Introduction

How AZT Changed Aztlán

I throw away your oxygen mask
Empty pills bottles and favorite hats
Remove the lint from the dryer
Thinking if I get rid of your death, Mi Amor
(Your Denim Shirt)
Then the virus that killed you
Won’t live in my clothes
(Your Denim Shirt)
In my house, our house
Anymore
—Samuel Rodríguez, Your Denim Shirt

Your Denim Shirt (1998) is a visual elegy on tape.1 Samuel Rodríguez’s experimental video short opens with handwritten poetry on parchment paper lit under the glow of candlelight. Text dissolves into a denim shirt haunted by the narrator’s lyrical verse. The camera follows behind the young man gliding through the tight corridors of his San Francisco apartment as he performs a daily ritual of attending to floral arrangements, personal possessions, and clothing left behind in the ruins of AIDS.2 Haunted by his lover, he seeks to “get rid of your death.”3 However, intrusive memories frustrate his impulse to lay waste to pill bottles, clothes, lint, and an oxygen mask. The bedroom closet opens, transporting the narrator to another time. He holds an ordinary felt fedora and fits it on his head. The video emits the soundtrack of the couple’s first meeting set to the Chicano nationalist anthem “Suavecito” (1972) by the Bay Area rock band Malo. Photobooth snapshots document the shirt and the lovers’ chance encounter, bittersweet keepsakes that suggest a future that was imagined but never arrived. The young man washes and
irons the denim shirt, and as the iron glides down the smooth fabric, Rodríguez intersperses erotic images conjuring visions of the lost lover with flashes of his bare back. Finally, the narrator returns the shirt to the closet.

Juxtaposing denim with skin and artifact with body, Rodríguez reveals that the shirt is more than a souvenir approximating “the virus that killed you.” The narrator empties the closet, erasing viral traces from his home. His hands press against the closet doors sealing it like a tomb. However, the shadow of his lover lingers. Cast in silhouette, the dead lover places the denim shirt over his bare chest like the “ephemeral trace” of queerness that “matter[s] more than many traditional modes of evidencing lives and politics” as José Esteban Muñoz suggests. Like a specter, the lover lingers as “pieces of cloud dissolved in sunlight.” Rodríguez’s lament closes over a Mexican American home altar with its constellation of photos, iridescent prayer candles, and sticks of incense. Loss becomes tangible through visual and material substitutions, a commemorative display that refuses to give up the ghost.

Whereas Rodríguez’s video is fictional, Cecilia Aldarondo’s vérité-style Memories of a Penitent Heart (2016) takes a documentary approach to metaphorically correlate a physical body with AIDS and material remains. Released nearly twenty years after Your Denim Shirt, Aldarondo’s film confronts family secrets surrounding the loss of her uncle Miguel Dieppa, a Puerto Rican actor and playwright who died from a mysterious form of “cancer” in 1987. Social media plays a consequential role in the film by helping her make contact with “Robert,” the man her uncle loved and lived with until his death. Now a Franciscan monk in Southern California, Robert helps Aldarondo uncover the “material remains of Miguel’s other life.” Aldarondo interrogates Robert’s personal archive, examining each fragment of her uncle’s body of record as though conducting an autopsy. She lovingly pores over Polaroid snapshots, business cards, found film footage, and a wallet. Three unpublished plays create tension in the film when Robert offers her these works if she promises to publish them. Aldarondo responds with uncertainty, which provokes Robert: “Did you not see how beautifully he wrote? Look at his writing!” For Robert, Miguel’s stories are more than the dramaturgical benchmarks of his MFA in playwriting. These are the last of his creative output, the last of him.
Extending body and memory through the remains of AIDS outbreak is why “Queering the Archive, Or Archiving the Queer,” hosted by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), holds paramount importance for the queer Chicanx artists who are central to this book. Attendees of this September 25, 2006 symposium found a portrait of Chicano avant-gardist Edmundo “Mundo” Meza projected on a screen, greeting them as they entered. Meza appeared in half-male and half-female clothing, a parlor gag indebted to nineteenth-century freak shows and circus theatrics (see figure 2.2). His photo was no ordinary snapshot. It was mined from the scrapbook of East LA visual provocateur Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. In its original form, Meza’s portrait is extracted from a page consisting of photography, collage, and performance art documentation. It reveals a scene of Chicanx masquerade, traces of carnivalesque play in glittering garments first rehearsed on Whittier Boulevard in the late 1960s. The UCLA event came on the heels of the CSRC library’s 2004 acquisition of Legorreta’s archive, a large, eclectic, and unruly assembly. Legorreta’s archive pervaded the discourse and the scholarship at the symposium and appeared most prominently in Meza’s appropriation, a new becoming as a promotional image advertising the event.

Meza appears as a specter, a visual embodiment of erasure. “When [Meza] passed away a great portion of his materials were then destroyed by family,” CSRC Director Chon Noriega observed, reflecting on the young man who died at twenty-nine on February 11, 1985. The avant-garde aesthetics of Meza and the wider contours of his biography begin and end here. We are given little explanation of how he died, what circumstances contributed to the apparent destruction of his art, and what consequence that violent act has for the way contemporary Chicanx art is defined. Overlooking symposium participants as a digital projection, Meza is a cautionary tale of vulnerability, his body of record known only because of its ruin.

Noriega makes no mention of AIDS in the context of Meza’s life or the physical conditions shaping his archive. He enters the discourse of Chicanx art history and criticism of Southern California excised from the plague much as his visual image is extracted from Legorreta’s scrapbook. The critical events surrounding the disappearance of his “materials” are equally obscure. Attendees are left to wonder: “Why is 1985 the last time
his things were publicly observed?” “What happened afterward?” For many of Meza’s peers and artistic collaborators, his death was their first encounter with AIDS, but it certainly was not their last.

Missing from the symposium is what Muñoz calls “the key to queering evidence”: to “think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor.” Meza hangs in just that way. The whereabouts of his paintings are unknown. Stories about his archive linger as speculation, bits of information expropriated from Legorreta’s documentation of East LA’s raucous performance statements. Queers of color encounter archiving differently, as the examples of a denim shirt, a box of unpublished plays, and a scrapbook reveal. This difference occurs because of the general neglect of queer ethnic and feminist records in repositories with conservative acquisition policies, egregious histories of colonial appropriation by cultural heritage institutions, the fugitive state of artworks, and physically degraded materials pulverized in the fallout from AIDS.

These fractures and occlusions demand alternative archival understandings of that which is left “hanging,” ways of interpreting queer archives outside institutional recordkeeping practices where the marginal places occupied by these archival bodies are dispersed and remote. Lingering in domestic undergrounds and subterranean archival spaces, art like Meza’s dwells elsewhere. Another methodology is needed to understand (1) how in the trauma of the AIDS plague archival and custodial practices have been alternatively constituted outside traditional recordkeeping nomenclatures; (2) how these constellations reveal queer epistemologies of the archive and challenge the foundations on which Chicano art history is written; and (3), most important, how institutional mediation can upset the entanglements of space, loss, and memory that give these fields their shape.

Archiving an Epidemic: Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicanx Avant-Garde reimagines the story of Chicano avant-gardism in post-1960s Southern California. This book contests the pervasive heteronormative vision of Chicano art by elucidating a queer genealogy of artists and artistic practices that yielded other avant-gardisms through gender non-conformity, sexual difference, and alternative kinships. This era’s queer creative agents were notorious for their garish performance personas, provocative visual spectacles, and “living art” statements. Storming LA
and agitating against predominant political ideologies and heteropatriarchal social norms, they shared an ethos of sexual alienation, a bolstering spirit of political dissent, and a philosophical aim to “open people’s minds” through “structures of feeling.” With an iconoclastic verve, they voiced an empowering language of the maricón and delighted in every “berserk” outburst they incited from barrio street corners to luxury storefronts on the west side of the city. Despite their significant creative activities, they remain largely unknown in the narrative of contemporary Chicano avant-garde art, which is centered on the East LA collective named Asco (Spanish for “nausea”), founded in 1972 by Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Willie Herrón, and Patssi Valdez. Only a few provocative exceptions disrupt the institutionally-sanctioned accounts of Asco, which did in fact have collaborations with the more brazen and unapologetically queer actors focused on in this book. The consequence of these historiographic decisions for Chicano art and performance are canon defining, while omitting a more complex picture of Chicana avant-gardisms in Los Angeles.

Rather than forming a singular entity, queer creative circuits are vast and represent a multinodal composition of Chicana avant-gardes. Although some art historians and cultural critics will consider “Chicanx” an erroneous descriptor because of its contemporary currency, I use it here to diffuse cisgender binary language and emphasize the gender and sexually nonconforming expressions proliferating in Southern California. Thus, I challenge the ostensibly progressive linearity of Chicano art history in “straight time.” By refusing the hegemonic norms of life maturation and destabilizing the “natural” attainments of the heteronormative Western human subject oriented through “reproductive” life cycles, a queer temporality urges a critical reappraisal of how much of what Chicana and Chicano art is based on a chronological model of complete records, social lives of objects in uninterrupted chains of custody, and clear claims to copyright transfer and artwork ownership. Rather than base our understandings of how “official” and textually authenticated reservoirs of cultural knowledge historicize Chicana and Chicano art, I take a queer of color turn by embracing the same-sex desires and gender transgressive impulses of Chicana art and move to consider what it could have been, though it is “not quite here.” The blind spots that surround this queer vestige exists, in part, because
AIDS devastated the field. The impact of this plague was grave: artist oeuvres, artistic practices, creative communities, discerning aesthetes, and, in particular, material records disappeared.

AIDS’s near obliteration of Chicanx avant-gardisms’ queerer exponents yielded other modes of recordkeeping, custodial interventions, vernacular preservation, and storage technologies for these posthumous oeuvres and pulverized fragments. My investigation elucidates this response to human loss by formulating a methodological intervention that I term “archival body/archival space.”

Queer Turns in Archival Theory and Evidence

Before I thoroughly explain this study model, allow me to add that “the archive” is an imperfect project. It is important not to presume that all institutional collections are “complete” bodies of record. Redactions, omissions, editorial revisions, and serendipitous rediscoveries prevail. Caught somewhere between completion and oblivion, public archives assemble remainders. Researchers hardly know what record administrators have jettisoned under the subjective measures of cultural significance and historical value. Thus, “evidence” as an information organizing structure is a hermeneutic taken at face value. As Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop stress, “The space of the archive is never neutral, never empty.”

However, an evidentiary paradigm like the document has been imbued in heterosexual terms as records are born in acquisition and die through deaccessioning. The life cycle of archival documents has provoked literary, cultural, and information theorists and in no small way, bestowed print materials with agency. Consider the views of one figure from the golden age of archive theory, Sir Hilary Jenkinson: he espouses “unbiased” and “objective” record administration defined by unbroken chains of custody. His approach largely privileges document generation from “official” state-sanctioned and corporate bodies. Such documents belong to a collection “untainted” by threats of mismanagement, inauthenticity, incompletion, or processual error. In nineteenth-century England, provenance or the history of record ownership followed a clear chain of possession, resulting in the mere transference of organizational papers through the unbiased stewardship of
a record administrator.21 The French archival idea of *respect des fonds* follows a similar principle: “All documents which come from a body, an establishment, a family, or an individual form a fonds, and must be kept together.”22 Drawing on varied record categories, including those organized by heterosexual familial units, original order is carefully delineated, which ensures that the collection remains deposited into a singular institutional repository. This practice guarantees that the “archival bond” between records seals the “organic linkage generated between agency and record group.”23 In this sense, the body of record remains stable and authentic through an emphasis on its documentary wholeness. Historical truth is commanded through administrative custody, an adage with clear colonial underlays.

Following the polemical work of Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever*, postmodern archive theorists’ suspicions and redefinitions of the archive led with an eye on “form” and “power.”24 They sought ways to expose the sociocultural politics of archives and to demonstrate that the bond or “organic linkage” was built on Eurocentric, colonialis, and, I might add, heteropatriarchal ideologies that favor progressive teleology and what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism.”25 Critical archive scholars such as Joy Atherton, Frank Upward, and Sue McKemmish similarly steered away from life cycle approaches in record management to better account for those interstitial evidentiary acts, whereby multilateral transactions unfixed contextual attributions in favor of a “records continuum model.” According to Michelle Caswell, “In this view, the archives [were] not a stable entity to be tapped for facts but, rather, a constantly shifting process of recontextualization.”26 In such a model, “the life cycle stages that records supposedly underwent were in fact a series of recurring and reverberating activities within both archives and records management. The underlying unifying or linking factor in the continuum was the service function to the records’ creators and all users.”27 Jay Kennedy and Cherryl Schauder have called the continuum model’s recontextualized record groupings “families.”28 Doing so, they nonetheless “linked” record interactions into discourses of biological normativity and naturalized belonging.

Though advocates for this model radically challenged the terms of record life cycles from a passive and fixed autonomous body to an active one, a heteronormative preoccupation with progeny persists.
This propensity had profound consequence amid the AIDS outbreak. Transparency in record transfer or deeds of gift was futile particularly for queers of color. Biological families oftentimes dissolved, trashed, or looted the deceased’s private collections. These artists’ “queer kinships,” the alternative semblances of nonprocreative desires organizing life, art, and memory, were routinely denied claims to their personal effects.\(^{29}\) As floating signifiers for infection, material ties to a lifestyle rich in queer creativity, same-sex domesticity, and sexual risk were broken. As Aldarondo reveals in her reencounter with the “official” history her grandmother Carmen constructs in the family scrapbook, the album is a carefully curated presentation of clippings and cutouts displaying “the son my grandmother wanted. Not the one she had.”\(^{30}\) In a “records continuum model,” it is difficult to understand what is to become of those orphaned collections, those parcels of paper with no recognizable “family” to belong to. Thinking about these complicated traumas in the archive is a frustrating endeavor. It also magnifies the compulsory heterosexuality pervading not only institutional recordkeeping methods but also the emergent field of archival affect theory.

Heteronormativity foregrounds emotive responses to records in what Richard Cox calls “The Romance of the Document.”\(^{31}\) He theorizes that “the pull of the document can be an all absorbing one. . . . Rather than feeling guilty about such emotions, records professionals need to realize that the romance of the document is a powerful means of understanding why our records are important in society.”\(^{32}\) His position is quite radical for empiricist factions in information studies, because, according to Anne Gilliland and Marika Cifor, “many practitioners and theorists continue to evince a profound distrust of stances that seem less than objective and of aspects relating to records and archives that invoke affective responses.”\(^{33}\) Despite this, Cox’s nascent theorization of archival affect is restrained, conservative even. He illuminates the “general fascination” of publics engaging with various forms of documentation such as journals, letters, diaries, oral storytelling, and websites.\(^{34}\) Each record type requires a different approach that “convey[s] something about this romantic attraction.”\(^{35}\) And yet, what this “something” is is never quite explicated in Cox’s assessment. Just what desire drives this “romantic attraction” to the document? Moreover, if “romantic appeal”
is engendered not by documentary records but rather by the debris that
fails to meet the barometer of authenticity, how do we account for other
“romantic attraction[s]” that deviate from the document’s normative
and appropriate allure? 36 How do we rectify those strange appeals for
evidence consisting not of “untainted” romantic papers but rather of the
“taint” of documents’ failure—their decay, shattering, disappearance or
visual obstructions? Queer archival bodies require pivoting from these
heteronormative archival epistemes with a view toward other method-
ological possibilities.

Because an “evidentiary logic of heteronormativity” perpetuates what
Mathias Danbolt sees as the “institutional ideology of ‘hard facts’ that
dominate the humanities—an ideology that excludes the temporary
and performative knowledges of queerness,” 37 performance theory is
consequential for understanding queer archives and affects. Ann Cvet-
kovich’s “radical archive of emotion,” José Muñoz’s “ephemera as evi-
dence,” Rebecca Schneider’s “performance remains,” and David Román’s
“archival drag” undercut the heteronormative document “romance”
in Cox’s purview and affairs with text. They emphasize the eclipses of
movement and ephemerality of queer desire. 38 My approach continues
in this register by resisting traditional historiographic prescriptions
of record wholeness and preferring to “get lost . . . from the eviden-
tiary logic of heterosexuality.” 39 Muñoz shares an important critique of
queers’ “vexed relationship to evidence,” a relationship that can no lon-
ger rely on the stable document in institutional custody but rather must
explore queer acts of cultural transfer in slips of time. 40

In light of growing attention to queer archives of feelings, it may be
surprising that I want to consider other material states of documenta-
tion that seek meaning not solely through the sutures of ephemerality
so central to Muñoz but also through the ware of time and decrepitude
devastating AIDS’ physical evidence. 41 However, because bodies, tech-
nology, and writing mediate performance, as Philip Auslander argues,
we must “perceiv[e] the document itself as a performance that directly
reflects an artist’s aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the
present audience.” 42 Amelia Jones echoes his sentiment, redrawing the
dichotomous relationship between the perceptual body and the archival
body as “a kind of material embodiment.” 43 Reading the archive, “we
cling to scraps from the past, \textit{re-embodying them} through projection, interpretation, restaging them in writing art histories or performative art work, in order to try to claim infinite futures.\textsuperscript{44}

“Re-embodying” the scraps left in AIDS’s ruin is a performance of inordinate difficulty.\textsuperscript{45} Neither ephemeral nor entirely concrete, the queer archival constellations central to this study lie somewhere in between, expanding the terms of affect and archive. Queer evidence makes “re-embodying them” a lesson in failure (a frustrating endeavor) as an archival body decays to the point of near absence.\textsuperscript{46} These gradients pose ways to read queer lives through a reenvisioning of the wreckage. Like Muñoz, I suggest that “the ephemeral does not equal unmateriality,” and so my thinking about these remains shares much with the fluctuating state of the material record in its wasted state.\textsuperscript{47}

Because of AIDS’s disastrous aftereffects, archival bodies eschew completion and systematic retrieval for public consumption in accessible repositories. My aim is not to overlook the ways in which record collections—institutional or otherwise—are “notoriously difficult, disorderly, impenetrable spaces, prone to produce multiple and conflicting narratives.”\textsuperscript{48} Nor do I assert that private recordkeeping is not disorganized or an affectively rich assembly in domestic space. Rather, I seek to look at the ways in which a virus engenders material worlds that Chicana/o cultural carriers of loss and memory know all too well.

Lost Bodies/Lost Spaces

The basis of these alternative archival formations is found in the resilient memorial practices of Mexican American material culture. Santos (saints), fotoesculturas (photo-object sculptures), nichos (boxes), recuerdos (prayer cards), repisas (display shelving), farolitos (luminous miniature lanterns), papelitos (paper bits), nacimiento (nativity scenes), capillas (yard shrines), descansos (roadside memorials), and \textit{El Dia de los Muertos} (Day of the Dead) folk art traditions produce functional portals to the divine, deceased, and diseased.\textsuperscript{49} Ofrendas (altars) memorialize through tangible/intangible juxtapositions of photography, plant life, ceramics, religious paraphernalia, ornate frames, fragrant atmospherics, and candle incandescence. The dynamic interplay of semiotic and sensorial cues perform the intimate “touch” of display acting upon the self
and home. In her critical study of altar vernacular practices, Kay Turner suggests that the physical body “is a central metaphor for relation. . . . That the home altars are populated primarily with body images is an indication of the essential desire to bring spiritual and physical, sacred and profane realms together through incarnation.”

Turner’s move here is instructional insofar as it translates the body through interlopers of object and picture, a surrogacy of human loss and suffering in artifactual stand-ins.

These constellations parlay discursive tethers tying memories to anachronistic teleologies, mnemonic aids, and historical reencounters. Strategic assemblages of accumulated objects, parts, and unfinished wholes map what Jennifer González calls “autotopographies”—memory landscapes of the self. Much like the archival process of institutional transfer where one record forms a bond with the next, the vernacular language of autotopographies invests Chicana and Latina homemaking with radical possibilities. Amalia Mesa-Bains calls this a “domesticana Chicana” sensibility, a feminist language for domestic arts and labor, which explicates women’s “techniques of subversion through play with traditional imagery and cultural material.” Chicanas’ “exterior worlds are ultimately made sensible through . . . particular system of signs” in González’s view, with the body of record concretized in artful associations and tactful combinations. This exteriorization of the “transmutation of social and personal suffering into penetrating visions of the present and brave sightings of hopeful, better futures” establishes sensorial and corporeal relations in these commemorative sites.

Domesticana aesthetics and collecting practices “turn dominant narratives and relations upside down” according to Karen Mary Davalos, in ways beneficial to understanding feminist custodial interventions beyond the Anglophone discourses privileged in collection/collector studies. Chicanas and Latinas have historically re-membered and re-placed their circumstances with alternative memory technologies that are conversant with the dead and challenge evidentiary regimes of printed records in “homage to the unseen but felt presences in our lives,” as Laura Pérez argues.

Certainly, Chicana and Latina stewardship intercedes and redefines public and private archiving, enriching Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s oft-cited “rasquachismo” sensibility, that perspective of the underdog improvising
new worlds with what is “tattered, shattered and broken.”\(^{57}\) Despite their resilient craftwork, these domestic art practices sometimes recommitted the very acts of trauma and violence on the material record at the precipice of viral outbreak. As Turner explains about the home altar, “because the family is a profoundly concrete manifestation of the power of connection, no one knows the importance of this power as the one who makes it possible: the mother.”\(^{58}\) Matriarchal domestic arts create dire consequences for queers of color when enacted only to scrub clean family histories from the stain of homosexuality and AIDS, as Aldarondo portrays in *Memories of a Penitent Heart*.

The fragments and occlusions tracing a life like Miguel Dieppa’s are no ordinary omission. Pérez’s “hopeful, better futures” recedes, giving way to zones of wreckage.\(^{59}\) Searching for queer evidence intensifies fugitive sources of knowledge in their incomplete forms. The resulting shards become a recurrent aesthetic, a powerful way to allegorize AIDS among what is “tattered, shattered and broken,” as Ybarra-Frausto says.\(^{60}\) AIDS breaks down all that it touches—bodies, social ties, material culture, archival bonds, record wholes. Powerful is its human devastation; wide is its field of debris. An incident that Alice Foley, a lesbian restaurateur, recalls is telling: “An entertainer here in town who was obviously sick came in the restaurant and ate. . . . We didn’t know what to do with his dishes, so we threw them out. That’s when I said I’ve got to get more information on this shit—I can’t keep throwing dishes away!”\(^{61}\) Foley’s shattered dishes occupy no ordinary position in the archival record; they are haunting reflections of AIDS’s lethal charge. Not surprisingly, anxiety over the toxicity of material remnants shape queer artist responses. A pile of shattered dishware in a derelict kitchen gives voice to human pulverization in Peter Hujar’s *Broken Dishes, Newark* (1985) (figure I.1). A disturbing and destructive pathos is articulated by his photograph. Matter breaks down, upturns, and grounds into dust. Monochromatic tones capture human destruction in fractures. HIV’s taint is made palpable in an obliterated home site.

Barton Benes’s mixed-media practice casts a lost civilization in archaeological ruins. In *Shards* (1989–2012), Benes decoupages bisque pottery fragments with photos of dead friends (figure I.2). Giving three-dimensional scale to vernacular snapshots, he refuses the terms of straight photography and whole ceramic forms. Rather, fifty shards
concretize AIDS’s material consequence, giving gravity to lives lived and memories shattered. The advent of protease inhibitors ended this practice. “After my health improved, a friend told me that Barton had made a shard for me in anticipation of my death,” wrote AIDS activist Sean Strub in an eerie revelation from his memoir, *Body Counts* (2014).62 Left on Benes’s workbench, his photo and ceramic fragment lingers in timely uncertainty detached from the deathly closure that was certain to come but did not come to pass.

Strub’s incompletion in Benes’s project upended AIDS imagery predicated on impending death. The advance of anti-retroviral drug therapies prolonged lives like Strub’s and thus tore a temporal rip between those who were and who were not counted in Benes’s accruing shards archiving

Figure I.1. Peter Hujar, *Broken Dishes, Newark* (1985), gelatin silver print. Photograph courtesy of The Peter Hujar Archive LLC.
the dead. “I haven’t had to make a new one in a long time,” Benes said to a reporter from *POZ Magazine* in 1999. “Isn’t that nice?” However, the inequities of health care, medication affordability, and the severity of HIV transmission for queers of color, in particular, frustrate narratives that AIDS is over. Shards have racialized and gendered implications and convey unending medical disparity, new infections, and persistent dying. Clusters of cracked dishware, fashion rags, and paper airplanes crowd the corners of David Antonio Cruz’s *playdeadreprised* (2013), giving transnational and immigrant meanings to this work from a younger Puerto Rican artist (figure I.3). Flecks of gold leaf, costume jewelry, and oil enamel cast a luminous finish over his mixed-media panel, an assemblage built into a high-relief surface. Decadent stains of brownness pool like melted chocolate bars. Amorphous white splatter flows into the swirl to create discordant colors and shapes in the composition.

Cruz’s chocolate blots demand a reenvisioning of brownness’ function and purpose. The work’s political undertones allude to what José Muñoz
calls “feeling brown,” a way of retaliating against invisibility and anti-immigrant stigma, of understanding “feeling like a problem [as] a mode of belonging, a belonging through [the] recognition” of brownness’s collective resistance.64 Cruz’s chocolate stains and Muñoz’s brown project both protest US xenophobic and colonial tensions that have pervaded the Americas and the Hispanophone Caribbean, in particular. Paper airplanes that are sculpted from archival records documenting Puerto Rican migration histories through Ellis Island and affixed to Cruz’s paneling upend a romanticized national origin story of European foundations. These voluminous layers widen to indexing state-sponsored migrations of exploitable Puerto Ricans in the 1950s to remedy mainland labor shortfalls.65 A rhetorical history of the “American Dream” melts down into indescribable but omnipresent brown blobs struggling for definition.

Figure I.3. David Antonio Cruz, playdeadreprised (2013), enamel, oil, gold leaf, fabric, broken plates, and paper planes on wood panel, 6” × 12”. Permission and photography provided by the artist.
Cruz’s self-portrait depicts his back arched and body splayed, chest and taunt torso exposed, creating conflictual desires, driving illicit thoughts, and raising necrotic allusions. Brown skin bristles against a cascade of dish shards and rags at the ends of the board paneling, signaling his death through the remains of things. Cruz revisits the wreckage portrayed in Hujar’s and Benes’s AIDS elegies by “playing dead” on veritable registers—from deathly erasures of his sexuality to the social death of his citizen subjectivity and legality.66 Emulating what Michael Moon calls “memorial rags,” the fabrics draping the painting and draping his body suggest the wound dressings Walt Whitman eroticized in his Civil War battlefield poems.67 That is, Cruz’s composition is “not only about literally shattered flesh but also about the shatterings—not least of all erotic shatterings—one can experience in response to flashes of flesh, the unexpected uncoverings and re-coverings of desired or beloved flesh that are as much a part of the everyday of the sick as they are of numerous other quotidian practices.”68 Peeking out beneath the debris is a queer Latinx body breaking away from strictures of social recognizability in flashes of skin, drippings of brownness, and fractures of things. The resulting permutation enunciates other “discursive spaces” from which queer Latinidad’s AIDS devastation is discernable and perhaps overwhelmingly weighing his body beneath the shards.69

AIDS’s jagged edges become a platform whereby queer Chicanx artists record and domesticate HIV, as in Laura Aguilar’s mixed-media assemblage, Gilbert’s Altar (ca. 2001).70 In it, she revisits past artistic practices “convey[ing] a sense of shifting and layered individual and collective identities that contests an ideal subject or body of cultural or national identity.”71 Her photo-text work, a visual process of layering that, according to Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, elucidates a new baseline for domesticana aesthetics, infusing a domestic arts vocabulary with an equally powerful axiom of bodily exposure beyond Aguilar’s archetypical nudes: HIV infection.72

Gilbert’s Altar, an ofrenda for her close friend and confidant, Gil Cuadros, refers to an American modernist language predicated on ready-mades, bricolage, junk art, and rasquachismo in Southern California. Installed in a worn leather suitcase, her portable virtual museum has all the itinerant possibilities of Duchamp’s Boîte-en-valise (box in a suitcase) and exacts the careful memory work of González’s
autotopography. Creating a rare three-dimensional entry in her photo repertoire, Aguilar presents viral citations in the crashings of remnants. When opened, the case exposes the viewer to Cuadros. His body lies in state as a layered collage of body signifiers, material keepsakes, and emotive accents of anguish. Campy depictions of the pair in kitschy Cisco Kid sombreros and ponchos combine bittersweet recollections with photography of his ailing body. Like a coffin, the leather case presents ritualizing portraits of Cuadros in health and physical decline. Pieces of him reverse the violent incisions ghosting Meza’s unattached visage in public spectacle or the strategic cutouts in the Aldarondo family scrapbook. Gilbert’s Altar gives a deeper look into Cuadros’s interiority; it is a study of queer of color intimate knowledge generated inside this leathery brown chasm. His photo fragments convey a life of whimsy and fantasy, of fastidious prose, a poet’s life cut short at the age of thirty-four.

Aguilar’s startling image of Cuadros near death inters his body into the collaged visual field mapping him in times of pleasure, play, indulgence, and demise. Like Cruz’s lifeless performance draped on his bed, Cuadros’s similarly limp body breaks away from the circuitry of circadian rhythms and neurological stimuli. He is in her care now. Aguilar’s photo assemblage echoes the intimate relations cast in other AIDS pre-and postmortem photographs by A. A. Bronson, Rosalind Solomon, and William Yang. According to Jennifer Doyle, David Wojnarowicz’s depiction of Peter Hujar’s corpse in Untitled (Hujar Dead) (1988–1989), “navigates the dual capacity of photography to function as a continuation of the care one extends to the dying and as a mechanism that abstracts death, turning it into a consumable object.”73 I would also stress that it reproduces that infected body’s consumptive entanglement in a pharmaceutical nexus of corporate capital.

A cookie tin in the case’s bottom compartment is stuffed with drug trimmings, AZT, HIVID, and Difulcan. Its patterned design presents a viral meditation in domesticana terms, an ofrenda made with biomedical compounds, citations of sickness, and health industry profiteering. Cuadros’s medications add one more “cocktail” to an archival body punctuated by bureaucratic indifference. An oral syringe bisects the gingerbread-man cookie-cutter making deft allusions to a Judeo-Christian cross and, coincidentally, signaling his seropositive status. The syringe is more than a prop; it conjures a body diseased, fatigued, and
bedridden. Shards here are of cellular proportion as the pills literally inside the gingerbread man are pollutants fostering viral replication, the breaking down of T cells, and crippling of human immunity. And like the classic children's tale, try as he may, the gingerbread man cannot outrun his fate. For Aguilar, no one is immune, least of all those in the vulnerable bastions of queer Chicanx LA. She intervenes in Chicana heteromatriarchal worldmaking by caring for an ailing queer brown body reapproximated in a domestic arts vocabulary and modernist tradition. More than testifying to the ways that Chicanas and Latinas also confronted the AIDS crisis with bold acts of recovery and care, Aguilar’s assemblage-ofrenda stages another kind of attachment through alternative kinship, a claim to queer familia that bonds Cuadros and Aguilar together through the fallout, in the shards.

Like the dead littering the Civil War battlefield in Whitman’s poetry or an expiring timeline approximated inside a leather suitcase, cultural obliteration was happening all around 1980s Southern California and making new demands on art and archive, record and remembrance. The AIDS crisis surrounded Chicanx avant-gardists such as Meza, Teddy Sandoval, Jack Vargas, Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, and Joey Terrill (though the latter two are still alive). It is not surprising that they exist in art history’s flotsam, in the shards of Chicanx art’s entrée into US and Latin American contemporary art, and beyond art museums’ delayed recognition of this heterogeneous community’s boundless creativity.

Chicana and Chicano art is a critical discourse and, as classically defined by Shifra Goldman, imparts “statements of a conquered and oppressed people countering oppression and determining their own destiny, though not all the producers of these images necessarily saw their production in the political way.” As the cultural arm of the Chicano civil rights struggle, it grows from the convergence of political mobilization, antiwar demonstrations, and third world protest movements in the 1960s. Given the disproportionate Chicano presence in the Vietnam War draft, corporate agribusiness’s abuses of farmworker labor, and increasing economic, health, and educational disparity, cultural workers fashion images to resist their material circumstances.

At this time, a visual vocabulary coalesced loosely based on Mexican postrevolutionary modes of public activism. These include street murals,
poster art, and political ephemera predicated on historically revisionist iconographies, anti-assimilationist cultural nationalism, and a sex-gender politic lauding “La Familia.”75 Chicanx artists practiced visually promiscuous “level[s] of deliberation, active engagement or agency . . . in the choices they made in their creative processes,” as Holly Barnet-Sanchez argues.76 Because Los Angeles has been a major epicenter for different creative factions and artistic movements ranging from the early bohemia of Edendale in the 1910s to the postwar “Cool School” on the west side in the 1950s, the city’s urban character shapes Chicano creative expression, infusing it with socialist, narrative-based, and experimental idioms and media critique.77 Early on, however, Chicano art’s enunciation as a category was propagated by public museums throughout the Southland in ways that favor representational images, street sensibility, and urban flair in shows such as Chicano Graffiti (1970) at Pomona College Gallery or the Los Four (1974) exhibition at the LA County Museum of Art.78 Chicanx avant-gardes’ dematerialized practices in conceptualism and performance remained outside histories of American art, contemporary art, post-Stonewall visibilities, and aesthetics of the New Left in the United States until the 1990s, when these omissions were rectified to some degree by landmark national exhibitions, traveling shows, catalogues, art media discussants, documentaries, and art historical scholarship. However, such resurgence was occurring against an AIDS backdrop as it ravaged queer Chicanx audiences. In turn, much of this curatorial activity boosted the formative work of Asco, the East LA art collective, in ways unexpected. I detail this discursive shift in the next chapter.

Chicano historiography and art criticism leave queer amoebic avant-gardes unevenly regarded, misattributed, or removed from an authorial line of sight that privileges pristine whole documents, fine art objects, and untarnished matter preferring discernible “hard facts.”79 Chicano art history struggles to grasp Meza and his illusory visage projected above symposium panelists, ghosting the archive of Chicanx avant-gardisms as “lost art,” that rare category traditionally used to define the systemic erasure of “degenerate art” in 1930s Germany where “Nazis’ vilification of modernist art . . . saw thousands of artworks destroyed, artists prevented from working, and they and their supporters imprisoned or killed.”80
Related human atrocities such as AIDS, coupled with government indifference, pharmaceutical greed, and inadequate healthcare for people of color and immigrants is an ongoing problem that must be confronted.

Chicanx visual and cultural critics have yet to assess the consequence of AIDS’s devastation. As this book shows, the post-traumatic aftermath of human loss crystalizes what this plague has meant for art historical interpretation, formal considerations, public memory, and historical retrieval. The irony of Meza’s illusory image is that the extant cannot exert its cultural authority without the nonextant. As curator Jennifer Mundy reminds us, “Lost art . . . should be seen rather as part of a broader continuum of thought and activity that can give meaning to the works even when they no longer exist physically (or, indeed, have never done so). . . . Not all works that are lost are forgotten, and even forgetting is part of art’s broader histories.”81 Using this as my cue, I advance a methodology for thinking about how “the disarticulation of the object may lead to the articulation of other histories, and other geographies” as Caitlin DeSilvey argues.82 Investigating the aftermath of AIDS demands “get[ting] lost” in Muñoz’s sense by turning to subterranean loci: the ceramic graveyard, window trimmings, disparate trails of artworks, and cutouts layered in suitcases and scrapbooks.83 Queer archival analysis resists privileging particular modes of heteronormative documentary authority and thus seeks out queer remnants reformulated in alternative ways because, as Cvetkovich reminds us, “creating history from absences, so evident in queer documentary and other cultural genres, demands creative and alternative archives.”84 This book retraces those alternative archival formations generated around and through a virus. These overlapping contexts are the basis from which an archival body/archival space methodology emerges.

Toward an Archival Body/Archival Space Methodology

Queer avant-gardists’ omission from histories of Chicano art and performance requires a complex set of analytics if one is to grapple with what, where, and how queerness remains in alternative forms. Although the public/private divide is certainly a leaky one in archive studies, Rob Fisher explains that personal recordkeeping is not only “embryonic” in archival theory but also “borrow[s] concepts from [its] government
colleagues” to the detriment of ascertaining its own language. Archival body/archival space confronts this by introducing a study model with a set of five operators. This schema offers another lexicon for alternative archiving conversant with practices current to queer homemaking, Chicana domestic arts, and memory fields of wreckage and loss.

Rendered through a metaphorical pill capsule, this book’s methodology is visualized in a graphic arts style that is mindful of AIDS activist creative expression (see figure I.4). Its design shares a confrontational spirit like that of the brazen art tactics of Gran Fury and General Idea in *One Day of AZT/One Year of AZT* (1991) and *Playing Doctor* (1992), which interrogate the disease and its pharmaceutical imagery. Consistent with Aguilar’s AIDS cocktail trimmings and what Rodriguez so desperately wants to extinguish in *Your Denim Shirt*, the resulting diagram’s spatialization reoccupies this visual past and thus points to the viral shapes of things found in the field.

“Archive elicitation” centers the diagram; it is an oral history–based technique that influences all aspects of this research design. The custodian is interviewed during an archive-centered activity. This activity takes the shape of an in-house collection survey or object-centered

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**Figure I.4.** The archival body/archival space study model.
inventory about the works’ disparate habitats. Preliminary fieldwork research with artist Joey Terrill in 2007, the subject of chapter 4, inspired the basis for this multifaceted technique. His reflections about his late friend Teddy Sandoval prompted him to announce mid-interview, “You know, I got some of Teddy’s stuff up here, I got all kinds of stuff.”

Breaking from the video interview and walking out of the frame, Terrill rummaged through kitchen cabinets. AIDS memory “fossils” populated his tabletop. The archival activity materialized a temporary portal to Sandoval, his extinguished oeuvre, and a queer Chicanx past of avant-garde collaboration.

Terrill’s ceramics charge an otherwise static interior with political purpose. They cast insight into the creative process of alternative archive production “somewhere beyond” institutional arrest. Unlike object biography methods focused on one object of “deeply held values and source of meaning” detached from spatial contexts or domestic environments, such as in Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman’s study of women’s treasuring practices, the compound layers of queer custodial interventions at home are vital.

Carefully analyzing the physical and visual properties of this constellation illuminates the devastation of AIDS more deeply.

Archive elicitation informs “archival body ethnography,” which broadly considers the queer afterlife for Chicanx art and archive in its fugitive state. Through a descriptive overview of the body of record, we evaluate the recordkeeping constellation in its textual, visual, and artifactual appearance. If physical objects can “give us a personal archive or museum that allows us to reflect on our histories,” in what Russell Belk has classically termed “the extended self,” then “all human-made material things have the potential to convey information—and in some cases, they even convey viewers to another world or state of being,” as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and colleagues contend.

The archival body convinces us of another state of being, an approximation of human loss in the articulation of accumulated records. By granting agency to this alternative archive form, we confront this assembly’s fleshy or what Jennifer González calls “epidermalized” surfaces. These are no ordinary physical objects; rather, they “come to stand in for subjects not merely in the form of the commodity fetish, but as part of a larger system of material and image culture that circulates as
a prosthesis of race discourse through practices of collection, exchange, and exhibition. Just as living humans can be conflated with material culture, so material culture can acquire the racial status of humans.”

The archival body extends identitarian ligatures with insight into AIDS loss at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and, in particular, a disease. A line of questioning emerges about the “creation of another archival structure” in a multidimensional assembly of this surrogate anatomy. By drawing specific observations from the sometimes conflicting or obscure relationships in the record formulation, the archival body congeals in a deluge of printed and artifactual “life tissue” or in literal ways like tins of post crematorium remains disguised as objet d’art accenting discreet corners of the home. These parts offer an unusual resource from which physical remainders of queer Chicanx lives and deaths cohere in subterranean grounds.

A closely aligned area of inquiry, “queer detrital analysis,” makes AIDS losses tangible through physical substitutions and reproductions of nonextant works to augment or resolve missing pieces with unknown or inaccessible whereabouts. Doing so challenges the terms of document preservation such as those relayed by historian David Lowenthal when he argues that “however venerated a relic, its decay is seldom admired.” Under his premise, archivists and historians should abhor decay because it “also symbolizes failure.” Conflating a decaying relic with failure, Lowenthal’s thinking perpetuates heteronormative views predicated on “success” of the new. As J. Jack Halberstam notes, “Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well.” Using detritus as an episteme to rethink archive as failure, we embrace the archival body’s degradation and incompletion and recognize that it suggests “ways of being and knowing that stand outside conventional understanding of success.”

By assessing the collection’s ruinous state, queer detrital analysis circumvents systemic preservationist practices that strive for permanence and instead questions what discernments are possible through fragments, bit parts, substitutions, or glimpses that depart from institutional preferences for wholeness, authentic originals, unencumbered views, and historical precision.

The next operation in the schema, “archival space description” (see figure I.4), understands that the “history of any archive is a history of space,” as Cvetkovich stresses. Refusing “house arrest” in Westernized
memory palaces, in Derrida’s terms, archival bodies experience a deviated life course. As Halberstam suggests, “Queer subcultures produce *alternative* temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience.”100 By diverging from institutional ascension, the constellation is “outside of all places,” according to Foucault, a type of countersite reserved for calamities happening “elsewhere” in “forbidden places” that are “persistently disappearing, though a few remnants can still be found.”

The archival body’s spatialization is a study in diffusion or what postcolonial archive theorist Ricardo Punzalan calls a “dispersion narrative” that “captur[es] the complex and layered paths of dispersion [which] present profound challenges in any attempts at consolidation.”101 By undercutting singular and complete institutional holdings, the subterranean ground acquires new importance and requires descriptions that take note of the archival body’s material-space ecology. Fields of wreckage and the environmental conditions are meaningful entanglements that impart place-based knowledge about where the record body is interred.

Doyle presents an instructional example in discussing her accidental discovery of Andy Warhol’s print *Sex Parts* (1978) at MJ’s, a historic gay bar in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles (the bar closed in 2014). As “queer wallpaper,” the framed work on paper accents other homoerotic décor and suggests a different, perhaps queerer architecture activating the sexually transgressive surroundings. The print’s queer spatial position—in this case, a queer nightlife environment—demands a baseline inquiry into “not what it depicts, but where it hangs—and what its location makes visible.”102 As such, an “archival space description” interrogates not only a network of cast-offs but also the immersive atmosphere for the remnant, and thus creates a retelling of the ways in which AIDS debris is located, (dis)assembled, and displayed.

The housing of these fugitive sources of queer of color knowledge requires closer consideration of queer modes of care. The intimate channels of custodianship enabled by alternative kinship challenges discourses of provenance based on individual histories of ownership among genteel European aristocrats or affluent connoisseurs. Rather, the vernacular technologies and preservationist practices generated in response to human loss empower an adjoining spatial analysis of...
“containers of desire.” In chasms and compartments, these archival bodies take shelter sometimes to prolong record longevity and other times not. Interior cracks and crevices charge domestic landscapes with Chicana art’s sexual agency, because, as Victoria Newhouse suggests, the power of art’s placement “affect[s] perception and meaning.” Thus, the preservationist technologies composing the micro-architecture shrouding the archival body and the sensorial experience of it are key to understanding its sexualized knowledge.

Containing personal keepsakes in shoeboxes or desk drawers is not extraordinary in and of itself. The private keeping of entrusted papers or heirlooms is part and parcel of much of material culture and collection studies. However, drawers, furnishings, and other containers are not inherently passive and benign. According to Gaston Bachelard, these “inner space[s]” structure the “veritable organs of the secret psychological life. . . . They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy.” Bachelard observes “an entity of depth” inside the object environment and suggests that even in the excavation of a casket, “We open it and discover that it is a dwelling-place, that a house is hidden in it.” This hidden house is rife with secrecy and discretion; the archival body’s “intimate space . . . is not open to just anybody.”

Bachelard is useful here. He speaks to the enclosures/disclosures of domestic archival technologies in preservation, keeping, and care. Queer racial, gender, and sexual difference is more pointedly confronted in Telling to Live. The Latina Feminist Group recounts the production of papelitos guardados (guarded papers), an intimate collection of private confessions “tucked away [and] hidden from inquiring eyes.” The materiality of Latina feminist archival storage is subtly suggested but unexamined. What meaning might be derived from the everyday performance of “tucking away” Latina writing and, more important, from the cavity swallowing this literary production at the edges of domestic architecture? Most pressing is the threat papelitos pose when the chasm withholding the writing is suspected and unearthed. It is not solely the paper scraps but the container, that in-between-ness of floorboards and domestic surface, which has the power to expose.

As the Latina Feminist Group attests, when papelitos shed light on the person’s erotic life, the threat of self-exposure stimulates sexually
charged interior spaces and behaviors. The nightstand, chest of drawers, closet, or headboard compartment threaten to expose erotic paraphernalia, pornography, sex toys, little black books, or other explicit ephemera. Discreetly placed “nudie” magazines or fetish gear hidden in a garment bag disturb the home setting. Alison Bechdel recounts in her illustrated graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006) the discovery of a suggestive snapshot of her male babysitter; the semi-nude photo was taken by her father during a family vacation and found “in an envelope labeled ‘family’ in Dad’s handwriting.”

In *Prospero’s Son* (2013), Seth Lerer descends upon his late father’s San Francisco apartment and finds in the closet, amid belts and suits, a rack of leather bondage paraphernalia. Describing his shock, Lerer writes, “I sliced through the papers: threatening letters from a spurned lover, a restraining order against someone else. Rough magic, robes, utensils, things of darkness.”

By darkening the domestic landscape with daily reminders of taboo sexual relationships, these containers emit ghostly possibilities of unspeakable desires, a haunting of that which lurks in the “dark cracks” of the furnishings and on the surface of envelopes. And these reminders grant ordinary containers with extraordinary abilities to possess sexualized meaning and queer evidence. These specific microspatial placements—and not just the things in them—potentially shape experiences of the home through sexual subjectivities germinating in wall cavities and behind closet doors.

Containers of desire exude a sexual agency that extends its reach far beyond the cohabitation with furnishings. A trip to the emergency room, for example, may set into motion a backup plan between friends where the armoire is “cleaned” of illicit contents before it can be seen by the prying eyes of anxious family relations. Other times these object environments are manipulated before the housekeeper, out-of-town guest, or moving company enters, rupturing (even temporarily) the way in which these things have routinely been lived with. The presentation and archival placement of these containers queerly catalyze certain actions in the everyday. They present an unsaid yet profound spatial organization of our sexual lives.

Another possible property to consider is the interplay of light and dark. Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sorensen propose an “anthropology of luminosity,” arguing that “the study of luminosity and lightscapes is
about attributing agency to light in the relationship between thing and person, through the illuminations and shadows this creates, and the meaning invested in these relationships.” Queer remains housed in cold dark shadow or exposed to the day show how sources of luminosity are important properties used to treat and present archival body/archival space on meaningful occasions or in quotidian household operations. An emphasis on containers’ interiority demands a rethinking of the neutral grounds of storage, especially in lieu of a custodian’s care, object safeguards, and staged encounters with different light sources to embellish or shield. After all, in the early years of the AIDS crisis, gay bars and public sex environments bathed patrons in blush hues to deflect physical evidence of bodily waste. The work of painter Roger Brown shows how lighting camouflaged diseased complexions under grim realities.

Overall, this study model explicates the visual and material consequence of AIDS for the story of Chicana and Chicano art and its queer avant-garde facets. The creative archival constellations roused by this plague demand an archival body/archival space methodology and its related neologisms. My intention is not to revel in stories of rescue or to overstate the distinctiveness of disorderly private recordkeeping. Rather, it is to confront how AIDS devastation and its traumatic aftermath created conditions unlike any other, for some queers, the stockpiling of wares amid persistent deaths and for Chicanxs—a culture fashioned with a rich repertoire of domestic arts and border craftworks infused with the dead—material worlds demanding a set of analytics that eschew the heteronormative logics of progeny, ordered systems of record retrieval, and the violence wrought by administrative controls.

The Structure of This Study

My efforts to discern the posthumous art practices and scenes central to queer Chicana lives and deaths take me from a living room in the mid-century architecture of Palm Springs, California, to a mountain ranch high atop Crested Butte, Colorado; from an artist studio in Downtown LA to a train station in Highland Park. What I discover are unusual recordkeeping formulations re-membering lost artists, demarcating a disease through artifactual stand-ins, visual surrogacies, object networks, and dispersed fragments.
Aiding in this investigation are other artists, family members, friends, collaborators, and, in particular, former lovers, who facilitate my entry into some of the most intimate and private areas of the home. Custodians meet my phone calls or emails with suggestions of other possible stewards of artworks, fragments, and stories. The case studies anchoring this study begin with “Cyclona’s East LA Circle of Friends” as curator Cirilo Domine dubbed the group in the Beyond Memorials and Symbols show at the LA Gay and Lesbian Center’s Advocate Gallery in 1998. Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta’s circuitous queer art faction dovetails with other informal collaborators, nebulous collectives, and fellow provocateurs and appears, for example, in an innocuous scrapbook of his performance art documentation (a subject of chapter 1).

The book foregrounds the nascent visual vocabularies of creative actors at the precipice of Chicanx queer aesthetics—artists who were besieged by widespread illness and in some cases erased. Three crucial yet little noticed avant-gardists—namely, Mundo Meza, Teddy Sandoval, and Joey Terrill—are the focus of case study chapters. Each illuminates a different vector of an archival body/archival space study model and instrumentalize the disparate constellations shaping the afterlife for queer Chicanx art “somewhere beyond” systemic forms of preservation and professional protocols. An archival body/archival space approach reveals a more complex picture of not only the experimental language of queer Chicanx representation but also the custodial responses to AIDS, the resulting degradation of physical records, and material losses of artworks and artists.

In chapter 1, “The Iconoclasts of Queer Aztlán,” I draw on Cherríe Moraga’s classic essay to introduce defiant remappings of art history through queer Chicanx avant-gardes formed in post-1960s Southern California. Rarely acknowledged in the prevailing narrative of LA Chicanx art and performance, artists like Legorreta, the central figure in this chapter, is typically seen as having a peripheral relationship to a singular Chicano avant-garde, with Asco at its core. In this chapter, I question and upend such a historical framing of curated exhibitions by describing how a queer iconoclasm interlinks and emboldens the art practices of the Escandalosa Circle, Butch Gardens School of Art, Pursuits of the Penis, and Le Club for Boys (among others). These salacious artistic endeavors invariably stop short in the face of the AIDS outbreak,
making the institutional disciplining of archival bodies/archival spaces
difficult if not impossible to achieve in traditional museum settings.
Thus, queerer epistemologies of archive and evidence are crucial to un-
derstanding another definition of Chicano avant-gardisms, which unfurl
in the forthcoming case studies.

In chapter 2, “Looking for Mundo Meza,” I detail my efforts to locate
Meza’s “vanished art” and challenge the prevailing belief that his family
destroyed his oeuvre following his AIDS-related death in 1985. Through
a mobilization of queer detrital analysis, I propose how partial visions
of Meza in mannequin anatomic fragments offer another way to under-
stand an alternative archive. Meza’s access to creative upstarts in the city
unveils a rarely seen infusion of Chicano and English aesthetics in the
fashion trends and burgeoning retail scene of LA in the 1980s. Look-
ing for Mundo means glimpsing him at the stylish filmic and literary
margins of queer custodianship enacted by fashionista Simon Doonan.

Several friends and artistic collaborators bore witness to the dissolu-
tion of Meza’s collection, including his contemporary, Teddy Sandoval.
In chapter 3, “A Roll/Role of the Dice: The Butch Gardens and Queer
Guardians of Teddy Sandoval,” I consider the relationships between two
distinct archival spaces: Palm Springs and the Highland Park neighbor-
hood of LA. I pair the sediment of Sandoval’s queer detritus with the
sentiment of his posthumously completed public art commission, The
Gateway to Highland Park on the Metro Transit Gold Line. By retracing
the ceramic trails, object networks, and specks of sand and sequins, I
uncover the artist’s largely concealed corpus harbored within an alterna-
tive archive formation that interlinks house with urban landscape and
city with desert in what amounted to a daring contribution to the city’s
public art history: the first Chicano AIDS memorial in LA.

Seeing Sandoval’s work for the first time at the Chicanarte exhibi-
tion at Barnsdall Park in 1975, Joey Terrill would later embark on a se-
ries of artistic collaborations with him, envisioning abject masculinities
in the barrio. In chapter 4, “Viral Delay/Viral Display: The Domestic
Para-Sites of Joey Terrill,” I examine how his considerable attention to
photorealism, American scene painting, and portraiture created and, in-
deed, archived intimate tableaus of same-sex desire, fantasy, heartache,
and loss. By focusing on two works finished in 1989, the same year that
Terrill tested positive for HIV, I unfetter an archival body/archival space
approximated by seroconversion. These “queer visual testimonios,” as I term them, furnish domestic display environments with viral meaning. Terrill’s collectors such as Michael Nava and Eddie Vela forge home bodies with “para-sites,” households tethered through Terrill’s retrospective documentation of AIDS incursion and introspective timestamps about HIV infection.

The fifth chapter, “Conclusion: Making AIDS Matter,” forwards a sixth precept to the archival body/archival space study model: the virtual queer archival laboratory. Taking a page from feminist art history and AIDS art activism’s institutional critique of museums, I present and rearrange a series of vignettes in speculative form. Returning to a failed nineteenth-century museum project predicated on casts, I “jostle” scenes from an art book fair, men’s fashion boutique, and travel document of a Mexican voyage to Chichén Itzá.115 Using duplication and revisitation as a means to make AIDS matter, I offer many possible afterlives for alternative archival forms to reimagine what Chicana/o art could have been. Queer of color futures break from discourses of wholesale preservation and thus invite creative and virtual interventions.116

By considering queer Latinidad within an archival body/archival space methodology, this book explicates the alternative ways these artists remain in visual compounds and material constellations. Given attitudes toward the authority of empirical records, documentary wholeness, and neutral repositories, it is not surprising that these subterranean sites are overlooked or circumvented. In remedying this omission, these memory fields air the long-standing silences and invisibilities surrounding AIDS in the literature and criticism of Chicana/o art history, performance studies, and contemporary art, more broadly. In the proceeding investigation, I generously apply this study model to reconcile distorted views of sexual and gender transgression in Chicana/o avant-garde histories, elucidate the unexplained yet undeniable presence of these artists in Southern California, and propose other ways of being and seeing Chicana/o culture.