

Mistaken Identities

Essay
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We, the undersigned, gathered in Pilgrimage to the capital of the State in Sacramento, in penance for all the failings of Farm Workers as free and sovereign men, do solemnly declare before the civilized world which judges our actions, and before the nation to which we belong, the propositions we have formulated to end the injustice that oppresses us.

We are conscious of the historical significance of our Pilgrimage. It is clearly evident that our path travels through a valley well known to all Mexican farm workers. We know all of these towns of Delano, Fresno, Madera, Modesto, Stockton, and Sacramento, because along this very same road, in this very same valley the Mexican race has sacrificed itself for the last hundred years. Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make other men rich. Our wages and working conditions have been determined from above, because irresponsible legislators who could have helped us have supported the rancher's argument that the plight of the farm worker was a "special case." They saw the obvious effects of an unjust system, starvation wages, contractors, day hauls, forced migration, sickness, and subhuman conditions.

The farm worker has been abandoned to his own fate—without representation, without power—subject to the mercy and caprice of the rancher.

We are suffering. We have suffered unnumbered ills and crimes in the name of the Law of the land. Our men, women and children have suffered not only the basic brutality of stoop labor, and the most obvious injustices of the system; they have also suffered the desperation of knowing that that system caters to the greed of callous men and not to our needs.

Now we will suffer for the purpose of ending the poverty, the misery, and the injustice, with the hope that our children will not be exploited as we have been. They have imposed hunger on us, and now we hunger for justice. We draw strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. WE SHALL ENDURE!

This Pilgrimage is a witness to the suffering we have seen for generations. The penance we accept symbolizes the

suffering we shall have in order to bring justice to these same towns, to this same valley. This is the beginning of a social movement in fact and not in pronouncements.

We seek our basic God-given rights as human beings. Because we have suffered—and are not afraid to suffer—in order to survive, we are ready to give up everything, even our lives, in our fight for social justice. We shall do it without violence because that is our destiny.

To the ranchers and to all those who oppose us we say, in the words of Benito Juárez, "Respect for another's rights is the meaning of Peace."

We seek the support of all political groups, and the protection of the government, which is also our government. But we are tired of words, of betrayals, of indifference. To the politicians we say that the years are gone when the farm worker said nothing and did nothing to help himself. From this movement shall spring leaders who shall understand us, lead us, be faithful to us, and we shall elect them to represent us. We shall be heard!

We seek, and have, the support of the Church in what we do. At the head of the Pilgrimage we carry the Virgin of Guadalupe because she is ours, all ours. Patroness of the Mexican people. We also carry the Sacred Cross and the Star of David because we are not sectarians, and because we ask the help and prayers of all religions. All men are brothers, sons of the same God; that is why we say to all men of good will, in the words of Pope Leo XIII, "Everyone's first duty is to protect the workers from the greed of speculators who use human beings as instruments to provide themselves with money. It is neither just nor human to oppress with excessive work to the point when their minds become enfeebled and their bodies worn out." God shall not abandon us!

We shall unite. We have learned the meaning of unity. We know why these United States are just that—united. The strength of the poor is also in union. We know that the poverty of the Mexican or Filipino worker in California is the same as that of all farm workers across the

country, the Negroes and poor whites, the Puerto Ricans, Japanese and Arabians; in short, all of the races that compromise the oppressed minorities of the United States. The majority of the people on our Pilgrimage are of Mexican descent, but the triumph of our race depends on a national association of farm workers. We must get together and bargain collectively. We must use the only strength that we have, the force of our numbers: the ranchers are few, we are many. United we shall stand!

We shall pursue the Revolution we have proposed. We are sons of the Mexican Revolution, a revolution of the poor seeking bread and justice. Our revolution shall not be an armed one, but we want the order which now exists to be undone; and that a new social order replace it.

We are poor, we are humble, and our only choice is to strike in those ranches where we are not treated with the respect we deserve as working men, where our rights as free and sovereign men are not recognized. We do not want the paternalism of the ranchers; we do not want the contractor; we do not want charity at the price of our dignity. We want to be equal with all the working men in the nation; we want a just wage, better working conditions, a decent future for our children. To those who oppose us, be they ranchers, police, politicians, or speculators, we say that we are going to continue fighting until we die, or we win. We shall overcome!

Across the San Joaquin Valley, across California, across the entire Southwest of the United States, wherever there are Mexican people, wherever there are farm workers, our movement is spreading like flames across a dry plain. Our Pilgrimage is the match that will light our cause for all farm workers to see what is happening here, so that they may do as we have done.

The time has come for the liberation of the poor farm worker. History is on our side. Mary the Strike go out! Viva la causa!

March 1966.

Manifesto and public declaration issued in 1966 by Farm Workers recruited with the Delano Camp Strike in California attempting labor liberation and reform in farm labor practice, and seeking social justice and fairness for the farm laborer.

On this historic day, October 28, 1967, La Raza Unida organized in El Paso, Texas, proclaims the time of subjugation, exploitation and abuse of human rights of La Raza in the United States is hereby ended forever.

La Raza Unida affirms the magnificence of La Raza, the greatness of our heritage, our history, our language, our traditions, our contributions to humanity, and our culture. We have demonstrated and proven and again affirm our loyalty to the Constitutional Democracy of the United States of America and to the religious and cultural traditions we all share.

We accept the framework of constitutional democracy and freedom within which to establish our own independent organizations among our own people in pursuit of justice and equality and redress of grievances. La Raza Unida pledges to join with all our courageous people organizing in the fields and in the barrios. We commit ourselves to La Raza, at whatever cost.

With this commitment we pledge our support in:

1. The right to organize community and labor groups in our own style.
2. The guarantee of training and placement in employment at all levels.
3. The guarantee of special emphasis on education at all levels geared to our people with strong financial grants to individuals.
4. The guarantee of decent, safe, and sanitary housing without relocation from one's community.
5. We demand equal representation at all levels of appointive boards and agencies, and the end to exploitative gerrymandering.
6. We demand the strong enforcement of all sections of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo particularly the sections dealing with land grants, and bilingual guarantees.
7. We are outraged by and demand an end to police harassment, discrimination and brutality inflicted on La Raza, and an end to the kangaroo court system known as juvenile hall. We demand constitutional protection and guarantees in all courts of the United States.
8. We reaffirm a dedication to our heritage, a bilingual culture and assert our right to be members of La Raza Unida anywhere, anytime and in any job.

Declaration of Independence by Chicano political party, "La Raza Unida," formed in the United States border town of El Paso, Texas by leading members of the Mexican-American intelligentsia.

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud heritage, but also of the brutal "gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano, inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.

We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops, and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the Bronze Continent.

Brotherhood unites us, love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner "gachacho" who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With our heart in our hand and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mesquito Nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the Bronze Continent, we are a Nation. We are a union of free peoples. We are Aztlán.

To hell with the nohing race.

All power for our people.

March 31, 1969

Public resolution adopted in March 1969 at the first National Chicano Youth Conference in conjunction with Crusade for Justice Youth Conference, Denver, Colorado.

Fig. 19a

Armando Rascón
Texts from *Artifact with Three*
Declarations of Independence
1991

And to the degree that *de*COLONIZATION makes explicit reference to an historic process of self-determination which is nevertheless inscribed with the traces of prior domination (in the case of Korea, by China, by Japan, and, in South Korea, by the U.S.), it reflects as well on the always partial and provisional processes of self-fashioning and self-definition.

Considered in its broadest terms, the problem posed by the interrogative mode in which the artists in *Mistaken Identities* set out the myriad skeins of subaltern, hyphenated, or neither/nor identities returns to the conditions of political utterance. If, within art practices, identities are presented in all their contingency, ambiguity, irresolution—if the range of possible identities are articulated in all their constructedness—where are the grounds from which to launch an aesthetic politics of entitlement, cultural enfranchisement, and contestation? Is there, one may ask, something like a provisional identity politics, something akin to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "strategic

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "strategischen Essentialismus", etwas, das je nach den Umständen in Anspruch genommen werden kann—ähnlich dem Baldwinschen Gewand der Identität—gleichzeitig aber heterogene und multiple Identitäten zulässt, die doch genauso zum Bereich des Selbst gehören?

Für Minderheiten ist die Erlangung von Selbstrepräsentation zweifellos ein politisches Muß; die Praktiken der bildenden Kunst sind dabei nur ein Aspekt. Der Akt der Selbstbenennung ist in dieser Hinsicht eine entscheidende, emanzipatorische Handlung. Nehmen wir zum Beispiel Norma Alarcóns Erörterung der politischen Implikationen der Bezeichnung Chicana:

Die Bezeichnung "Chicana" ist nichts, womit Frauen (oder Männer) zur Welt kommen, wie es gewöhnlich bei der Bezeichnung "Mexikanerin" der Fall ist; sie wird vielmehr ganz bewußt und in kritischer Absicht angenommen und dient als Ausgangspunkt für einen erneuten Anlauf, den tradierten Knäuel von Krisen, Verwirrungen, historischen und ideologischen Konflikten und Widersprüchen aufzulösen, der dadurch zustandekommt, daß man gleichzeitig "keinen Namen hat", "viele Namen hat", "seinen

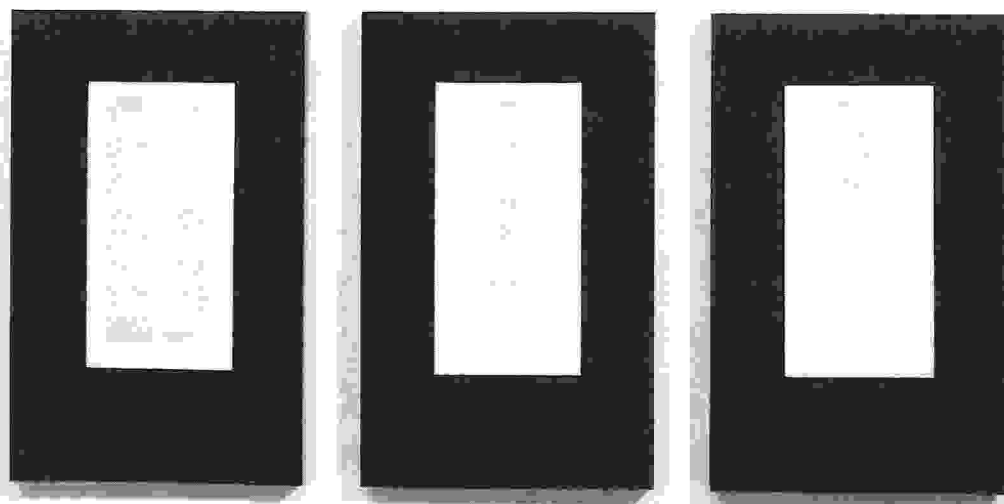


Fig. 19b
 Armando Rascón
Artifact with Three Declarations of Independence, 1991
 installation view
 Cat. no. 16

essentialism" that can be circumstantially claimed, like Baldwin's garment of identity, but which allows for the heterogeneity and multiple identifications that are equally the province of the individual self?

Clearly it is a political imperative for dominated groups to achieve self-representation, of which visual cultural practices are but one element. In this respect, the act of self-naming is a crucial and empowering activity. Consider, for example, Norma Alarcón's discussion of the political modalities inhering in the name Chicana:

The name Chicana is not a name that women (or men) are born with, as is often the case with "Mexican," but rather it is consciously and critically assumed and serves as point of redeparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict and contradictions of the simultaneous effects of having "no names," having "many names," not "know(ing) her names," and being someone else's "dreamwork." However, digging into the historically despised dark (*prieto*) body in strictly psychological terms, may get her back to the bare bones and marrow, but she may not "find the way back," to writing her embodied histories. The idea of plural historicized bodies is proposed with respect to the multiple racial constructions of the body since "the discovery."²⁹

It is in relation to both my rhetorical questions and to the implications of Alarcón's text, that I close with a consideration of Armando Rascón's *Artifact with Three Declarations of Independence* (fig. 19a–b).

Assembled here are twelve "found" photographs, framed as found, including dust and marks of age and neglect. With the exception of the four portrait snapshots, the pictures consist of familiar stereotypes of "Mexican-ness"—the bullfight, the "native" market, the grizzled campesino, the richly adorned señorita, the Zorro-like silhouette, and so forth. Below are mounted the three declarations of the installation's title, manifestos respectively of "El Plan de Delano of 1966" (the founding statement of the Delano Grape Strike, formulated by the nascent Farm Workers Union), the 1967 preamble of the "Plan de la Raza Unida" (the declaration of independence by the Chicano political party "La Raza Unida," formed in the Texas border town of El Paso), and "The Spiritual Plan of Aztlan" of 1969 (a public resolution adopted at the First National Chicano Youth Conference in conjunction with the Crusade for Justice Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado).

These manifestos represent three political moments in the formation of a Chicano political identity and consciousness and three discrete moments of political

Namen nicht kennt" und "von jemand anderem geträumt" wird. Wenn sich eine mit dem historisch verachteten dunkelhäutigen (*prieto*) Körper in rein psychologischer Hinsicht beschäftigt, mag sie zwar zu ihrem nackten Kern finden, aber sie wird dann vielleicht nicht "wieder zurückfinden", um ihre verkörperten Geschichten zu schreiben. Der Vorschlag, den Körper vielfältig zu historisieren, erfolgt angesichts der multiplen rassistischen Konstruktionen des Körpers seit "der Entdeckung".²⁹

Sowohl wegen des Bezugs zu meinen rhetorischen Fragen als auch wegen der Implikationen von Alarcóns Text schließe ich mit einer Betrachtung von Armando Rascóns *Artifact with Three Declarations of Independence* (Fig. 19a–b).

Die Arbeit besteht aus einem Arrangement von zwölf "gefundenen" Fotografien in genau dem Zustand gerahmt, wie sie vorgefunden wurden, verstaubt und von Alter und sorglosem Umgang gezeichnet. Mit Ausnahme der vier Porträtfotos zeigen die Bilder wohlbekannte Stereotypen des "Mexikanischen"—den Stierkampf, den "einheimischen" Markt, den ergrauten Campesino, die reichgeschmückte Señorita, die Zorro-Silhouette usw. Darunter sind die drei im Titel erwähnten Unabhängigkeitserklärungen angebracht, nämlich: "El Plan de Delano" aus dem Jahre 1966 (das Gründungsmanifest der anlässlich des Traubenpflückerstreiks von Delano entstandenen Farmarbeitergewerkschaft), die 1967er Präambel zum "Plan de la Raza Unida" (die Unabhängigkeitserklärung der Chicano-Partei "La Raza Unida", gegründet in der texanischen Grenzstadt El Paso) und der "Spiritual Plan of Aztlan" aus dem Jahre 1969 (eine Resolution, verabschiedet von der ersten nationalen Chicano-Jugendkonferenz, welche im Zusammenhang mit der Jugendkonferenz "Crusade for Justice" in Denver, Colorado, abgehalten wurde).

Diese Manifeste repräsentieren drei politische Bewegungen, die für die Bildung einer politischen Identität und eines politischen Bewußtseins der Chicanos eine Rolle spielten, und zugleich auch drei aufeinanderfolgende Phasen ihrer politischen Organisation. Sie dokumentieren für den Zeitraum der drei Jahre, in denen sie stattgefunden haben, eine Evolution von einer Politik, die zutiefst religiös inspiriert war (unter der Schirmherrschaft der Hl. Jungfrau von Guadalupe), bis hin zur Ausrufung eines "bronzenen Volkes" mit einer eigenen "Bronzekultur", die sich auf den Aztlan-Mythos gründet.³⁰ Die Manifeste dokumentieren aber auch die Entwicklung von einer Sprache des Leidens und der Unterwürfigkeit ("wir sind arme, bescheidene Leute und uns bleibt nur die Wahl, jene Farmen zu bestreiken, die uns nicht mit dem Respekt behandeln, der uns als arbeitenden Menschen gebührt...") zur Verächtlichkeit und Militanz der Chicano-Jugendkonferenz ("Zur Hölle mit der Nichtsrasse. Alle Macht unserem Volk").

organization. They trace, in the three-year period of their appearance, an evolution from a politics profoundly informed by religious piety, presided over by the Virgin of Guadalupe, to the affirmation of a “bronze people” with a “bronze culture,” whose presiding myth is that of Aztlan.³⁰ The declarations trace as well a transition from a discourse of suffering and humility (“we are poor, we are humble, and our only choice is to strike in those ranches where we are not treated with the respect we deserve as working men...”) to the defiance and militancy of the Chicano Youth Conference (“to hell with the nothing race. All power for our people.”).

Counterpointed in Rascón’s installation is, on the one hand, the image world of cultural stereotype — what could be called the Gringo imaginary — mingled with modest, vernacular examples of self-representation (such as the snapshot portrait of the campesino couple) — and on the other, the actual process of political articulation and political/cultural self-definition. It is the space *between* these two representational “sets” that can be said to constitute the viewer’s share. This space operates as a kind of discursive ellipsis, dividing the domain of conventional and stereotypic representation (in which the Chicano or Mexican exists as object) from the declarations of political agency, in which the participants collectively assert their identity as subjects. Hence, for the non-Chicano/a the instrumentality of *Artifact with Three Declarations of Independence* resides in how the viewer positions him/herself in relation to both the familiar cultural fantasy and the textual documentation of political struggle — “the subaltern speaks.” Where so much previous postmodern art practice assumed that quotation or appropriation could in itself dissolve the ossified accretions of political and cultural myth, Rascón, like the other artists in *Mistaken Identities*, instates the historical real, the uneven, erratic but potentially transforming activity of political organization, contestation, and continual struggle that is a catalyst of new identities in the making.

Was Rascóns Installation miteinander konfrontiert, ist zum einen die Bildwelt des kulturellen Stereotyps — das, was man als Gringo-Imagination bezeichnen könnte — vermischt mit bescheidenen, volkstümlichen Beispielen der Selbstrepräsentation (wie etwa dem Schnappschuß des Campesinopaars) und andererseits der tatsächliche Prozeß der politischen Artikulation und der politisch-kulturellen Selbstdefinition. Man kann sagen, daß der Raum *zwischen* diesen beiden Repräsentationsweisen den Anteil des Betrachters ausmacht. Dieser Raum fungiert als eine Art diskursiver Leerstelle, die den Bereich der konventionellen und stereotypen Darstellung (in der der Chicano oder Mexikaner zum Objekt wird) von den Dokumenten der politischen Aktion trennt, in denen die Teilnehmer gemeinsam ihre Identität als Subjekte artikulieren. Für Nicht-Chicanos liegt daher die Funktion von “Artifact with Three Declarations of Independence” darin, daß sie sich klarwerden müssen, wie sie sich als Zuschauer zwischen der vertrauten kulturellen Vorstellung und der Textdokumentation des politischen Kampfes (“der Subalterne meldet sich zu Wort”) positionieren. Wo die frühere postmoderne Praxis vielfach davon ausging, daß Zitat und Appropriation allein schon die verknöcherten Anhäufungen politischer und kultureller Mythen zersetzen könnten, setzt Rascon — wie die anderen Künstler in *Mistaken Identities* auch — das historisch Reale ein, die auf und ab schwankende, hin und her irrende, aber potentiell verändernde Aktivität der politischen Organisation, der Infragestellung und des unablässigen Kampfes — eine Aktivität, die ein Katalysator ist für neue Identitäten im Prozeß ihrer Entstehung.