fi” format of art documentation: the slide. Its grainy and distressed material conditions made its digital import and printed finish difficult to reproduce. For other contributors, acquiring permission to reprint obscure paper materials created its own dilemma. Manuel Martín-Rodríguez details the fortuitous discovery of Bartolo Ortiz’s poetry flysheets in the private family collection of the late Chicano writer Tomás Rivera. Given the scant information about their

provenance and about Ortiz's living descendants, this case illustrates the difficulty in recirculating and acquiring formal permission to reproduce nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chicano literary remains. This dossier's art program intensifies the material consequences of Aztlán's printed matters, taking rare, out-of-print, and nonextant paper works and giving them a second life—many for the first time.

The essays in this collection explore the myriad ways in which a *cultura de papel* continues to shape *latinidad*. The remainder of this introduction details each author's relationship to the following themes: the (de)colonial logics of power and paper, performances of printed bodies, and the "outlaw" imagery of paper-based art and social movement activism.

Paper was foundational to the colonial project that drew physical, geopolitical, and literary borders. In his essay, Manuel Martín-Rodríguez shows how official documents, located in extant "paper trails," permitted control of New Mexican territory under Spanish rule, an exertion of "textual power" based on a literate ruling elite's access to paper, writing implements, and "divine mandate." Examining the nineteenth- and twentieth-century print cultures shaping the US-Mexico borderlands, Martín-Rodríguez demonstrates how the emergence of Spanish-language bookstores, presses, chapbooks, and newspapers in Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas fostered a Chicano popular literature. He recovers the little-known prose and poetry of José Inés García and Bartolo Ortiz, examples of a *cultura de papel* that offered farmworkers and migratory families lyrical stanzas and moral counsel.

The didactic use and influence of paper also emerges in Maria del Mar González-González's essay on graphic arts in Puerto Rico. The Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) was a state-sponsored program to expand adult literacy under the island's first democratically elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. At a time when the rapidly industrializing society faced the threat of cultural erasure, DIVEDCO sought to elevate and nationalize Puerto Rican printmaking. Gonzalez y Gonzalez captures the way paper seemed to pervade the island's industrial and rural zones. In a photo from the Puerto Rican countryside (see Gonzalez y Gonzalez, fig. 2), Irene Delano, who led the graphic arts division of DIVEDCO, guides her apprentices through a figure study of a farmworker. The artist's hand commits the *jíbaro* to paper, using drawing techniques to convey the dignity of agricultural labor. The sketched farmworker becomes a fraught symbol of the island, perpetuating racial and gender limitations in his iconicity. "Through the production of work on paper," the author

concludes, DIVEDCO helped construct a collective national identity for Puerto Ricans and contributed to the Puerto Rican diaspora's strong print tradition of solidarity and cultural identity.

Paper enacts embodied functions, performing the environment, documenting movement, and conveying the flesh in absence of the body. In her essay, Allison Fagan illuminates the “ghostly fingerprints” of Chicana/o posthumous publishing. Paratextual elements of works by Arturo Islas, Jenni Rivera, and Gloria Anzaldúa prolong these authors' lives in a prosthetic network, a print-based life support system. Cover art, book design, unfinished revisions, abandoned texts, and handwritten pages suggest the persistent presence of the “half-dead”—to borrow a term from Anzaldúa (1987). Paratexts perform a funerary convoy for the reader, allowing a deathly relation to Chicana/o literature's own erasures and unfinished or half-finished prose. This relationship, according to Fagan, allows “a material existence in paper that grows and perseveres in spite of—or even because of—the vanishing of the flesh” (182).

Robb Hernández also considers paper's fleshy contours as a lo-fi interface linking the physical and symbolic bodies of queer Chicano avant-gardists in Southern California. Noting artist Joey Terrill's “homo-homeboy” art-performance digest *Homeboy Beautiful* (1978–79) and its re-release at the Printed Matter's LA Art Book Fair in 2015, Hernández foregrounds the magazine's critical role in remitting, enabling, and performing alternative personae, alter egos, and conceptual art handles in the paper-based image-text artworks of 1970s Los Angeles. These creative formations—Escandalosa Circle, Butch Gardens School of Art, Pursuits of the Penis, and Judeo Christian Ethic Universal—forged intimacies in the “mail/male,” allowing for queer and “potentially transgender fiction[s] of self” (205) to circulate in little-known facets of the Chicano avant-garde.

If *Homeboy Beautiful* sought to reshape the Los Angeles landscape in the service of queer racialized visibility, then the creative forces behind *ChingoZine*, first published in 2012, did something similar for Austin, Texas, three decades later. Curator/editor Claudia Zapata reveals *ChingoZine*'s genesis in scraps, discards, doodles, and “crude drawings” generated by the staff of Mexic-Arte Museum in Austin. A versatile paper-based platform, *ChingoZine* blurs borders of language, picture, and narrative. It is a printed conglomeration of borderlands vertices—lowrider magazine graphics, anthropomorphic entities, Spanish puns, Tejano slang—and an engine of social gatherings. Release parties for the zine, organized by queer Tejana “chola-fied fly girls,” refute Austin's limited infrastructure for Latino arts

events and spaces. Treating this zine and its release parties as a contemporary barrio happening, Zapata describes a sonic-literary space charged with a party atmosphere that imbues alternative print media with sexually transgressive possibility.

Anita Huizar-Hernández's essay on the series Documenting Operation Streamline (2012–14), by artist Lawrence Gipe, reconsiders the “material and symbolic meaning of paper as a marker of being and belonging” (226). Gipe's courtroom sketches document the harrowing effects of Operation Streamline, a federal initiative to charge, try, and sentence unauthorized migrants en masse. As an artist granted access to Arizona deportation hearings, held in courtrooms where camera technologies are banned, Gipe critiques this form of assembly-line justice by using the very material—paper—that is used to regulate belonging. In his sketches, Gipe captures fragments of a concealed reality, allowing us to glimpse poignant evidence of the migrants' humanity. Huizar-Hernández challenges readers to view these representations as a “move toward a politics of personhood” (236), a way to delink human beings from illegality, and legal papers from political existence.

Reflections on paper, personhood, and illegality are woven through the essay by Tatiana Reinoza, who looks at the use of print media in social justice activism against a carceral system in crisis. Her essay examines the “experiential field of images on paper” (240) that disrupted mainstream media portrayals of Latinos as criminals and produced “counterpublics” in San Francisco's Mission District. Focusing on the representation problem posed by political prisoners—“Los Siete, the *pintos*, the famed Lolita Lebrón”—that required a new set of image reproduction tactics, Reinoza underscores poster art's conceptual maneuvers in shaping a critique of the prison-industrial complex. In providing strategic reproductions of the subjects most feared by the dominant public and the police state, namely Central Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans, posters throughout the Mission District questioned structures of belonging, laid claim to the image environment, and challenged the controls over media representation in transnational acts of political solidarity.

In the final essay, Carlos Jackson argues that campus-based poster production enabled self-representation and community control of media resources at a time when Chicano studies was emerging as an interdisciplinary field. Through a brief history of the Chicax Poster Workshop at the University of California, Davis, Jackson argues for an expansion of artistic methodologies in ethnic studies curricula to empower individuals and

transform the social justice aims of the Chicano movement into praxis. Refuting notions of the poster as an outdated “relic of a movement,” Jackson reflects on his contemporary experience of teaching the poster workshop at UC Davis, where he encourages students “to engage the broader community through their poster making, but also to see themselves as creating community within the workshop” (266). In this manner, the author repositions the *taller* as an “outlaw” method in the academy. His students raise the visibility of issues such as domestic violence, patriarchy, and implicit bias in the criminal justice system, challenging the hyper-individualism of studio art and drawing renewed attention to the socially transformative possibility of the poster.

The power of paper for Chicano/Latino studies goes beyond its importance as literary metaphor or artistic corpus, speaking to the essence of our current political situation. Amid escalating anti-immigrant rhetoric, “having papers” remains a highly politicized reality, a site of disavowal, refusing immigrants entry into US society without “documentation.” A “paper market” grows where “the trading of both real and copied documents is in essence part of the process of constructing new identities and can be the route to local integration” (Vasta 2011, 188). To echo what Huizar-Hernández, in her dossier essay, refers to as Latinos’ “paper paradox,” immigrant legibility is predicated on what is lacked, particularly since the passage of SB 1070 in 2010, which discursively marked Arizona as the “show me your papers” state. Never before have Latino livelihoods, identity formation processes, and humanity been more dependent on the power of paper than now.

Notes

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