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## Rasquache Rhetorics: a cultural rhetorics sensibility

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I have been a builder since I was a child. My dad, a construction worker, made sure of it. In one of my earliest memories, I am sitting with overalls and a hat on in the back of my dad's work truck surrounded by buckets. My job is to pass him tools. While other kids are identifying colors and shapes, I'm picking out wrenches, hammers, squares, and levels. I can stick my hand into a bucket of odd nails, pull one out, and tell you immediately if it's for masonry, drywall, or roofing. On the way home, we stop at Pic-Quick for a Coke and a bag of peanuts. These are my happiest days.

Building is directly tied to my geo and eco politics. [i] My body is marked by the physical scars of labor and shaped by the emotions it produces. It is my earliest form of education and serves as my introduction to rasquache [ii] Rasquache is a movement popular in chicanx art, cultural, and literary studies, but hasn't gained much attention in cultural rhetorics. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto defines rasquache as "an underdog perspective" that stresses making do "in an environment always on the edge of coming apart [where] things are held together with spit, grit and movidas" (5). Poor yet pioneering, my dad practiced rasquache as a builder, and I learned rasquache through his example. He never spent money on tools or supplies if he didn't have to. He had plumb lines made from string and washers, and carpet pushers made from 2x4s and nails. He would pull cabinets out of one house, refinish them, and install them in another like new. He would borrow, bargain, and barter whatever he could. As I grew and my job title evolved from construction apprentice to assistant professor, my reliance on rasquache remained consistent. Although a laptop and stack of books replaced a hammer and nails, my rasquache ways continued to underscore my work.

While my dad's rasquachismo was driven by a socioeconomic imperative, rasquache represents more than just the daily need to "make do." As an agented choice, it is also political and subversive. Ybarra-Frausto continues:

This outsider viewpoint stems from a funky, irreverent stance that debunks conventions and spoofs protocol. To be rasquache is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness seeking to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down—a witty, irreverent and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries. (5)

Rasquache challenges stability and encourages practitioners to use what they have at hand. It pays careful attention to “nuances and details,” mixing bold, new, colorful, bright, or even ironic pieces together with the old, decaying, unfinished, or impermanent (anyone who has ever seen a primered low-rider with vanity plates will be quick to understand) (Ybarra-Frausto 5). It adopts an attitude of living in the moment: the walls of this house may desperately need repair, but at least if they are bold and bright, they will look nice when they collapse. Rasquache emerges from a sociocultural imperative to recycle, upcycle, make do, and make new meaning through whatever available bits and pieces. It is this combination of ingenuity, meaning making, boldness, and flair that dovetails nicely—although not perfectly, as that would work against the roots of rasquache—into cultural rhetorics.

Rasquache as cultural rhetorics theory and practice presents a robust approach to meaning making by allowing users to pull from the compendium of theories, ideas, experiences, tangible tools, and intangible epistemologies they can access. Recycling, upcycling, making do, and making new meaning through whatever is available is an explicit performance of rasquache. So, for example, a rhetoric and composition scholar might combine classic, dogmatic sources like Kenneth Burke with their *gramita*’s recipe for *sopa de fideo* to comment on how private, cultural, and familiar/familial settings create and reproduce rhetorical knowledge. But rasquache, as a deliberate act of challenging what counts as academic knowledge and meaning making by pulling from disparate threads, animates how cultural rhetoric scholars embrace academic writing through and with alternative epistemologies.

Rasquache also “changes the terms” [iii] of academic conversations by providing scholars and practitioners with a new vocabulary [iv] to name change. As the “spit, grit, and movidas” of rasquache suggest, these changes are not simple or permanent, but “held together” through hard work (spit, grit) and “movements” (movidas) (Ybarra-Frausto 5). While spit and grit might be commonplaces in broader U.S. rhetorical frameworks, [v] *movida* is one of those complicated Spanish terms whose meaning is based on speaker and context. In the *pocho* Spanish that I grew up speaking, *movida* means both “hustle” [vi] and “commotion.” In other usages, it might mean “hyper” or “restless,” and formally it also refers to political, cultural, and theoretical movements. People make *movidas* to take advantage of situations, to do what they must to get by, and they aren’t quiet about it. Ybarra-Frausto defines *movidas* as, “whatever coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options to retain hope” (5). *Movidas* are energetic and optimistic. They don’t settle, and they mark periods of larger social change. Below, I provide examples of rasquache that move paradoxically from Smithsonian-housed art through cult classic counter culture films and *chicanx ranflas*, demonstrating the breadth and depth of rasquache and its political goals to illustrate the *movida*-making potential of rasquache rhetorics. In tracing rasquache from its indigenous roots through its subversive politics, this

article provides a new way for cultural rhetorics scholars to theorize how we might use rasquache rhetorics not to simply approach the disciplinary table but build a new one out of the bits and pieces we have at hand.

### **Indigenous practices, rasquache reimagining**

As a chicanx aesthetic, rasquache reproduces indigenous knowledges and calls attention to the meaning making practices of hybrid identities. Alicia Gaspar de Alba names rasquache as “alter-Native,” emphasizing the indigenous roots of the chicanx community. Terming rasquache as “alter-Native” makes visible the decolonial undertones of rasquache: rasquachismo is not just about providing different cultural perspectives, but it is also about a return to native and pre-colonial (pre-Colombian) wisdoms and knowledges. Comparing rasquache to Celeste Olalquiaga’s definition of kitsch, [vii] Gaspar de Alba argues that rasquache occupies three different levels:

First-degree rasquachismo—icons, objects, and practices that are rooted in the oral and popular traditions of Chicano/a culture; second degree rasquachismo, which is appropriated from its original context by mainstream and commercial enterprises such as stores that sell “ethnic” paraphernalia; and third-degree rasquachismo that informs the work of Chicano and Chicana artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, and other producers of Chicano/a popular culture. (“Alter-Native Grain” 116)

Gaspar de Alba uses the art installation *An Ofrenda for Dolores Del Rio* by chicanx artist and theorist Amalia Mesa-Bains as an example. Mesa-Bains’ *Ofrenda* is the artists’ version of a traditional altar to the dead used to celebrate the Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos. The traditions and customs of Día de los Muertos, which takes place on November 1<sup>st</sup> (the Roman Catholic feast of All Saints Day), are celebrated and reinterpreted in chicanx communities across the United States. Traditionally an indigenous practice, Día de los Muertos altars serve as a strong reminder of the subtle pervasiveness of indigenous customs and beliefs and their hybridization through Western culture. Modern altars combine the habit of offering native foods and alcohols to the deceased with Roman Catholic religious iconography and ritual. Thus, it is not uncommon to see an altar with an eclectic mix of bananas, pulque, [viii] and pictures of the Virgen de Guadalupe, for example. In the United States, at least in southern New Mexico where I am from, it is more likely to see the bananas and pulque replaced with Big Macs and Bud Light, but the idea holds fast (see fig. 1). Traditional altars found during the Día de los Muertos holiday are part of first-degree rasquachismo. The “spunky” and perhaps seemingly “irreverent” combination of Roman Catholic feast days and indigenous liquors speak to the very essence of chicanx culture, the “alter-Native” unification of the indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and American.



*Fig. 1. Platero, Cortney. Purple Altar, Mesilla Plaza 2014.*

Artists like Mesa-Bains play on traditional, first-degree rasquachismo to make bold and profound political arguments through their work. Housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum Renwick gallery in Washington D.C., *An Ofrenda for Dolores del Río* illustrates what Gaspar de Alba defines as third-degree rasquachismo (see fig. 2). *Ofrenda* honors first-degree rasquachismo by adopting the traditional Día de los Muertos altar as cultural asset, while pointing to problematic second-degree rasquachismo (commercialism and mainstreaming of cultural artifacts) through its glorification of Mexican movie star Dolores Del Rio. [ix] Del Rio was the first Mexican female crossover movie star and mother of the iconic Mexican / chicanx / latinx “look” (dark hair, strong profile, bold lips, and brows). The altar, decorated in hues of pink satin and tulle, parallels hybridization and commodification of the



Fig. 2. Mesa-Bains, Amalia. *Ofrenda for Dolores Del Río*, 1991, mixed media, Smithsonian Institution Collections

star through its intricate mixture of small Mexican toys and relics, golden costume jewelry, Mexican pesos, and American dollars. A floor of dried pink rosebuds supports the altar, symbolizing innocence, youthfulness, Mexicanness, [x] beauty, excess, death, and decay. In the middle of *Ofrenda's* second shelf, there is a traditional fruit offering spray painted metallic silver in front of a bold black and white picture of Del Río dressed in an evening gown striking a sassy, hands-on-hips pose (see fig. 3). [xi] The juxtaposition of Mesa-Bains' *Ofrenda* against the traditional altars and offerings of native Día de los Muertos customs is an acute reminder of the roots of first-degree rasquache sensibility in indigenous beliefs, and how those merge into the political, lived realities of chicanxs in the United States.



Fig. 3. *Mesa-Bains, Amalia*. Ofrenda for Dolores Del Río, 1991, mixed media, Smithsonian Institution Collections, <http://edan.si.edu/saam/id/object/1998.161>.

### Rasquache Art: tradition and controversy

Like Mesa-Bains, other chicanx artists also capture the complicated intersection of first, second, and third degree rasquachismo through their work. Alma López's controversial digital print *Our Lady* is exemplary of the intricate cultural and political work of rasquache. López's *Our Lady* reimagines the traditional Virgen de Guadalupe image as a bold mestiza woman wearing a bikini made of pink roses. López's Virgen stands with her hands on her hips instead of the reverent prayer-hands pose traditionally assumed by La Virgen de Guadalupe. At her feet, a bare-chested photo of the artist substitutes for the angel that customarily supports the black crescent moon where La Virgen stands. The "irreverent" reimagining of La Virgen de Guadalupe into López's *Our Lady* sparked intense debates, including thousands of emails and newspaper articles documented on the artist's website, and harassment and protests at museums that display López's art. [xii] *Our Lady* exemplifies first, second, and third degree rasquachismo, and, coupled with its broad political reception across the art world and beyond, also speaks to the movida-making power of rasquache.

On its own, the image of the traditional Virgen de Guadalupe demonstrates first degree rasquachismo. The most revered Catholic saint in Mexico, she is an important representation of the complicated roots of Chicanx culture and spirituality. Her highly symbolic image joins native Aztec [xiii] religions with the Catholicism of the Spanish colonizers. Catholic.org describes La Virgen de Guadalupe symbolically as "brighter than the sun, more powerful than any Aztec god, yet she is not a god herself... Her gown is adorned with stars in the correct position as in the

night sky, and the gold fringe of her cloak mirrors the surrounding countryside” (“Our Lady of Guadalupe”). The marriage of Aztec and Catholic imagery establishes a new saint symbolic of the shifting identity of the Mexican people (see fig. 4). Anthropology scholars connect La Virgen de Guadalupe to the Aztec goddess Tonantzín, suggesting worship of La Virgen de Guadalupe replaced pre-Hispanic cult worship of Tonantzín as a response to the Spanish rule of Mexico. [xiv] Thus, La Virgen de Guadalupe represents intersectional chicanx identities, spiritualities, and cultural politics. The complex symbolic parts of indigenous, Hispanic, and ultimately modern Mexican/Chicanx identities reflected in her image expose the roots of chicanx identity politics, and how and why modern chicanx adopt her as an icon.



Fig. 4. de Arellano, Manuel. *Virgin of Guadalupe*, 1691, oil on canvas, LACMA, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/220044>.

Reinterpreted by López as *Our Lady*, La Virgen de Guadalupe becomes the political commentary of third degree rasquachismo. López uses La Virgen de Guadalupe to make a firm statement about machismo, gender roles and stereotypes, and the commodification of chicanx



symbols. *Our Lady* challenges the propriety of the traditional Virgen de Guadalupe by replacing her robes with a pink bikini and six-pack abs. This outfit choice is necessarily complicated. The bikini still speaks to a certain sexism that one cannot help but question. Stripping La Virgen de Guadalupe to nearly nude risks transforming her into a blatant sex symbol. However, *Our Lady's* toned torso, raised chin, and hands-on-hips-come-at-me-bro stance suggest she is a fighter—professionally, even. Her confident demeanor challenges the conventionally submissive gender role of women in chicanx culture and gives her an almost threatening appeal. The striking juxtaposition between an overt sexualization of Guadalupe's body and her explicit confidence seem to reconcile in a way that empowers her image.

Bolstering her empowerment, López removes La Virgen de Guadalupe's veil in *Our Lady* as a way to reveal the long hair of the model cascading past her shoulders. This reads as a nod to Native traditions of long hair as a source of power and connection to nature. The roses that make up her bikini and the platform she stands on further emphasize Native tradition. In the story, La Virgen de Guadalupe's image as we know it today manifests when her apparition instructs an indigenous peasant named Juan Diego to collect roses from Tepeyac Hill. Juan Diego ties the roses up in his tilma, a traditional native garment, and takes them to the Catholic Spanish Bishop who governed the area where Juan Diego lived. He unties his tilma, and the roses fall to the floor revealing the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe [xv] left on the cloth. In addition to being part of the traditional story of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the roses in *Our Lady* connect López's image to a Native naturalism, suggesting the duality of chicanx identity and a nod to its indigenous roots. López furthers La Virgen de Guadalupe's indigenous ties by replacing the stars in her robe with Aztec symbols, and exaggerating the black crescent moon where *Our Lady* stands, which, according to Catholic.org, is symbolic “of the old Aztec religion” (“Our Lady of Guadalupe”). Through the complex symbolism in *Our Lady's* image, she becomes a political representation of the complicated identity of chicanx people, and a challenge to the traditional gender roles of chicanx women.

The comingling of the traditional and the subversive make *Our Lady* a solid example of rasquache art. While nodding to customary chicanx icons (first degree rasquache), López also questions the problematic ways that conventional chicanx culture creates oppressive power structures, particularly those that disenfranchise women, and how the reproduction and commodification of chicanx symbols encourages this power dynamic (second degree rasquache). By focusing on the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, which circulates broadly in both chicanx and mainstream spaces, López questions how, when, where, and for what purposes it is okay to reproduce the image. Controversy surrounds López's work because of the political agenda it forwards. The artist received thousands of emails which she meticulously

documented on her website [almalopez.com](http://almalopez.com). Many support López, such as a doctoral student of Practical Theology at the Boston University School of Theology, who wrote on June 20, 2011

I hear you have received much protest correspondence regarding the upcoming conference and the exhibition of López's work. It is sad and disappointing that some people think there is something obscene or blasphemous about her art work. In *Our Lady* López honors Our Lady of Guadalupe and all women by imagining Jesus' mother in a way that highlights the femaleness and sacredness we all share. It is beautiful and liberative, not obscene or blasphemous. (Alvizo)

Many Catholics see *Our Lady* as profane. Other commenters decry the work as vulgar and sacrilegious, and some even openly insult the artist, such as Therese Meisling on April 16, 2011:

Even though you have shown the most vulgar display of Our Beloved Lady of Guadalupe, you are still loved by God—although I pray that you will one day endure His mercy and justice. For this act of sacrilege [sic], it may be quite painful for you—physically, emotionally and spiritually. May Our Dear God Bless you—you're going to need it—may He have mercy on your decrepit soul. Evil, simply evil. (Meisling)

Or Mickey Mathis, who calls López “human garbage and sewer slime” (Mathis). Such controversy surrounding *Our Lady* legitimizes the political power of rasquachismo. Conversations about the artist's work move beyond the typical arena of art criticism, and venture into open critique of institutions and power structures that either welcome new ideas or limit freedom of choice and freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the lively discussion on both sides of *Our Lady's* controversy arguably overlooks the artistic value of López's work. Instead, the nexus of disagreement is in the larger symbolism of López's rasquache subversion: how dare she challenge Catholic dogma; or, heck yes! It's high time. The subversive undertones of López's *Our Lady* speak to the power of rasquachismo as not just art, but rather a true movida: a theory and method for creating and inviting change through subtle, purposeful subversion.

## Rasquachismo: subversion is a lifestyle

I began this article with an excerpt from my own experiences growing up chicanx to reinforce what is perhaps the most significant part of rasquachismo. It is not just an artistic or theoretical movida, but a lifestyle—a lived reality for chicanx people. Rasquachismo “[mirrors] the social reality of the majority of Chicanos who were poor, disenfranchised, and mired in elemental daily struggles for survival” (Ybarra-Frausto 7). It is the daily politics of the “downtrodden” (Ybarra-Frausto 7). Rasquache did not begin with Ybarra-Frausto; he just carried it into academic contexts. Conceptualizing rasquache as lived reality connects to Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s Theory in the Flesh. In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Moraga and Anzaldúa introduce Theory in the Flesh as the places “where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (19). Rasquachismo is that politic, the physical reality of necessity manifest through the actions and ingenuity of the underdog. Make no mistake: my dad was not refinishing cabinets to be “environmentally conscious” like the people who do it on HGTV. He had mouths to feed. Although agented in his decision, his physical reality limited his possibilities. He didn’t know he was being rasquache—he was just putting frijoles on the table. In the context of daily lived chicanx realities, rasquache isn’t a choice; it is the embodied epistemology of struggle, of “making do with what’s at hand” (Ybarra-Frausto 6). Rasquache is subversive because it is survival.

There are various examples of third-degree rasquache that evidence the embodied epistemology of surviving by “making do.” Cheech Marín’s 1980s cult classic *Born in East L.A.* actively challenges chicanx stereotypes and garners respect for its critical value [xvii] while still overtly “making do” with what Marín had on hand: a tiny budget, his brown body, and his talent as a comedian (he wrote, directed, and starred in the film). [xviii] Lowrider cars and bicycles, which often confront the gap between low and high art, are another example of third-degree rasquache (see fig. 5). Lowrider cars have evolved from an East L.A. pachuco trend to pop culture icon thanks to Hollywood movies like *Selena*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, and *Straight Outta Compton*. Their appeal runs parallel to mainstream U.S. car enthusiasm, as seen in Phoenix, Arizona, home to both the Barrett-Jackson annual auto auction and Lowrider Arizona SuperShow which both draw large crowds and media attention. [xix] The popularity of lowriders means serious business, and lowrider artists like Vernon “Vmax” Maxwell can sell their vehicles for well over \$75,000, according to a recent article in the *L.A. Times*. [xx] The rasquache values of excess and of recycling something old into something new, bright, and “chillante” underscore lowrider culture. In lowrider vehicles, “a kind of aesthetic “superficiality” is valued over utility” (Chappell 224). The public politics of lowriders “depends precisely on the fact that [they are] produced by outsiders to the commodity spectacle, a (working) class who have not had the luxury of effacing the memory of use value; they still have to get their hands

dirty to fix up their cars, yet they seek to enter the field of the image as not merely spectators but as participants” (Chappell 225). Lowriders respond to the “American dream” by saying, “we might not be able to afford a new vehicle, but we can still drive a luxury car.”



*Fig. 5. López, Ramon. Superior.*

The examples I provided move paradoxically from Smithsonian-housed art through cult classic counter culture films and chicanx ranflas, demonstrating the breadth and depth of rasquache and its political goals. Each artist and practitioner has found subtle ways to use rasquache to forward their individual arguments and tailor those arguments to specific audiences. But how might rasquache contribute to cultural rhetorics, its students, scholars, and practitioners? Rasquache, as cultural rhetorics theory helps balance recent calls[xx] for new theories and practices that account for the nuances of feminist, embodied, indigenous, and decolonial ideas, centering and focusing our field on new ways to express, make meaning, and build robust and productive conversations about who counts and what counts as cultural rhetorics scholarship and practice.

### **Rhetoric, writing, rasquache**

Questions remain: what does rasquache rhetoric look like? How might we practice it? What benefit will it bring to our study of cultural rhetorics? These are complex questions whose answers I hope will be fruitful, robust, and productive. I use this space to attempt a beginning, but I also leave these questions here as an open invitation. The theoretical significance of rasquache rhetoric as a purposeful practice is one I am still negotiating. As a freshly minted Ph.D., I feel discipline and convention pulling at me in all directions, challenging my rasquache

tendencies to flip the bird to discipline and hustle convention to gain an advantage. As I walk into the cultural rhetorics cafeteria with my government subsidized lunch, I wonder how this brown southern New Mexican barrio baby can use what is at hand to find a seat all her own. I am not the only scholar of color to feel first day lunchroom jitters. In her article “Rhetorics of Possibility,” Bernadette Calafell narrates how she responded to a “crisis” of feeling lost by merging her commitments to identity, experience, rhetoric, and performance studies through *Theory in the Flesh* (Moraga and Anzaldúa), creating a “methodological pastiche” and finding her academic homeplace (105-106). Looking for my (home)place at a disciplinary lunchroom table, I hear my dad whisper, “Mija, don’t find a seat. Build one. You have all the tools.” He hands me a hammer and a bucket of odd nails.

I begin where many marginalized scholars have begun: story. Story and testimonio are a foundational rasquache practice of using what is at hand. They are also one way to adopt a rasquache sensibility that recycles and reuses from theories that are already available. Indigenous and decolonial scholars advocate for the importance of alternative knowledges presented through story, and the value of storytelling as rhetorical practice. In “Rhetorics of Survivance,” Malea Powell shows how story allows indigenous peoples to build sovereign rhetorical identities that fight back against colonized rhetorics, theories, and practices. The movida she begins allows marginalized writers and thinkers to create a space for themselves at the rhetoric and composition table without compromising their wisdom or ways of knowing. The value of story surfaces elsewhere, such as in the work of Dolores Delgado Bernal and The Latina Feminist Group. Delgado Bernal includes story in her theorization of Chicana Feminist Epistemic, a theory and practice of how latinxs make meaning and value knowledge. [xxi] The Latina Feminist Group uses testimonio—a form of storytelling in which oppressed people narrate real-life experiences to illustrate wrongdoing— to highlight political injustice and negotiate identities. [xxii] As a practice that stresses meaning making through alternative frameworks, storytelling is an act of academic rasquache. It calls on its practitioners to look beyond peer-reviewed articles or educational resources and build new epistemologies with what they have at hand: experiences. Storytelling, recycled/upcycled as survivance and testimonio, is rasquache, and one way that rasquache practices have already carved out a space in cultural rhetorics conversations. Thus, as the beginnings to the large questions I pose at the beginning of this section, rasquache might look like storytelling, and it might be practiced as such.

In this rasquache article, I upcycle story as rhetorical practice purposefully to fill in gaps, to present new ideas, and, importantly, to decorate my text: “to be rasquache is to be unfettered and unrestrained, to favor the elaborate over the simple, the flamboyant over the severe. Bright colors (*chillantes*) are preferred to somber, high intensity to low, the shimmering and

sparkling over the muted and subdued” (Ybarra-Frausto 6). Reconfigured through the lens of rasquache, story as theoretical practice takes on a new meaning. It becomes more than just voicing alternative perspectives through experience. It is also about being bold, standing out, adding color and sparkle and pattern, ornamenting and elaborating to an extreme. As rasquache makes do by recycling story as rhetorical practice, it purposefully calls attention to this confluence, “the grit and obstinacy of survival played out against a relish for surface display and flash creates a florid milieu of admixtures and recombinations” (Ybarra Frausto 6). Instead of worrying that it is just more of the same, rasquache encourages us to take comfort in the cluttered intersection, “communion is preferred over purity” (Ybarra Frausto 6).

Another way that I practice rasquache in this article is through language. Similar to story, incorporating my native Spanglish with words like “gramita,” “movida,” and “ranfla” doesn’t present a groundbreaking new idea; rather, it recycles a cultural rhetorics tradition of questioning language politics, voice, and subject position. Recently, scholarly conversations in rhetoric and composition have yielded exciting new ideas about the promise of translingual practices and meaning making. Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, for example, highlight the messy, recursive, challenging nature of doing translingual work, and argue that “translinguality is itself vulnerable to and in need of constant reworking” (216). The constant reworking of what translingualism is, they argue, not to be seen as “threat” or “cure,” but rather precisely that which spells its potential: “it is an occasion for labor, the labor of revision that we... take up, and take responsibility for (whether or not we acknowledge that responsibility) in our thinking, teaching/learning, writing” (Lu and Horner 216). Translinguality is not, then, the *sana sana colita de rana* (a Spanish cure-all saying) [xxiii] of rhetoric and composition, but instead an open invitation to do the labor-rich critical questioning that consistently challenges and mediates dominant practices. As a native “translingual,” these sentiments hail me to “pull from what is at hand” and acknowledge the potential of translingualism through my own rhetorical practices. As a timid newbie to the cultural rhetorics cafeteria, it also emboldens me to not have to “clean up” my language too much and, as a purposeful and chillante language choice, also plays nicely into the hands of rasquache sensibility.

Combining languages and knowledge systems to create new meanings and new understandings is a key practice of rasquache, one found in Ybarra-Frausto’s own translingual writing style and the translanguaging of other rasquache artists, like Cheech Marín. Like me, Ybarra-Frausto and Marín practice translingualism through their reliance on Spanglish, a language choice that traditionally represents a limited education or lower social class. As a political site, Spanglish represents the true “fregado pero no jodido” in-your-face sentiment of rasquache (Ybarra-Frausto 5). It challenges language on both sides of the Spanish/English dyad, and sends “shudders through the ranks of the elite who seek solace in less exuberant, more muted and

“purer” traditions” (Ybarra-Frausto 5). In his work, Ybarra-Frausto uses Spanglish words and phrases like “cursi” or “al troche y moche” to provide more meaning and nuance to his language. By combining Spanish and English, Ybarra-Frausto demonstrates rasquache by upcycling both dialects to make new meaning. In his translanguaging, Marín adopts a purposeful, exaggerated Spanish accent that colors his otherwise precise English. For example, in one scene from the film *Born in East L.A.*, Marín is hired to teach a group of “OTM” (Other Than Mexican) immigrants how to speak English before they start work (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. “Órale vato was sapping.” Youtube, uploaded by Técnico Notebook 25 September 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-C5aQT3KVo>.

As their first lesson, he has them repeat the greeting “Waas sapping?,” which he writes on a wall for them to see spelled exactly as I have it here. Marín’s calculated use of irony is comedic genius: is he even teaching them English? By calling attention to the neither-this-or-that everyday Spanglish of many chicanx, Marín challenges language politics through his “witty, irreverent and impertinent” use of rasquache to “[recode] and [move] outside established boundaries” (Ybarra-Frausto 5). Both examples show agented choices made by Ybarra-Frausto

and Marín to use language to express knowledge, make meaning, and challenge conventions. Rasquache language practices expose translanguaging as agented and political, a pointed way to make do with the language options that are at hand.

Rasquache is synonymous with potential. It encourages us to renew, recycle, upcycle, renovate, and reimagine. I use this article as an example, and a first, simple answer to two of the large questions that begin this section, “what does rasquache rhetoric look like?” and “how might we practice it?” I have the beginnings of my chair for the cultural rhetorics cafeteria, but building takes time, patience, and practice. Like rasquache, building is synonymous with potential. I stop short before I fathom an answer to my third question, “what benefit will rasquache bring to our study of cultural rhetorics?” because there is still too much potential in that question. If nothing else, at the tense and unwieldy social, political, and cultural crossroads where our cafeteria is located, rasquache gives us the opportunity to renew, reinvigorate, redefine, and recommit, and encourages us to do these things boldly, colorfully, and unapologetically. Like story and translanguaging, rasquache practices have already existed in cultural rhetorics for quite some time. What recycling these practices as rasquache does, however, is give us a new vocabulary by which to name the agented choices we make, and a new way of thinking about how, when, where, and why we can make new choices.

As a movida, one thing that rasquache adds to our current conversations is that hyper restlessness that marginalized groups often need to get attention. Rasquache rhetorics do not intend to blend into academic conversations. They stand out. Rasquache choices are daring and colorful on purpose—they aim to get noticed. So, as we continue to explore what rasquache might offer us as a cultural rhetorics practice, I am most encouraged by thinking about how we can use rasquache rhetorics to open disciplinary spaces by being loud, bold, and unyielding.

In the cultural rhetorics neighborhood of tract housing, rasquache encourages us to be the one turquoise house with the shrine to La Virgen de Guadalupe in the front yard. Like those overtly rasquache spaces, rasquache inspires us to decorate our work in ways that cannot be ignored—through story, through language, and through whatever else we have at hand, in the back of our minds, in our experiences, and in our flesh. In rasquache, visibility is key. In a field where we hide our bodies behind neatly polished, typed, and edited pages, let’s think about how we can make our bodies visible through rasquache rhetorics. Not only through the words we write and stories we tell, but through any and all other political ways we can imagine decorating our work—to make ourselves bold, to make ourselves known, and to build our own chairs and disciplinary tables with whatever means we have available.



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## About the Mentor

This piece included mentorship by Raúl Sánchez. Raúl Sánchez is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Affiliate Faculty in the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. He is the author of *Inside the Subject: A Theory of Identity for the Study of Writing* and *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*.

## Notes

[i] This comment mirrors discussions in the field of rhetoric and composition about the intersection of social class and the composition classroom. See, for example Ohmann; Linkon, et al.; DeGenaro; and Zebroski, among others.

[ii] Rasquache is a movement that is popular in chicanx art, cultural, and literary studies, but it hasn't gained too much attention in the field of rhetoric. See, for example, Sandoval, "Methodology"; Mesa-Bains "Domesticana"; and various works by Gaspar de Alba. With the exception of Sandoval, who only briefly mentions rasquache in a list of other methodologies that she identifies as evoking oppositional consciousness, rasquache is most often used in art or literary criticism.

[iii] See Lynn Worsham, "Coming to Terms."

[iv] See also Horner, "Rewriting Composition," where he argues, to "give full play to all that might and does get accomplished in the work of composition, we need to rethink terms used to define, and limit composition" (452).

[v] See, for example, Welch, "We're Here, and We're Not Going Anywhere"; Greer, "Expanding Working-Class Rhetorical Traditions."

[vi] Here, I am using one of the urbandictionary.com definitions of the word hustle, which Bucky D defines as : “Anythin[sic] you need to do to make money...be it sellin[sic] cars, drugs, ya[sic] body. If you makin[sic] money, you hustling[sic].”

[vii] See *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities*.

[viii] Pulque is an indigenous Mexican liquor made by fermenting the maguey plant. For more information, see “What is Pulque?” <http://delmaguey.com/pulque/>.

[ix] For more on Del Rio, see Joanne Hershfield, *The Invention of Dolores Del Rio*.

[x] There are many places where the rose is shown as symbolic of Mexico, and, particularly Mexican women. See, for example, Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

[xi] For pictures of the altar, see <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=36799>.

[xii] See <http://almaLópez.com/ourlady.html> and Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Alma López, *Our Lady of Controversy*.

[xiii] The word Aztec generally refers to the various native tribes and peoples of Mexico, although it is also the proper name of one indigenous group. To avoid confusion, I am using Aztec as a general term, although I do not wish to overlook the nuances and identities of the various indigenous groups that comprise the native peoples of Mexico.

[xiv] See, for example, Xavier Noguez, “El Culto Prehispánico en Tepeyac.”

[xv] For the complete story, see [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=456](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=456).

[xvi] See, for example, Gaspar de Alba, “Born in East L.A. An Exercise in Cultural Schizophrenia”; Eddie Tafoya, “Born in East L.A.: Cheech as the Chicano Moses”; Manuel Betancourt, “Why Cheech Marín’s ‘Born in East LA’ is still Painfully Relevant Almost 30 Years Later.”

[xvii] See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092690/>.

[xviii] See <https://www.barrett-jackson.com/Events/Event/Home/Scottsdale-2017/5a0b6fec-3238-4bae-baba-7d93140c8a83> and <http://www.thearizonasupershow.com/>.

[xix] See Charles Fleming, “The art of lowriding, born in L.A.’s Eastside, gets supercharged, <http://www.latimes.com/business/autos/la-fi-hy-low-slow-and-go-20170331-htmlstory.html>.

[xx] See, for example, Schell and Rawson, *Rhetorica in Motion*; Royster and Kirsch, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*.

[xxi] See Dolores Delgado Bernal, “Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Education Research.”

[xxii] The Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*.

[xxiii] “Heal heal little frog tail” is a customary Spanish saying that parents will tell their children as a “cure all” when they are injured.

See [https://www.123teachme.com/learn\\_spanish/childrens\\_music\\_videos\\_316](https://www.123teachme.com/learn_spanish/childrens_music_videos_316).

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