

INVISIBLE BODIES, INVISIBLE LABOR:

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF

RAMIRO GOMEZ'S CUT-OUTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Latino/a communities have used art, like the mural, as a way to showcase life in the United States. Similarly, Ramiro Gomez, a first-generation Mexican-American artist, crafted a series of cardboard *Cut-Outs* around Los Angeles to humanize undocumented bodies and labor. Gomez's work forces both, Latino/a and non-Latino/a audiences, to confront their perceptions towards these invisible people and their labor. Rhetorical critics have looked at the power of the visual as a form to communicate meaning. By establishing a series of theoretical frameworks connecting vernacular discourses, critical rhetoric and visual rhetoric this study engages the artwork of Ramiro Gomez. This study looks into the ways Gomez's *Cut-Outs* render undocumented bodies and labor into subjectivity in American spaces.

Through examining a collection of his *Cut-Outs* from his biographical book *Domestic Scenes: The Artwork of Ramiro Gomez*, this study looks at how these art pieces created, placed and disposed of in American spaces. Second, this study analyzes the rhetoric surrounding Latino/a communication studies, critical rhetoric, vernacular discourses and visual rhetoric. Additionally, it will provide context of the United States current relationship with immigration. As a result, by analyzing Gomez's artwork, this study will explore what his images contribute to communication studies regarding undocumented bodies and Latino/a communication studies.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the man I will never become, my father, Fernando Morales, the man who risked everything in his life for his family to have a better life.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Plan of Study</i>	5
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	7
<i>Latino/a Communication Studies and Labor</i>	8
<i>Critical Rhetoric</i>	13
<i>Vernacular Discourse</i>	17
<i>Visual Rhetoric</i>	22
CHAPTER 3 THE AMERICAN THREAT: CONTEXT	29
<i>Post 9/11 as Social-Political Context for The Latino Threat</i>	31
<i>The Latino Threat Narrative</i>	32
<i>The United States-Mexico Border as a site of criminality</i>	34
<i>Good Immigrants vs Bad Immigrants</i>	36
<i>Latino/a Discourses of Resistance</i>	42
<i>Ramiro Gomez as a rhetor</i>	44
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS CHAPTER	48
<i>Creation of the Cut-Out</i>	50

<i>Creating Invisibility</i>	51
<i>Cardboard as Pollutant</i>	55
<i>Placement of the Cut-Out</i>	57
<i>Power Dynamics in American Spaces</i>	57
<i>Immigrant Identity as Labor</i>	60
<i>Communicating Citizenship</i>	62
<i>Disposability of the Cut-Out</i>	65
<i>Immigrants as Disposable</i>	65
<i>Immigrant Belonging</i>	68
<i>Conclusion</i>	70
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	71
<i>Results of Study</i>	72
<i>Hypervisibility of Labor</i>	74
<i>Opportunities for Vernacular Discourses</i>	77
<i>Directions for Future Research</i>	78
<i>Conclusion</i>	80
REFERENCES	82

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Gardener, North Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, 2014.....	50
2. We Are All American, Clooney Mansion, 2012.....	57
3. Gardner, Hotel Bel-Air, 2013.....	65

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Mexican-American artist and painter Ramiro Gomez headed to the nearest Best Buy in Los Angeles in search of something other than electronics. His shopping eventually led him to the dumpsters behind the Best Buy. After a brief search through trash, Ramiro Gomez found exactly what he had been looking for: empty cardboard packaging (Stamberg pr. 3). Ramiro took the cardboard packaging home to begin painting and cutting life-size figures onto the cardboards. Gomez was an artist living in Los Angeles, a city that is predominantly Mexican-American. His parents, both of whom immigrated from Mexico, were part of the Los Angeles' working class. As a result, Gomez's life included experiences dealing with undocumented parents working to make ends meet. For him, art was a way to communicate his experiences in the United States.

Gomez tells author Lawrence Wechsler, as he drove over to Sunset Boulevard, he reflected on his childhood memories as inspiration for his upcoming artwork collection. As part of his newest collection, Gomez placed his cardboard figures against lush landscapes, construction sites, and bus stops around Los Angeles. These figures would remain in those spaces until they were taken down by either property owners, locals, or sometimes just the wind. The cardboard figures added a level of disposability to these figures. The figures were faceless and wore clothing that was appropriate for their current working conditions. Some held water hoses, others held leaf blowers, while some were only working. All of the figures were simple, from their design to their actions. However, despite their simplicity, people from the Los

Angeles' paused and looked at this artwork. Gomez says, "And that was the idea. I wanted to slow people down, to have them double-take, to make them notice and see. It was strange" (Weschler 18). And that's exactly what his paintings did.

The cardboards *Cut-Outs* had every intention to make a bystander stop and look, as the subjects in these figures were Los Angeles's undocumented labor class, the invisible bodies who worked at the margins. These were the individuals that had migrated into the United States for a better life. With immigration debates within the United States continuing to undermine the humanity behind these people, it is evident, "this anti-immigration sentiment is not a true fervor for but instead is veiled racism" (Shattell & Villalba 541). So, Ramiro Gomez set out on a mission to combat these preconceived notions that had made these subjects into objects of the larger American white hegemony.

Ramiro Gomez would refer this artwork as the *Cut-Outs*. From homes to businesses, Gomez's *Cut-Outs* were placed in areas where people had worked around the Los Angeles (Stamberg pr. 5). For example, if Ramiro Gomez witnessed a gardener trimming the bushes of a home in Beverly Hills, he would sketch the worker doing their work and construct a cardboard figure of that body. The cardboard figures remained in their position long after the worker had completed their task or until someone decides to take them down. Throughout their existence, many figures eventually ended up back in the dumpsters. Despite their disposability, they were made visible to bystanders, "[it's] actual humans involved in their labor had become invisible to most people, but the image of a human, there, in the middle of your day, and not at some museum or gallery, but there in the middle of your path, somehow that registered. It provoked thought; it provoked recognition. And that's all I was going for" (Weschler 18). Gomez's *Cut-Outs* were a way to raise questions about those workers to non-Latino/a audiences. Los Angeles

as a vast metropolis has a high concentration of undocumented bodies. Gomez's art showcases the working undocumented bodies that have worked in the shadows. It brings conversations on how bodies function within American spaces. These are bodies found in the outskirts of the booming Los Angeles metropolis.

It did not take long for Ramiro Gomez's cardboard figures to gain traction. Local news stations began to pick up on the figures. His art would be reviewed in places such as *The Los Angeles Times*, *National Public Radio*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic*. Finally, award-winning author, Lawrence Weschler, wrote a book about Gomez's life and paintings. Weschler comments on Gomez's ability to make the everyday viewer aware of the bodies present in his figures, "Gomez seemed to be allowing us, indeed forcing us, to notice the very groundskeepers and housemaids and pool cleaners who make that look, the look of Los Angeles, possible" (Weschler 1). It was clear that people were beginning to pay attention. The Mexican-American artist had now gained prominence for his ability to disrupt a space with bodies, who had never been considered human, but merely objects of the American dream.

Ultimately, Gomez paintings provide an interesting perspective in the discussion of the rhetorical positioning of undocumented bodies and labor in America public spaces to non-Latino/a audiences. Vernacular discourses have played a significant role in theorizing the discursive experiences of Latinos in the 21st century (Anguiano and Castañeda 108). Additionally, scholars like Margaret LaWare have looked into the ways images, like Chicano murals can serve as a way to build ethnic pride among Chicano and Mexican-American individuals. Moreover, sure, there have been works in the discipline that focused on the symbolic meaning conveyed by visual images, as a way to "document histories of the poor and working classes" (Olson 2). Communication studies have also looked at how immigration discourses

constructed immigrants as a "problem" in the mass media" to non-Latino/a audiences (Cisneros, "A Nation of Immigrants" 359). It is that group of Americans that view undocumented groups as threats of the American way of life. However, very few have attempted to do what Gomez is doing with immigrant bodies and visual rhetoric concerning disposability of the artwork. Nonetheless, Ramiro Gomez's artwork is there to start to non-Latino/a audiences who have only seen immigrants as criminals in the United States. Thus, the primary audience for this artwork are non-Latino/a audiences because they are the ones that have these negative images towards undocumented groups. Thus, for Latino/a audiences, they are able to identify with these images of labor.

The undocumented body continues to be what the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign professor and Latino/a studies scholar J. David Cisneros, calls a "pollutant" in our social and political climate. In the midst of Ramiro Gomez creating his artwork, the state of California is in an anti-immigrant climate. Legislation such as California Proposition 187 in 1994 echoes the state's relationship with undocumented bodies. This law was a ballot initiative to prohibit any undocumented bodies access to government services like public education and non-emergency health care. Moreover, the United States' anti-immigrant sentiment opened the door for legislation such Arizona SB1070 in 2010. Referred to as the "Show Your Papers Law," SB1070 is one of the country's harshest immigration laws, "enabling police officers to request proof of legal immigration status the suspect is undocumented" (Toomey et al. S28). These legislations assumed undocumented people were tarnishing American democracy. Both, 187 and 1070, along with similar legislations like Georgia HB 87, Pennsylvania HB 1502, Utah HB 497, Florida HB-1C, Alabama HB 56, set up the rhetorical situation regarding socio-political context for Ramiro Gomez's artwork. In a time where the country uses legislation to place

undocumented bodies at the bottom of power relations with the United States, Ramiro Gomez's artwork is meant to position the immigrant body as a human. In other words, to be a subject in the United States is synonymous to being human. As the United States current political climate continues to dehumanize these people, it is important to ask: How does Ramiro Gomez's art render undocumented bodies and labor into subjectivity in American spaces? Gomez's work is an attempt to humanize the undocumented experience to non-Latino/a audiences.

The following thesis looks into our country negatively views undocumented bodies and labor. This thesis helps us understand Gomez's artwork through theories in communication studies and rhetoric. As a rhetorical analysis of Gomez's work, it is pivotal to look at how vernacular discourses, critical rhetoric, and visual rhetoric can theorize the symbolic power of the image. This study also reviews relevant research to Latino/a communication studies, critical rhetoric, vernacular discourses, and visual rhetoric as a means to show how the *Cut-Outs* place undocumented body and labor from object to subject in our discussion.

Plan of Study

For this project, we specifically examine at the *Cut-Outs* by Ramiro Gomez. The text comes from the book *Domestic Scenes: The Art of Ramiro Gomez* by Lawrence Wechsler. This book is ideal since it gathers all of the *Cut-Outs* in one accessible place. Additionally, *Domestic Scenes*, through a series of interviews with Ramiro Gomez, offers a background of Gomez's life. Gomez's background is important because it lets us understand the motivation behind Gomez's artwork. The study includes articles, from May 2014 to May 2016, which include interviews and media reports by *The Los Angeles Times*, *National Public Radio*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic*. These pieces of literature are ideal for analysis because it provides a broad range of outlets that cover the artwork of Ramiro Gomez.

This study is organized into the following chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic of the study, including establishing the research questions, a justification for the analysis, and present the subject of the study. In this chapter, I introduce the artifact. Chapter Two will covers the relevant scholarship relating to Latino/a communication studies, critical rhetoric, vernacular discourses and visual rhetoric. Chapter Three includes the life of Ramiro Gomez and the larger rhetorical situation regarding the socio-political context. Chapter Four offers a study of his *Cut-Outs* to understand how Ramiro Gomez's art positions undocumented bodies and labor into subjectivity in American public spaces. Finally, Chapter Five includes rhetorical and theoretical implications based on the analysis of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review begins with an overview of research on Latino/a communication studies and labor. Since Ramiro Gomez is a first generation Mexican-American artists doing artwork concerning immigrants, one must understand the rhetorical strategies used during the Chicano labor movement. I also look into the ways communication studies discusses the means of empowering the powerless. Next, scholarship on critical practice narrows the conversation into the disruption of power dynamics within discourse. The turn into the critical practice of rhetoric brings forth what the materiality of discourse can do for powerless bodies. More importantly, it brings into conversation the idea of power and how it works to position positive experiences above others. The artwork of Ramiro Gomez puts immigrant bodies in a particular social-political environment, Los Angeles, and renders them into subjectivity in that environment. Additionally, the literature review seeks to comment on the ways visual vernacular discourses function to make these bodies into humans in hegemonic discourses. Vernacular discourses open opportunities to move past the discussions of the privileged and create a space where marginalized voices can be creators of discourse to disrupt the power dynamics. Finally, Sonja K. Foss's work on visual rhetoric helps explain how visual images can serve as rhetoric because they communicate symbolic meaning. All three work together in the ways to expand the field of communication through the use of power, visuals and marginalized communities. Rhetoricians expand on findings of vernacular discourse by including an embodied critical

rhetoric. We must look into more avenues of knowledge production than just texts. Instead, we must look at the visual, verbal and performative aspects of marginalized communities to adequately locate counter-hegemonic practices. In doing so, this move is an attempt to expand the discursive strategies in our discipline. Essentially, to understand the experience of marginalized groups, we must with meet them on their own methodological terms. (Calafell 7). Latinos/as have their forms of knowledge production that are different than those from members of other communities. So, it becomes imperative to understand how Ramiro Gomez's work is an attempt to counter oppression and produce an empowering space.

Latino/a Communication Studies and Labor

The Latino/a population makes up the largest minority group in the United States. Understanding the Latino/a community is complicated since they come from various part of Latin America. So their presence in the United States is a rather significant contribution to our discourse. However, it is important to acknowledge and contributions made by Chicanas such as Gloria Anzaldua, Ana Castillo, and Lisa Flores. These writings provided context to the ideological framing to Latino/a communication studies and expressed the need to create a discursive space for Latino/as within the field.

Labor right and immigrant rights have become synonymous in the United States. Since so much of the discourse around Latino/a bodies in the United States is in the labor movements of the 1960s, the communication field when it comes to labor is stuck on the speeches of Cesar Chavez as its primary form of rhetoric. This section will give an overview of the rhetorical strategies used in U.S. labor movements to highlight the position of labor in American discourse. Next, prominent Latino/a labor scholarship and the framing of the undocumented body in our

current discourse. Finally, I conclude with how art among Latino/as can construct meaning.

Rhetorical strategies within the Chicano/a labor movement focus on the empowerment of migrant bodies and rights. The labor movements stem out of the American demand for labor in its agricultural sector. After the passing of the Bracero Program, Mexican farm workers had a legally binding contract. However, employees were overworked and fell victims to racial discrimination (Matthiessen 14). Mexican agricultural workers were not able to unionize, unlike its American counterparts. Thus, in the attempt to give Mexican farm workers' rights, the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which later turned into the United Farm Workers (UFW), employed strategies to overthrow the farm labor system that had maltreated so many workers.

Mexican-American farmers Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta co-founded the UFW in 1962. The UFW demanded the good treatment of Mexican farm workers. Rhetorical criticism surrounding the labor movements focuses on speeches given by leaders of the labor movement like Chavez and Huerta. Their speeches have been viewed rhetorically on their means of meeting Aristotle's persuasive appeals: pathos, logos, and ethos. It worth noting that the discourse surrounding the labor movement focused primarily on written documents and text (Sowards 224). Chavez received much of the attention. However, Huerta's contributions are equally as important to the development of workers' rights (Avalos 9). Both leaders stressed the human aspects of labor and rhetorical agency. Essentially, the discourse of the labor movements focused on viewing the workers and first, and foremost, as people. Dolores Huerta employed rhetorical strategies by implementing the social and material dispositions in relationship to the different aspects of diversity among the workers. Ethnicity, gender, and class played a significant role to shape rhetorical agency of both Chavez and Huerta (Avalos 10).

Cesar Chavez, as a rhetor, employed his strategies by drawing from his personal experience in an attempt to change the perceptions of Mexican-Americans in the United States. Social scientist and American historians have portrayed Mexican-Americans to be lazy and unintelligent (Hammerback and Jensen 25). Thus, Mexican-American leaders relied on themes from their personal experiences to combat these stereotypes. The rhetoric of Cesar Chavez throughout the labor movement relied on those same principles. Hammerback and Jensen claim that to counter the images that fruit and vegetable growers had on their workers, Chavez and other Mexican-American leaders, "altered perceptions of events, people, and places and organized the scattered direct and indirect experiences of individual listeners into a broad and cohesive group" (Hammerback and Jensen 25). Through public address, Chavez and other Mexican-American leaders were able to gather together like-minded individuals and allies that would foster into the UFW.

The effects of owners and worker's relationships are still present in our contemporary discourse. The economies of labor in contemporary discourse still focus on dehumanizing foreign bodies, "the suffering imposed on indigenous Mexican farm workers that have been rendered invisible through the naturalization of racialized hierarchies" (Holmes xii). Again, it brings up the power dynamics between both groups and how they function within the American ideology, social scientist, William Murphy, contends, "while exploitation occurs at the class level, that exploitation stretches across multiple points of identity" (Murphy 185). Exploitation of labor and marginalized bodies seem to be a consistent theme in labor movements. More importantly, there's aspects of diversity that come into play. For example, the treatment of workers depended on their class and race.

In the 1980s, research for Latinos was still very speaker-centered with references and

mentions to speeches by leaders during the Chicano Labor Movement such as Cesar Chavez. In Latino/a labor scholarship, these works focus on a speaker and the rhetorical choices he or she made. For example, Chavez relied on religious images for his speeches (Zompetti 263). As Holling contends, these periods continuously asked questions about what it meant to be studying public address deemed as American that, “had failed Chicana/os and Latina/os” (Holling 299). This speaker centered approach fails to expand how audiences viewed labor and Latino/a communication. It was very limited in its execution; it relied on the symbols communicated in a speech by a prominent figure rather than focusing on the actions, or vernacular discourses, of those in the community.

The media has an influence on how we view undocumented bodies and labor. This media portrayal creates opportunities for such discourses that comment on the undocumented body as a political subject, such as immigration discourses. Whereas J. David Cisneros contends “discourses of US national identity certainly define the border and non-citizen and also structure the lives of immigrants, who in the shadows as ‘impossible subjects’” (“(Re)Bordering the Civic Imaginary” 27). As shown, recent scholarship has looked into the ways these bodies and identities function through spaces that continue to mark them as others.

Similar to the work of Cisneros, other works seem to unpack the dehumanization of the immigrant body through metaphors. For example, Jennifer E. Potter has looked at how there are specific metaphors that are unique to undocumented immigrants: "Latino/as as animals, Latino/as as water, Latino/as disreputable persons, Latino/as as commodities, and Latino/as as aliens" (Potter 236). The usage of metaphors only strengthens how individuals feel about undocumented immigrants. Lisa Flores explains how political discourse has shaped the undocumented body into a criminal. Their migration into this country is what she refers as

"criminality of entry" (Flores 377). The echoing of this rhetoric in the media conveys meanings of destruction. It lets the United States public feel as if the immigrant is a criminal. Because of current stigma towards undocumented bodies and labor, some have looked into the ways Latino/a can improve their identity. It becomes a tool to combat the stereotypes placed upon them by "reshaping the boundaries of civic identity along the way" (Cisneros "Affect, Rhetoric, and Performativity 133). The current standing of Latino/a communication studies, as Holling elegantly puts it, are constant efforts to acknowledge the Latino/a body as a complex subject, and how those performances construct meaning to a greater audience.

Art has played a prominent role in the expression of the Latino/a community. Whether it be images of the Virgin Guadalupe or graffiti art, works dealing with visual rhetoric have specifically looked at symbols that are culturally significant to the Latino/a community. Pictures call "attention to unique cultural characteristics and historical events that have shaped a community's progress" to build unity among the community (LaWare 138). However, I am specifically looking at the work done by Chicano artists and the murals. The mural is a gorgeous site for Latino/a communication studies because it carries meaning. Gomez attempts to make undocumented bodies into subjects in American spaces, while Chicano murals focus on their construction of identity and community building. For Gomez, it is the Los Angeles terrain and environment, and for the mural, it is the walls of predominantly Mexican-American neighborhoods. Murals are a constant reminder of the connection between two homelands, Mexico and the United States, through the notion of Aztlan, the legendary ancestral home of the Aztec people. Margaret L. Ware uses the visual image of the mural to convey messages where "visual images can serve an argumentative function for a community" (LaWare 137). It is the intent of the optical image to produce a concept of development within the Latino/a community.

Art then becomes not just a form of expression, “but rather a resistance to entrenched social systems of power, exclusion, and negotiation” (Ybarra-Frausto 57). The visual becomes a kind of resistance towards the policies that affect marginalized bodies in the United States. For Ramiro Gomez, this means creating art that continues to combat and fight those systems.

The ideas behind the murals come from construction of identity, but more importantly an identity that rejected “American Interpretations that either omitted ethnic people or placed them in negative roles” (Romo 136). Similar to discourses of the oppressed, “show how activities reflect and produce the social and political reality that residents recognize and act upon” (Gonzalez et al. 56). More importantly, it attempts to view bodies in their artwork as people. Artists continue searching for ways to build connections within the community.

When studying how Ramiro Gomez’s artwork attempts to place the undocumented body into a place of subjectivity, it is important to note how his work is similar to other Latino/a artists. In overviewing this scholarship, we can understand how current works are attempting to combat the negative perceptions of undocumented bodies labor. The study explores the ways in which Gomez’s work accomplishes the same goals as those within Latino/a Communication Studies. It views Ramiro Gomez’s work as a particular contribution to Latino/a art.

Critical Rhetoric

Rhetoric as a field of study continues to commend the discourse of the privileged. Since Plato's critique of rhetoric as an inferior art, dominant theories have pushed for universal audiences, ideal speech situations, in an attempt to rehabilitate rhetoric (McKerrow “Critical Rhetoric” 91). Because of this, rhetoric has become dependent on global standards that focus on the voices of the privileged. Rhetorician, Raymie Mckerrow, contends to move away from Plato's critique thoroughly, there should be no rehabilitation of rhetoric, but rather viewed as a

critical practice. In doing so, he establishes principles for critical practice to focus discourse regarding material relations.

In an attempt to separate critical practice from being a method, McKerrow moves the critic towards the act of criticism (“Critical Rhetoric”). Thus, he proclaims, “as a theory, a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world” (“Critical Rhetoric” 91). As scholars, McKerrow urges us to think about the ways power functions within a particular rhetorical text, situation or practice (“Critical Rhetoric” 91). In rhetoric, we should constantly look for the context located within larger discourses, “the aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society” (“Critical Rhetoric” 91). Critical rhetoric, unlike other forms of rhetoric, allows us to unmask the power dynamics that are occurring. More importantly, it pays attention to the nuances in relations to class and domination (Hasian and Delgado 246). In unmasking the power behind the larger discourses, we can find the power dynamics that allow for individual bodies and experiences to be put on the margins, as the individuals in Gomez’s *Cut-Outs*.

The following section reviews literature over critical rhetoric, more importantly, explain how as a theory can help understand power relations between the American racial hegemony and marginalized groups. I refer to the American white hegemony as the controlling force that allows for whites to have racial superiority towards Latinos/as (Cobas et al. 8). McKerrow’s critique of domination is reviewed here because it is a constant critique of ideologies. In Ramiro Gomez’s *Cut-Outs*, power relations are necessary to theorize how marginalized bodies, as undocumented immigrants, establish their presence and existence within an American white hegemony.

The purpose of this section is to highlight how rhetoric and communication studies should continue to move past the rhetoric of the elites and begin to pay attention to those who are

not. As scholars Marouf Hasian Jr, and Fernando Delgado contend, "whether dominated by the formulas of the classics or the modern suppositions of neutrality and objectivity, ordinary citizens are placed on the periphery of rhetorical performances" (248). In moving past the rhetoric of the privilege, speech runs past public address as only the form of discourse. The critical practice of rhetoric focuses on the fragmentation of messages. Michael Calvin McGee urges the discovery of fragments within the conversation of "text" and "context" (274). Since the delivering of the text to the audience in that given moment and space makes communicating messages easier, it is then considered to be complete. In other words, if the text is to meant to be a clear and concrete moment or expression, then it isn't communicating the entire message. Rather, we should look at the ways our expressions come from various and multiple bits, present in our discourse, "we have instead fragments of "information" that constitute our context" (McGee 287). For critical rhetoric, fragmentation serves as a way to move past the simple model of speaker-audience communication. It instead it centers critical rhetoric by gathering different scraps of information, which would otherwise be left out in public address.

Additionally, in moving past traditional forms of rhetoric, critical rhetoric brings discussions of power forward. Power is a useful element in how Gomez's art functions to make undocumented bodies and their labor into subjects within the American nativist ideology, or the anti-immigrant position. The American nativist ideology has placed foreign bodies at the bottom of the power dynamics. The idea of power revolves around the notion that someone has control over another individual. It is pervasive throughout every fabric of knowledge production in the United States. It's the reason why certain groups are at the bottom, and others are the top. It is a manifestation that centers itself across various social practices (McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric" 97). In doing so, it makes a constant relationship between two actors or subjects. Sociologist

Anthony Giddens contends that power relations include two different players in a relationship with one another (Giddens 6). The word, actor, or subject is used to incite that the individual has an influence in the power relationship. This power dynamic makes up the subjectivity of a person, by "his/her acting as a particular subject in a particular context" (Therborn 15). Because both actors have an influence in the power relationship, power, then becomes a two-way relationship. This bilateral relationship establishes a dominant or ruling class, where someone claims domination.

Domination allows for the communication of ideas or beliefs to be voiced by the superior power. This power creates social structures of what is acceptable and what is not. As Stuart Hall believes, this creates a circle of domination which "does accumulate symbolic power to map or classify the world for others" (Hall 44). The ring of power creates the values, beliefs, and ideas that are normal. Anything that contradicts the discourse of the principal actor is inferior. In the relationship between the United States and foreign bodies, this power relationship puts the American ideology as the dominant one in the relationship. This relationship foreign bodies at the bottom, with little control to escape the influence of the principal actor in the power dynamics.

However, resistance to towards the dominant power can occur. Resistance is an attempt to make a crack at the power dynamics. If the ruling group has a constant grasp of the power dynamics, then it is likely that the other side will counter that opposition. Since the discourse becomes a way to keep particular groups at the bottom, resistance will come from members of that group. Every actor has a level of an agency when resisting dominant ideologies. As Giddens, explains, "all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them" (Giddens 72). Resistance allows for subjects to fight back the

messages of the dominant force. For Ramiro Gomez's art, this gives him agency in combating the American ideology. Mostly, since power plays an important role within critical rhetoric, resistance is needed from members of marginalized communities.

Ultimately, critical rhetoric was a step forwards for rhetorical criticism. By focusing on the materiality of discourse, rhetoric can unmask the many nuances in our discourse. In doing so, various scraps of information can reveal the power dynamics and classist principles that praise dominant voices, while leaving others at the margins. It is a step away from the universality claim that often silences disenfranchised experiences. As McKerrow, furthers, "critical rhetoric celebrates its reliance on contingency, on doxa as the basis for knowledge, on nominalism as the ground of language, meaning as doxastic, and critique viewed as performance" ("Critical Rhetoric"109). The theoretical rationale for the need for critical rhetoric thus opens doors for other avenues of knowledge production and discourse. It especially opens up the door for those at the margins, those who have been dominated by the ruling class.

Vernacular Discourse

Vernacular discourse would not be understood without looking how critical rhetorician Raymie McKerrow built critical rhetoric. In unmasking the power behind the larger discussions, we can find the vernacular discourse in our discipline. As a result, communication scholars contend the troubling outcomes if we only focus on privileged documents that shaped our history. Instead, we should look past Eurocentric traditions and rather concentrate on the texts and discourses made from communities on the outskirts. Artworks such as Ramiro Gomez's become "rhetorics of the oppressed" because they come from individuals at the margins (Ono and Sloop 20). Ultimately, it opens up discussion on how vernacular discourses can influence our perceptions of undocumented bodies and labor. Ramiro Gomez's artwork would classify as

rhetoric coming from the oppressed because it centers itself around oppressed bodies at the margins of society: undocumented immigrants. Specifically, the artwork is meant to make undocumented bodies and labor into humans. This section, I discuss some findings over vernacular rhetoric and how those findings can create an avenue for Latino/a vernacular discourse.

Vernacular discourses can help us understand how history and power have influenced conversations within Latino/a communities. They are the forms of knowledge production from people who are in the outskirts. Vernacular discourses can serve as "an encompassing, though not subsuming, meta-theory for critically examining the everyday sites in which Latinos/as struggle over, produce, engage, enact and/or perform culture identities and community formation" (Holling and Calafell 20). Holling and Calafell urge us to look into the ways rhetorical discourses about Latino/a struggle can create meaning and make those undocumented bodies into rhetorical subjects. More importantly, those discourses inform the audience about the systems that put undocumented bodies at the bottom of the object-subject position. As Barry Brummett contends, the function of rhetoric is, "the social function that influences and manages meanings" (xiv). Ramiro Gomez's artwork presents an interesting analysis for what Calafell and Delgado explore on their critique of vernacular discourses, which, "function as a critical rhetoric rooted in the vernacular expressions found in the cultural margins" (6). Ultimately for something to be vernacular, it has to be produced at the margins of society. This idea means that it comes from those individuals that are a part of marginalized communities, such as Ramiro Gomez.

Vernacular discourses function within non-vernacular spaces to provide insight on audience perception. So, by putting Gomez's work in American areas, he is intruding a space through vernacular rhetoric. Communication scholar, Alberto González, looks into the

expression of Latino/a identity in areas such as Toledo, Ohio through vernacular discourses. According to Gonzalez, Toledo is an unusual location due its small Latino population. In doing it establishes power dynamics between those who identify as Latino/a and those who do not. Toledo's small Latino/a population provides more opportunities to create vernacular discourse from those at the margins. Through a form of art activism by members of the Latino/a Toledo community, Gonzalez warns us, "[vernacular discourse] requires more than situating the activities within a particular locale, it requires showing how activities reflect and produce the social and political reality that residents recognize and act upon" (Gonzalez et al. 56). For the members of the Latino/a community of Toledo, they produce discourses that situate the Latino/a experience in the Midwest. That is an experience that is far different than the one in Gomez's *Cut-Outs*. However, both bring forth the reality of living as a Latino/a in the United States. Mainly, vernacular rhetoric should always highlight the realities of the marginalized community to the audience. In doing so, it could incite action. For Ramiro Gomez, this comes in making undocumented bodies and labor into subjects in American spaces.

There has been Latino/a scholarship on the image as a form of vernacular discourse. Rhetorical critics looked at the visual and discursive fragments within a published collection of images showcasing Latino/a life in the United States (1). Their artwork follows a very similar concept than that of Ramiro Gomez. Both of these would classify as a vernacular discourse. The published collection, titled *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States/ La Vida Latina en Los Estados Unidos*, can construct a Latino/a community within the American space. The artwork was photo documentary explaining the Latino/a way of life in the United States. However, just like the artwork of Ramiro Gomez, it relied explicitly on the visual to communicate meaning to a larger audience. The makers had believed that there had been a cynical misrepresentation of the

Latino/a experience in the television and film. Thus, it was their project to challenge that current misunderstanding of Latino/a's with *Americanos*. It included a soundtrack, an HBO documentary, and a set of images. However, within vernacular rhetoric, little work is done on "the role of the visual (photography, figurative art, or iconography) in constructing Latina/o identities, let alone a pan-Latino identity" (LaWare 5). *Americanos* served an excellent analysis on how images can communicate meaning and sense making about Latino/a bodies through vernacular discourses.

Vernacular discourse's, Calafell and Delgado articulate, "opens up the possibility for the performative and the visual to be central articulators of the people and the community" (Calafell and Delgado 2). Images create a message about the American Latino/a community towards the non-Latino/a audience and left them to interpret that message. These strategies invent a community, or people, into space, as "vernacular discourse can simultaneously operate against something as counter-hegemonic rhetoric and for something, the articulation of a generative discourse" (Calafell and Delgado 6). Vernacular fragments, such as the ones used in *Americanos*, complicated images that we have towards particular groups. It does so by gathering these images and presenting them towards an audience for the sake challenging hegemonic notions. As Ono and Sloop point out, these bodies are objects of hegemonic discourses, where the experience and body are crafted through "scraps" of public information or claims made by members of the dominant group that mostly "construct subjectivities." (Ono and Sloop 24). They create moments of alternatives, it presents the argument and lets the audience construct that information. These tactics are present through various types of vernacular discourse, such as pieces of art and images.

An outstanding quality of vernacular discourses is the ability to create arguments that

require construction. As McGee, Deluca and Delicath suggest, “as fragments, unstated propositions, moments of refutation, and implied alternatives, image events function as incomplete and indirect arguments that require construction” (Delicath and Deluca 328). The image provides the messages and delivers them to the audience, and it is up to them to construct meaning out of them, thus endowing meaning construction with a site of resistive power. That is to say, images of Latino/a labor have the ability to convey the hardships of work in the United States to non-Latino/a audiences who unaware of the Latino/a experience. For the artwork of Ramiro Gomez, it must communicate images of undocumented bodies and labor as humans to make it visible in American spaces.

Vernacular Rhetoric is a form of resistance for those communities at the margins of society (Ono and Sloop 22). Following this framework, if images have the ability to make arguments by making claims, refuting assumptions, and advancing alternatives then images such as Ramiro’s art can influence attitudes of the audience depending on how the audience engages with those fragments. Gomez’s artwork becomes a piece showing, “how the prographic and epigraphic fragments within it attempt to persuade readers. Latinas/os are imbricated within the sociocultural fabric of the U.S.” (Calafell and Delgado 8). That is to say, Gomez’s work can make those non-Latino/a audiences who are not familiar with the Latino/a experience in the United States, to acknowledge the contributions of undocumented immigrants. Additionally, fragmentation enables a vernacular discourse to be recognizable for those communities that are not at the center of rhetorical spaces, those at the margins. Ono and Sloop, through their scholarship, engage these marginalized bodies into existence to create a community that exists outside the hegemony. However, Ramiro Gomez, in his artwork, is only looking at how those fragments on the migrant body and labor are functioning within the dominant hegemonic

environment.

Visual Rhetoric

Visual rhetoric must be understood to complete this study. Visual rhetoric is an essential element to comprehend how Gomez's artwork carries symbolic meaning to non-Latino/a audiences. This framework can theorize how both Latino/a and non-Latino/a audience interpret the message of Gomez's artwork. For each of these audiences, the symbol of the undocumented body carries different meaning. In essence, Gomez's artwork is attempting to combat perceptions of undocumented bodies to non-Latino/a audiences. I will give an overview of visual rhetoric, then go into detail over the set of characteristics that render visual artifacts as rhetoric. Visual rhetoric scholar Sonja K. Foss, synthesizes, one can only look at a sign, but if they have no relation to it, there would be no symbolic meaning. These characteristics are crucial to understanding how images communicate meaning to audiences. I have reviewed relevant scholarship in visual rhetoric. Ramiro Gomez's work focuses on the image's ability to convey meaning through symbols. Moreover, the visual becomes the central piece in acknowledging how undocumented bodies and labor are made visible through Gomez's artwork. Visual rhetoric is a useful method to analyze the image regarding its effectiveness in communicating its function.

The rhetoric goes beyond just verbal and written texts. Since the beginning, the foundation of communication studies and rhetoric focuses on speeches as the primary form of discourse. Rhetorical criticism began from a single speaker deriving from a single piece of text. However, rhetorical scholar Barry Brummett contends that traditional ideas of text are fading (2). Mostly, if the field wants to expand and further explain the ordinary meaning, rhetoric should

move beyond the speeches and written text. As Sonja K. Foss suggested, the analysis symbols like music, dance and the image ("Theory of Visual Rhetoric 141"). Similarly, Douglas Ehninger encouraged the addition of visual symbols in rhetorical scholarship. For him, all humans were symbol using beings, and that rhetoric "may influence each other's thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols" (Ehninger 22). Therefore, the image allows the audience to confront the visual. This makes the visual a preferred medium for this analysis because it has the power to do things that written language cannot. It becomes a more disruptive technique. Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers furthers, the problem was not the analyzing of various and diverse visuals but, rather, "the fundamental nature of the two terms visual and rhetoric" couldn't coexist in the field of communication studies (Hill and Helmers ix). It implied that the study of visual rhetoric is analyzing anything created by human beings to invoke meaning.

To advance the field of visual rhetoric, Sonja K. Foss thought that rhetoric's discursive and theoretical framework could move away from linguistic or text-based artifacts ("Theory of Visual Rhetoric" 303). Thus, the attention to the text as verbal and spoken gave early rhetorical scholars a minuscule view of the constant symbols that surround our lived experiences. However, this doesn't take into account how vast humans really are. The human experience is complex and it can be explained through discursive symbols, like the visual image (Foss, "Theory of Visual Rhetoric" 303). Thus, visual imagery carries symbolic meaning, and those symbols help us better understand the world around us.

The inclusion of visual images into rhetorical studies has not been an easy process. To encapsulate the pervasiveness of visual rhetoric should expose the individual to the multidimensional human experience. Visual artifacts could include photographs, drawings, paintings, architecture, internet images, and film. In doing so, they serve as a form of speech or

rhetoric that resonates within local communities, like “culture: music, art, criticism, dance, and architecture of local communities” (Ono and Sloop 20). Janis L. Edwards explains how it is common for the image to adapt itself to new forms of media. Art doesn’t come merely in the shape of paintings and other media. Instead, paintings and images should signal messages, thus, “creating analogies that recall past moments and suggest future possibilities” (Edwards 179). Because the visual image carries meaning, these new forms of discourse “are enormously powerful influences on attitudes and beliefs” (Blair 23). The image provides us with a clearer understanding of the world because visual images are constantly around us. In studying images, we are more likely to analyze visual symbols rhetorically. Thus, the study of images provides, “a richer and more comprehensive understanding of rhetorical processes,” helping the audience better understand the world around them (Foss “A Rhetorical Schema” 213). Sonja Foss attempts to apply rhetorical perspectives to address the aspects of visual imagery to understand these visual images. Here, she establishes a set of two definitions for visual rhetoric.

First, Foss defines visual rhetoric as a "product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating" (Foss “Framing the study” 304). Second, "it is the perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication" (“Framing the study” 304). Mostly, Foss believes for an image to be rhetorical, it has to communicate meaning. For example, the American flag expresses meaning through our understanding of what America is. We understand that the red, white, blue are patriotic colors. Thus, the flag gives us a sense of patriotism because of what America stands for in our discourse. It is by looking at the of colors, shapes and textures within the art to communicate with an audience. Through this lens, the rhetorical discourse constructs meaning through other venues that don't include simply just words or text.

The same rhetorical elements used to break down written documents can also apply to the visual image. Foss utilizes three distinct characteristics that make these artistic artifacts rhetorical. First, to be visual rhetoric a picture must be symbolic. If communication is said to be a collection of various signs, then visual rhetoric should then to be a group of symbols. Rhetorical critics encouraged all critics to actively engage various forms of expression from mathematics to different forms of architecture, stated "visual rhetoric is symbolic action in that the relationship it designates between image and referent is arbitrary" (Foss, "Framing the study" 305). In being arbitrary, the audience's reception is different from audience member to audience member. An image with symbolic meaning can carry an argumentative function, in which it operates as "inventional resources and the possibilities they afford to a generative argument" (Delicath and Deluca 324). For the image, the generative case only means "animating the possibilities for public debate and generating new lines of argument" (Delicath and Deluca 324). By having image that is symbolic, it allows for the picture to be the carrier of meaning and thus, inducing an argument to an audience

Second, Foss explains the involvement of human intervention within visual rhetoric. For example, whenever readers see images they are exposed to symbols. Those symbols create the meaning of our world and help us better understand the world around us. From the colors, sizes, and shapes, each aspect of an image communicates something to the audience. Additionally, human intervention possesses the ability to make images that are not rhetorical to become rhetorical (Foss, "Theory of visual" 144). Thus, the act of human intervention is needed either in the planning or creation process of visual rhetoric. The human intervention allows for images to become rhetorical because it gives them purpose. For example, Gomez could place a cardboard box in front of a lawn, but without the actual figures representing undocumented bodies, it just a

cardboard box with no meaning. Without human intervention, the image is not symbolic and thus doesn't qualify as visual rhetoric. Since visual rhetoric wouldn't exist in spaces without human involvement and creation, an image must include some form of human intervention to be rhetorical.

Third, visual rhetoric must live in the presence of an audience. Since human intervention is a crucial component to making images rhetorical, then these visuals are simply for more than just "self-expression." That is to say, the creator of the image can serve as the audience member, but the importance of visual rhetoric lies in its ability to communicate with a public audience "even if the only audience for an image is its creator" ("Theory of visual 144). An image is created and placed into space in hopes it gains attention from someone in public. In doing so, it conveys messages to the audience. As a whole, an image can be analyzed as visual rhetoric if it included symbolic action, human intervention and done so in the presence of an audience. Through these characteristics, an image is rhetorical since it helps the audience understand how images communicate meaning. As a result, images become these audience-constructed texts that should be viewed in the sense of traditional text analysis since the decoding or construction occurs in the mind of the audience.

Sonja Foss's 1987 analysis of various body art looked at how readers view the art on these bodies. More importantly, how different audiences can interpret the meaning and organize them to construct an understanding of their worlds. Visual rhetoric should take into the account the lived experience of the viewer. It comes with the notion that discursive images are much different from the characteristics that drive verbal and oral textual traditions. For example, oral language is more abstract while the power of the picture tends is more concrete in their interpretation. In some sense, it expanded the rhetorical theory that we, rhetoricians, put into

practice every day. It becomes a calling to make rhetoric a more inclusive space that includes the visual as an initial framework to make sense of our world. It provides rhetorical expansions, since it uses the qualities of the images “and builds rhetorical theory on the basis of those characteristics” in order to provide more context to what the image is articulating (Foss, “Theory of visual” 150). Thus, by moving across different avenues of rhetorical theory, this inductive reasoning takes into consideration the different lived experiences of the viewer to provide more avenues for symbol creation and understanding. In becoming rhetorical, these images blend past experiences with the perception of a picture to construct meaning. The inductive approach has expanded rhetorical theory by opening the level and types of epistemologies that constitute different responses to symbols.

The conception of the image from the audience is another important element in visual rhetoric. Since the picture plays the role of the text the viewer's perception and interpretation of the image are needed to make the visual rhetorical. Images can bring out emotions in audiences that can cause a reaction, thus, “evoking one of these cultural constructs causes the emotions that linked to it to be instantiated” (Hill and Helmers 35). That is to say, if an image can communicate meaning and persuade an audience, then the audience's conception of the picture is important. This interpretation of the text is why images must be symbolic and universal. In doing so, they open up the process of sense making to a larger audience.

After reviewing literature over Latino/a communication studies, critical rhetoric, vernacular discourses, and visual rhetoric it is important to acknowledge how these can be used to analyze Ramiro Gomez’s *Cut-Outs*. In doing so, they can establish a theoretical framework to understand how these images are humanizing the undocumented experience to non-Latino/a audiences. First, Gomez’s art is similar in the ways others Latino/a artists have attempted to

combat the stereotypes of immigrants in the United States. However, through the use of a vernacular discourse, which is embodied in critical rhetoric, Gomez tries to place a real object, the *Cut-Outs*, into subjectivity. Finally, Foss's visual rhetoric has been applied to Gomez's art to show how the visual conveys meaning. In combining all of these theoretical frameworks, we can find an appropriate fitting to situate Ramiro Gomez's discourse.

CHAPTER 3

THE AMERICAN THREAT: CONTEXT

The United States has had a complicated history with undocumented bodies. In our current discourse, these immigrants and labor present a threat to the American way of life (Hanson et al. 871). As presented in Chapter two, this chapter looks into the ways Ramiro Gomez's art renders undocumented bodies and labor as subjects in American spaces and provides a context of undocumented bodies and their relationship with this country to set up the rhetorical situation of immigration in the United States. As rhetorician, Lloyd Bitzer asserts "a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation", and thus, any discourse situates itself within a rhetorical situation (Bitzer 5). According to Bitzer, a rhetorical situation exists before any rhetorical discourse. Because of this the rhetorical situation dictates the types of responses that are made. In the case of Ramiro Gomez, his artwork is a response to the current state of immigration in the United States. To fully encapsulate the rhetorical situation that brought Gomez's artwork to manifest, we must look at "the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse" (Bitzer 1). By understanding the rhetorical situation, we are able to understand the current subjectivity of undocumented bodies and labor in the United States. Next, it provides the context of Ramiro Gomez as a rhetor. By using moments of his life as presented in the book *Domestic Scenes*, we can see how Gomez's life influenced his art. Both, Gomez's life and the United States relationship with immigration, interplay and work off one another provide a narration of what it is to be undocumented in the United States.

In this chapter, I argue that the United States situates undocumented individuals as enemies of the American way of life. There are a series of events that have led the United States to continue to demonize foreign bodies to protect democracy. In essence, since the relationship with undocumented people is a complicated one, there's connections, "between economic restrictions, political repression, and racialized nativism" and how we handle foreign threats in the United States (Buff 523). It is imperative to look at the socio-political and economic context of this relationship in a post 9/11 setting. As Chicana scholar Lisa Flores warned us, "contemporary images of immigrants, such as that of the illegal alien, do not emerge in a vacuum," rather, "they are a part of our nation's history of immigration, race, and nation" (Flores 363). I use the word "relationship" because events have occurred in the United States that affect how these bodies and labor are perceived as threats. Ramiro Gomez's artwork needs a post 9/11 context because it takes place within the boundaries of that period. Additionally, works on presidential immigration rhetoric show "9/11 had a substantial impact upon how the public perceives, and the media portrays, those considered outsiders" such as undocumented immigrants (Arthur and Woods 471). I look at the context of 9/11 as a historical point that heightens the United States and immigration relations. The event gives us a contemporary outlook on immigration. More importantly, it helps understand why certain policy initiatives towards immigration were passed. Since the *Cut-Outs* represent these bodies and their labor, then this relationship must be understood socially, politically and economically.

Ultimately, this chapter provides us with a context of Ramiro Gomez as a rhetor. The present chapter gathers literature from interviews with Gomez from Lawrence Weschler's book *Domestic Scenes*. The literature reviewed from these outlets focus this context around a central factor: his life as a first generation Mexican-American artist. More importantly, how those life

experiences shaped the direction and goals of his artwork. It is important to look into the ways rhetors balance between the frontiers of art and life. Performance scholar and artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Christopher Winks, contend “there is always a real danger present especially when the work of art or performance occurs in spaces that are unprotected by cultural institutions” (Gómez-Peña and Winks 112). The socio-political and economic context and the life of Ramiro Gomez are critical stepping stones in understanding Gomez’s rhetorical strategies.

Post 9/11 as Socio-Political Context for The Latino Threat

Political scientists believe there is a correlation between socio-political context around immigration in the United states and immigrants (Arthur and Woods 469). The socio-political context around 9/11 created the need for national security and to protect the American way of life that lived within its borders. Moreover, I refer to this historical point as a project encapsulating the many anti-immigration initiatives that were created during this period. Similarly, Chicana scholars Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo and Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo highlight, “when we refer to the 9/11 project, we are referencing the institutionalized ideological, philosophical, and sociopolitical construct encompassing the more than a day and its particular events” (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2). Initially, to focus on post 9/11 as a socio-political context means to include the creation of government institutions and legislation that marginalized undocumented immigrants. Scholars have looked into the ways economic and demographic factors in the United States can influence policy decisions in the United States (Ybarra et al. 313). These policy decisions include the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the USA Patriot Act, ICE detention centers, proposed construction of a fence along the United States-Mexico border, and Arizona’s SB 1070 law, among others. Each of these initiatives followed 9/11 as a means to get rid of any foreign threats to the United States. But more

importantly, the events of 9/11 made it increasingly difficult to cross the border due to increased terrorist threats (Newman 143). Thus, the socio-political frame allows this study to see how both of these concepts overlap and play off one another to further dehumanize undocumented bodies.

Regarding this study, I highlight two specific outcomes it provides to the rhetorical situation concerning Mexican immigration in the United States: First, it enhances the Latino threat narrative and second, furthered discussions around the “good” immigrant vs. the “bad” immigrant in our immigration discourse. Immigration rhetoric continues to be one of the most contested issues every election cycle (Newton 5). Moreover, the ways we viewed these bodies socially affects their political treatment. After 9/11, racialized groups were viewed as threats to being American, which is associated to being white (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 3). As a result, foreign bodies were thought to destroy democracy. Post 9/11 created a series of events that affected the ways we look at undocumented bodies and labor in this country.

The Latino/a Threat Narrative

First, the Latino/a threat serves as an ongoing narrative in the immigration debate. It establishes that immigrants enter this country illegally at alarming rates and will eventually destroy the American way of life, by stoking fears and myths, like the trope of Latinos/as taking American jobs (Espenshade and Hempstead 543). These fears turn into anxieties that only increase immigration restriction talks. The events that occurred on September 11, 2001 “raised the stakes” and called for new ways to stop foreign bodies from entering the United States, and more importantly, left the country in fear towards anything that wasn’t American (Chavez, *The Latino Threat* 33). The discourse seems to surround itself around national security, and that sense of national security keeps getting threatened by the number of Mexican and other Latin American immigrants that enter into this country. This type of mentality calls for passing

legislation that comes out of “racialized anxieties” about foreign individuals (Provine and Doty 262). For example, American political scientist, Samuel Huntington describes that Americans should fight against the rise of Mexicans entering the U.S.-Mexico Border. He says, “Mexican immigration looms as a unique and disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country” (Huntington 22). Therefore, the event of 9/11 only continues to enforce the anxieties felt in moments of crisis.

The Latino/a threat narrative survives through constant political and media portrayals of illegal immigration in the United States. Overall media portrayal towards illegal immigration have been negative, which creates political and economic anxieties among the United States population (Steinberg 111). Communication and media scholars have looked into how immigrants were depicted in the media, but very little effort has been made on why they were depicted this way (Kim et al. 294). This sentiment contributes to them being viewed negatively through agenda setting, since immigration is often associated with drug cartels, high rates of crime, and human trafficking (Dunaway et al. 362). Studies have concluded how film depictions of immigrant labor and the United States-Mexico border welcome migrant labor in this country, despite not wanting the Mexican laborer’s body (Sisk 41). Thus, Leo Chavez contends “as a consequence, the larger society often endows the identity, character, and behavior of the illegal alien with mythical qualities” (Chavez, *Shadowed Lives* 17). One possible reason for this is the criminal labeling of undocumented immigrants. The labeling of these bodies includes so many terms that the portrayals become convoluted. For example, some media outlets refer to them as undocumented workers. Communication has looked at how the interchangeability between “undocumented workers” and “illegal aliens” has affected the types of prejudice towards Mexican immigrants (Pearson 118). By stressing the word “illegal”, it centers the undocumented

body in terms of legality within the United States, which, “conjures up the idea of a criminal” or “implies an entity that does not belong” (Soderlund 171). However, the term “undocumented” is preferred by the Latino/a community because it strays away from the legality standpoint. Yet to non-Latino/a audiences “undocumented” and “illegal” are interchangeable. By implying that undocumented bodies do not belong within the borders of this country, it sends the message that they are criminals, thus only enhancing the Latino threat narrative to the American public. The constant portrayals make undocumented immigrants synonymous with threats, and change the narrative into a more destructive one. This transformation of the immigrant narrative relies on the notion that current immigration occurring below the United States is destroying the fabric of our democracy.

The United States-Mexico Border as a site of criminality

Additionally, the Latino/a threat narrative thrives on the idea that the United States-Mexico border should be a scene of a national crisis. As a result, post 9/11 discourses strictly enforce the need for national security and stronger “border security” (Dunmire 196). Communication scholars such as Karma Chávez, illustrate what the need for stronger border security means. She contends, “discourses constitutes the way immigration, generally, is understood” (“The Need to Shift” 48). As American anthropologist, author, and professor, Leo Chavez, proclaims, “over the last few decades, the U.S.-Mexico border has been likened to a war zone”, which comes with increased levels of militarization along the border (*The Latino Threat* 146). In doing so, the border between the United States and Mexico is a site of criminality. Therefore, a construction of this border allows for “social boundaries” to be created around Americans and foreign bodies (Nevins 136). This tension over the border is more reflective among border states such as Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and most notably, California. By

having bodies entering through those border states, “the immigrant is dehumanized as a mere enemy of the state,” and should require some intervention (Trifonov 4). Events such as Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, Texas, Operation Gatekeeper in California, and Operation Safeguard all become military initiatives to stop the flow of criminality crossing the southernmost border of the United States. All of these initiatives run on the premise of the Latino threat narrative, causing a sense of fear in the American government, so these methods are designed “to stop the problem at the border” (Correa-Cabrera et al. 40). The narrative propels itself in the border states because they are in proximity to Mexico.

The United States-Mexico border highlights our problem with brown bodies. As stated in this chapter, the US-Mexico border dominates discussions around immigration. This leaves very little to no conversation about immigration efforts occurring across the Canadian border. Immigration discussions hardly concern themselves over other sites of immigration because those immigrants are white and not brown. There is no such thing as a Canadian war zone or dangerous narratives about that area because that is what the United States chooses to focus on brown bodies. Brown bodies are the ones that have been painted as criminals by our country. They are the ones that our country tells us we should be afraid of. These actions speak to the problems that this country doesn't have a problem with bodies crossing into this country, as long as they're not brown and undocumented.

Thus, in the context of Ramiro Gomez's artwork the geographical area of California becomes a hotspot for immigration flow and discourse. More importantly, it is worth noting that these regions grew to national attention following the events of 9/11 as a means to enforce border security (Coleman and Kocher 229). Since then, this geographical area has become the site that our policymakers refer to as a war zone with an influx of undocumented immigrants.

Good Immigrants vs Bad Immigrants

Second, the post 9/11 era furthered the creation of the two immigrant groups within the Latino/a population. While there are no questions that immigrants come from all corners of the globe, immigration scholars believe, “not all immigrants are equally visible or central in official and popular representations of immigrants and therefore targeted by underlying mistrust” (Maldonado et al. 322). Essentially, the United States and its people tend to view immigration coming from its southernmost border as its main source of immigration flow and most dangerous. For example, southern and border states became hotspots for illegal immigration, and immigration became the “top story” in that region (Winders 924). The misconception tends to make immigration a Latino/a issue rather than focusing on the other groups that migrate into this country. Socially, it is an attempt to blame the Latino/a community for the problems that are occurring in the United States. Like previously mentioned, the political initiatives depend on perceptions of undocumented immigrants. This line of thinking creates a dichotomy within the Latino/a immigrant community.

The United States doesn't have a problem with all immigrants, only a certain kind of immigrant. This dichotomy is fused by political figureheads, like our presidents, who paint certain immigrant groups in a positive light such as those, “who came ‘earlier’” and did the immigration process in the correct way (Simon and Lynch 458). These are immigrant groups that have benefitted the American way of life. In other words, they are the “good” immigrants that best align with the American values. These immigrants are white and do not come from the United-States Mexico Border. However, some groups of immigrants, like undocumented immigrants, are constantly bashed through xenophobic rhetoric and frame the immigrations and the immigration process as destructive to the United States (Arthur and Woods 469). For

example, studies on the United States immigration dilemma show that an immigrant's worth is tied to the economy. Those immigrants who do not contribute to the well-being of the economy are looked as detrimental to the well-being of America (Esses et al 391). The idea that undocumented immigrants take American jobs assumes that immigrants are not good for the economy. Similarly, theorists suggest that fears towards difference play a role in the level of prejudice toward outgroups and immigrant groups (Stephan et al 1). These immigrants are the “bad” ones. The creation of these two groups shapes our public perceptions of these immigrants. This line of thinking shows us that the United States is complacent with the entering of certain bodies as long as they are not attached the criminality label. Undocumented brown bodies, like the ones in Gomez’s artwork, are not welcomed into this country.

To drive more political context into the rhetorical situation, I believe it is important to look into the ways pieces of legislations like California Proposition only further the “good” vs. “bad” immigrant dichotomy. Legislation becomes an attempt to restrict the number of immigrants crossing the United State-Mexico border (Lee et al. 431). California Proposition 187 serves as an ideal piece of legislation because it shares the same geographical area as Gomez’s artwork. Also known as the Save Our State (SOS) initiative, 187 made it possible for the state of California to prohibit undocumented immigrants from using health care, public education and other services provided by the state. This law becomes a way of paying for the crime they have committed. In passing laws like these, Maldonado and her associates, contend, “they effectively conscript the expression of Latino/a subjectivities spatially, simultaneously reproducing power structures and exploitative social arrangements across geographic scales (Maldonado et al. 327). The context hints at the idea that these bodies are not human and should be submissive to the American way of life.

Proposition 187 was passed due to the rise of nativism and the fear that those outside the United States border would infiltrate the country (Alvarez and Butterfield 168). Till this date, California Proposition 187 serves as one of California's harshest immigration policies because as JD Cisneros explains, such laws, "reinforced dominant assumptions about the danger of 'illegal' immigration by focusing on nativist, racist, and xenophobic justifications for immigration restriction" ("Contaminated Communities" 571). It was the current state of immigration affairs and over concern with threats to the United States, and aggressive rhetoric used towards undocumented bodies that allowed for California Proposition to be born. However, that same sentiment that was behind 187 continues to step towards other anti-immigration policies. As previously mentioned, border states are more likely to see harsher immigration policies due to the state's proximity to the Mexico border. Such policies enforce the notion of the "bad" immigrant and more importantly, associate immigrants with that negative connotation of alien or illegal (Cisneros, "Affect, Rhetoric, and Performativity" 140). In other words, contemporary framing on immigrants during Proposition 187 focused associating negative connotations of immigrants to animals, or nonhuman (Otto, "Like an animal" 192). Since these types of immigrants cannot provide benefit to the country, they are rendered inadequate or alien.

For this present section, I focus on the language during the Obama Era that helps create the socio-political context for undocumented bodies and labor. More importantly how Obama's presidency creates the immigrant dichotomy using a subtler rhetoric (Cisneros, "A Nation of Immigrants" 357). The Obama Era is the years during the Presidency of Barack Obama from the years 2009 to 2017. These years encapsulate the years in which Ramiro Gomez created his *Cut-Outs* and placed them around the Los Angeles area. This period saw the effects of post 9/11 seep into our countries fears of those who look different. These years also marked a period where the

Obama administration had, “deported 400,000 people” and thus, “far exceeded the number of deportations under the Bush administration” (Zimmerman 17). Conversations around this era help establish the United States relationship with immigrant bodies and labor. More importantly, it heightens the tension of the Latino/a threat narrative and only continued to shape perception around “good” vs “bad” types of immigrants. It came down to the notion that those who followed the American way of life were accepted into American culture, while those who did not be different.

The Obama Era proved to be as detrimental towards the perceptions of immigrants compared to the campaigns of his predecessors (Dorsey and Diaz-Barriga 91). Like previously mentioned, this discourse was not straightforward like the harsh immigration policies, but rather, “relied on explicitly neoliberal criteria to mediate the inclusive/exclusive dimensions of presidential immigration rhetoric” as a means to separate immigration groups from one another (“A Nation of Immigrants” 361). By creating markers on what made a good immigrant, the Obama Era’s rhetoric was able to make the public’s perception believe that this was the way all immigrants should look like in the United States. Such rhetoric is what Cisneros refers to a “kinder, gentler” image of what immigration in the United States is (“A Nation of Immigrants” 367). By not being explicit towards undocumented immigrants, the discourse of immigration relied on how well these immigrants added to American’s moral capital. They were not criminals or drug dealers like America had feared, but rather they were DREAMers. The term is used to refer to undocumented students who were granted legal status once they have finished their education. In essence, how well they conformed to the American ideals of hard work responsibility and service was important.

The “good” vs. “bad” immigrant dichotomy thrived in the times of Ramiro Gomez by

focusing on entrepreneurialism or rags to riches mentality of immigration. They were the exemplary immigrants used as tokens. As rhetorician Dana Cloud explains in her “rhetoric of tokenism,” tokenism glorified the exception as an attempt to ignore the outside structural factors that affected the others (122). In that same fashion, the stories of immigrants told by policymakers to pass comprehensive immigration relied on the notion of entrepreneurialism as means to justify humanity. It made those immigrants who had followed the American way of life into the exceptions. However, the United States’ line of thinking towards immigration is fundamentally flawed. Each step of the immigration of process is a calculated decision to keep brown bodies out of this country. Through the focus on criminality, our legislators disregard that many of these immigrants have worked their entire lives to make the lives of their families better. Instead policymakers drive the Latino/a threat narrative every election cycle and doing otherwise would contradict every negative perception of undocumented immigrants to the American public. These findings within the immigration narrative have an effect on how the public views immigrant bodies. It was an effort to push the dichotomy in a very subtle fashion. It is worth noting that “good” vs. “bad” immigrant runs on the notion of fear towards difference. So, those undocumented bodies that fail to assimilate into America’s core values should not belong in this country. Meanwhile, those white immigrants, who have done everything the correct way and embraced Americanness should benefit from being in this country.

The strongest proponents of comprehensive immigration will argue that immigrants are here to take the jobs of Americans. That mindset runs on the notion that immigration will displace American workers with cheap labor without any repercussions (Porter Pr.7). Meanwhile, proponents of comprehensive immigration believe that these individuals take the jobs that no one wants. However, both viewpoints echo the sentiment of anthropology professor

Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, in which he contends “it has narrowly focused on the economic costs and benefits said to be associated with the new arrivals” (Suarez-Orozco 155). By focusing on labor and the economies behind that menial labor, conversations around undocumented bodies surround themselves around how well a body can perform a given task. Menial labor includes any labor such as gardening, landscaping, construction work, and nannying. This type of labor is the same one as the one shown in the artwork of Ramiro Gomez.

There’s a connection with the economy and our current sentiments towards illegal immigration. When the economy is doing poorly or not at a level where they feel is adequate, policymakers and the media attempt to place the blame towards something that can generate support from its publics (Baum 265). This is due to the myths that Latinos/as take American jobs. Therefore, making it is easy to put the blame on them and be, “more negative about immigration when unemployment is high (Arthur and Woods 472). This line of thinking makes policymakers blame the negative effects of the economy on immigrants. The economy runs on a notion of fear and the loss of American jobs to undocumented bodies. Because economic success translates to success as a country, it is easy to blame immigrants for these problems.

The socio-political context surrounding undocumented bodies and labor runs on a notion of criminality and fear. In the time of Ramiro Gomez, the 9/11 project had an impact in our view towards undocumented bodies and labor. Again, that term refers to the policies and impacts that event had towards foreign individuals and their existence in the United States. It would be wise to think of that event as a catalyst, or rather an exigence to the current relationship between the United States and immigration. More importantly, it enhanced the strength of the Latino/a threat narrative. It concretizes the ideals of what it means to be a good immigrant. In doing so, our current context has created the blueprint of what the United States immigrant should look like

and, “tie this status to specific bodies and practices” (Cisneros, “A Nation of Immigrants” 371). The artwork of Ramiro Gomez is about those bodies that have been negatively affected by the policies and initiatives after that event. His artwork is a continuous effort to combat the negative images that have rendered these bodies and labor invisible in public spaces, but above all, make them visible.

Latino/a Discourses of Resistance

Several works within Latino/a Communication Studies have looked at how dominant discursive meanings translate the context of migrant bodies (Chávez, “Embodied Translation” 19). Whether it be through legislation, media, or political figureheads, the logics of immigration have associated immigrants with negative images. Like previously mentioned, these discursive meanings tie the migrant body to criminality. In order to combat the dominant powers that continue to undermine the Latino/a experience, I echo the sentiment of Latino/a Communication Scholars, Claudia Anguiano and Mari Castañeda, in which Latino/a communication’s discourses of resistance should be a performance toward activism and civic engagement (Anguiano and Castañeda 115). Essentially, discourses of resistance from Latinos/as regarding inclusivity in the United States have shifted from the promotion of “pan-ethnic unity” to the assertion that “Latinos are also Americans” (Silber 299). For example, in 1996, talk show host Geraldo Rivera urged people from various countries around Latin America to set aside their geographical and country differences and become one unified Latino/a community. Nonetheless, contemporary acts of resistance look at ways to humanize the Latino/a experience, making it American. Similarly, Hector Amaya suggest Latino/a immigration should be a “radical rewriting of the self” in order to gain inclusion into American society (Amaya 194). This act of resistance to become American assumes that Latinos/as in the United States should be subjects, or have some sense of

belonging. The sense of belonging is echoed by the artwork of Ramiro Gomez. However, it has been a strategy used by members of the Latino/a community. Thus, as an act of resistance, Latino/a discourses should be viewed as performances of national belonging or citizenship. As Cisneros explains, “civic belonging is not conceptualized exclusively through a nation’s laws, institutions, or myths” but rather, how they performing citizenship through a variety of discursive actions (“(Re)Bordering the Civic Imaginary” 30). This performance as an act of resistance comes through the material, or the vernacular. For example, the 2006 Immigration protests, *La Gran Marcha* or The Grand March, were massive demonstrations against the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The bill, like many other immigration bills, was an attempt to control immigration in the United States. However, the Latino/a community took to the streets and protested the bill through speeches, chants, posters but most significantly, flag waving. Rhetorical scholars have looked into how the act of flag waving the United States flag alongside flags from countries all over Latin America was a “visual argument about cultural citizenship” (Pineda 5). In doing so, it places the undocumented body as political actors who become visible through their struggle and becoming a unified collective (Galindo 39). These are the ways social movements have worked from the bottom up to resist the images placed on undocumented immigrants. Social movements have a been a way for oppressed groups to make a fight towards equality. I contend these resistive strategies is a way of survival for these groups. The strategies focus on associating undocumented bodies with Americans, and, thus are rendered humans. It is only through this avenue that Latino/a discourses of resistance are able place undocumented bodies at the forefront of discussion. This is similar to Gomez’s approach, by making them American to non-Latino/a audiences, he is making them human. And in doing so, contradict the negative perceptions of them.

Ramiro Gomez as a rhetor

Ramiro Gomez offers an interesting dynamic on how we view creators of discourse. First of all, he is a first generation Mexican-American artist who paints about the Latino/a experience. Puerto Rican performance artist and painter Papa Colo, according to Laura Roulet, believes that an artist's background is a determinant in the discourse artists produce (Roulet 34). For an artist, like Gomez their backgrounds and life experiences have an influence on the type of art they create. There is no denying that Gomez's discourse is about dehumanized bodies in the metropolis of Los Angeles. Therefore, to get a better understanding of his discourse, it is imperative to look into the ways his identity as a first generation Mexican-American artist influences his artwork. Moreover, second, how his family's experience influences his decision to paint about undocumented life.

Born in 1986 in San Bernardino, California to two undocumented Mexican immigrants, Ramiro Gomez Senior and Maria Elena, Gomez knew the difficulties his parents had in entering the United States (Weschler 8). Both, Ramiro Senior and Elena, were very hard working and motivated to have a better life than they did in Mexico. However, they still lived under the poverty line. Gomez's recalls his childhood days, "I never considered us poor, growing up, until a cousin one told me that we were, because my mother used food stamps and we got free lunches at school" (Weschler 11). Gomez knew that his childhood was different from the other people around him. Once diagnosed with hemophilia, his passions for playing soccer derailed. Hemophilia is a condition where the blood clots at lower rates, thus allow for easier internal bleeding (Weschler 12). His medical condition allowed him to focus his attention more towards education. In his school, he did not like to read and was poor at math. However, the area in which he excelled was the arts. At a young age, Gomez would be guided by his mother to pursue

his artistic talents. That passion for the arts would extend into his later education. In his high school years, Gomez's had won a t-shirt design competition held at his school. After briefly attending the California Institute of the Arts, Gomez, decided to work as a nanny in the West Hollywood area (Solomon pr.7). It was at that moment that where his appreciation for labor and space began.

Gomez's work as a babysitter exposed him to the many forms of labor present in Los Angeles. Gomez was babysitting two children in a West Hollywood neighborhood. West Hollywood is a part of town known for its LGBTQ population. In this area of the city, same-sex couples tend to hire nannies as an attempt to get a female presence in the home, and yet Gomez still got the job (Weschler 8). While babysitting in West Hollywood, Gomez would come across old magazines featuring living spaces such as rooms, dining sets, and backyards. Yet Gomez, would question, "where were the maids and nannies and gardeners, where were the people like him?" (Solomon pr. 8). It was then when Gomez began to draw figures that represented brown bodies into those magazines. By inserting them into the magazine spaces, he believed he could acknowledge their presence and existence into space, even if had only been a magazine page. This experience led Gomez to think about the ways these bodies and labor are disposable to the American public. He witnessed fellow nannies, gardeners, and other workers come and go. Gomez realized how invisible these humans are. Gomez explains, "your fellow house help (the housekeeper, the gardener, the pool cleaner) could disappear from one week to the next without so much explanation to them or you" (Weschler 8). The fear of deportation played a role in Gomez's art, as this was a reality for him and his family. As sociologist professor, Joanna Dreby, contends, "The apprehension and removal of Mexicans today is likely to have a profound impact on families, including children, living in the United States" (Dreby 831). Thus, the people in

Gomez's life could disappear at any point. Both his upbringing and his job as a nanny, shaped his perceptions about the placement of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

After two years of half years of being a nanny, Ramiro Gomez decided to quit. It was now September 2011, and within that two and half year span, he was able to develop his consistent theme within his magazine-based pieces. However, Ramiro Gomez felt that he wanted more out of his life. Nannying wasn't the best way to showcase his passion for the arts. So upon quitting, Ramiro Gomez decided to dedicate himself fully to the arts. Meanwhile, during this time in Los Angeles, the fandom of graffiti art had begun. It seemed like a great opportunity for Ramiro as he thought about joining the "Arts in the Streets" graffiti show, but couldn't bring himself to spray paint pictures on people's property. Graffiti art was something Gomez was not too eager to try. He explains to Welscher, "I tried, thinking I might spray some of my domestic worker figures onto the sides of empty walls downtown. We even set out for a particular site, but it was hopeless: I just couldn't bring myself to deface people's property like that" (Welscher 17). Afraid of the vandalism, Gomez rejected the idea of graffiti art. However, this opened the possibility placing his sketches figures into a physical space. And so, his idea to build figures out of cardboard material began.

A year later after his first *Cut-Out*, Gomez was now an established artist in the Los Angeles area. His artwork has gained the attention of locals and news stations. Gomez made appearances at Autry National Center, UC Santa Barbara, UCLA, and others. So, in June 2012, Gomez was featured in the *Los Angeles Times*. It is evident that Gomez's upbringing made him into the artists he is today. He simply isn't an artist that is painting for fun or profit, and rather he is an artist that genuinely cares about the message within his artwork. As a first generation Mexican-American artist, Gomez drew from his experiences to create artwork that would change

the way non-Latino audiences viewed undocumented bodies. Images of labor and undocumented immigrants filled the life of Ramiro Gomez. Gomez felt that these individuals should be treated and viewed as people.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS CHAPTER

Ramiro Gomez's *Cut-Outs* open up opportunities to discuss the ways undocumented bodies and labor are positioned in American spaces. Ramiro, throughout his experiences as a first-generation Mexican-American, realizes the stereotypes towards undocumented people in the United States. So his artwork has been a way to challenge the negative images associated with brown bodies. As discussed in Chapter Two looked into the ways, rhetoric serves as a powerful tool to disrupt power dynamics. For rhetors who come from marginalized backgrounds, this form of discourse becomes a way to intrude spaces dominated by the elites. Additionally, Chapter Three provides the necessary context for the placement of undocumented bodies and labor in our United States discourse. The fear towards difference as affected the socio-political climate of the United States towards immigration. Throughout its history, the United States has constantly concerned those who are different. That fear has placed undocumented bodies and labor on the outskirts of society. It is a place that renders the immigrants as objects rather than subjects in our American discourse.

While proponents of effective immigration legislation continue to look for ways to remove undocumented bodies from this face of this country, it is imperative now more than ever that people like Ramiro Gomez change the way to view these people. Our current state with immigration, and the possibilities of where immigration debates could head towards the future, bring some important questions that require some unpacking. This situation warrants the return to the research question: How does Ramiro Gomez render undocumented bodies and labor into

subjectivity in American spaces? Thus, this chapter unpacks Ramiro Gomez's *Cut-Outs* and theorize them to better understand the rhetorical strategies within his artwork. Since the *Cut-Outs* are all visuals, I look into the ways they meet the qualifications set by the Sonja K. Foss in her analysis of visual rhetoric as a way to convey meaning. I call for the opportunity for visual rhetoric to serve as a critical rhetoric that seeks to amplify the vernacular expressions of undocumented immigrants. In doing so, we able to see how the visual acts a form of vernacular discourse to disrupt the power relations between the United States and immigrant bodies.

The analysis looks into the ways Gomez's images can communicate undocumented labor into subjectivity. The Chapter begins with a rhetorical analysis split into three thematic parts the creation of the image, the placement of the image, and finally the disposability of the image. This thematic approach allows the analysis to acknowledge every stage of the *Cut-Outs* since every stage is a rhetorical strategy. These rhetorical strategies help us understand the ways Gomez makes undocumented bodies to be viewed as humans. Similarly, Margaret LaWare explains that visual images create a specific type of identity formation and create "tangible abstract possibilities" (LaWare 140). Therefore, this approach is suitable to better understand what Gomez's artwork is achieving. The creation of the image exposes the rhetorical strategies in the pictures such as their faceless nature, physical attributes, work equipment and attire. This creation process shows why audiences, both Latino/a and non-Latino/a, interpreted the images in a specific way. Second, the placement of the image looks into the ways the setting in a political move to improve the *Cut-Outs* visibility. The installation focuses on geographical location as a marker for discourse. Finally, the disposability allows us to answer rhetorical questions on what the act of disposability or removing means brown bodies and immigration conversation. To organize the analysis into this way also allows the audience to see how the *Cut-Outs* try to put

undocumented bodies and labor at the forefront of discussion to humanize their experience. Through an analysis of this program this chapter argues Gomez's *Cut-Outs* place undocumented bodies and labor as subjects rather than objects in American spaces. When taken together, these *Cut-Outs* are an attempt to disrupt the power dynamics within the United States to place undocumented immigrants into subjectivity.

Creation of the Cut-Out



Figure 1 Gardener, North Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, 2014

Gomez's creation of the images forces audiences to have conversations about the invisibility of undocumented immigrant bodies and labor. The establishment of the *Cut-Outs* is

the starting point of his discourse. Gomez's life as a first generation Mexican-American in the United States has influenced his art. Chapter three explored Gomez's background to understand his artwork as rhetorical discourse. The images are life-sized, faceless, and made out of cardboard. Each of these elements plays a significant role of the subjectivity of labor and, offer discussions on what this can do for the undocumented body. More importantly, the artwork offers critiques in the representation and portrayal of undocumented individuals in the United States. The following looks at how the first stage of Gomez's *Cut-Outs* turn undocumented bodies and labor from objects into subjects in American spaces.

Creating Invisibility

First, Gomez's *Cut-Outs* uses tropes of facelessness to evoke the complex issues within the Latino/a community. Gomez tells Public Radio International, "there are no details for the fact what when we drive by the real people, we don't have the time necessarily to observe the details: their eyes, their nose, their moles, and their imperfections. We just have time to view the physical outline, and my cardboard cut-outs are interpretations of that" (Pr. 4). Their lack of facial characteristics is similar to other representations of undocumented immigrants. Chicano scholar Rene Galindo explains how the undocumented immigrant in the United States is the opposite of the ideal citizen and is rendered "invisible and faceless" in their representation (Galindo 59). Therefore, Gomez's creation of these figures allows for non-Latino/a audiences to confront the invisibility of undocumented immigrants. Additionally, for the Latino/a community it establishes that the undocumented experience is identifiable between Latinos/as. This identifiability means that anyone who is familiar with images of labor can identify with the cardboard *Cut-Outs*. As Ramiro Gomez explains in an interview with the Atlantic, "labor is everywhere, the cast is different, but the role is the same" (Schwab Pr. 9). Essentially, while they

are faceless, the *Cut-Outs* are given names such as Nemesio, Grizelda, Lupe, Eduardo, Abelina. These are names that common in Latino/a households and give the audience connection with the cardboard figures. Gomez's creation of the artwork expands conversations of Latino/a invisibility. Latino/a communication studies has looked into the way the Latino/a is viewed as an invisible race in United States discourse, or in other words viewed as "an invisible racial minority" (Vaquera et al 1827). Chapter three discussed the ways Latinos/as are rendered invisible through political and social initiatives, however Gomez's work showcases the importance of these immigrant bodies to the American public. In its creation phase, the qualities of the images show that Latinos/as are an invisible people. For Latino/a communication this means looking for more ways to combat this invisibility. The *Cut-Outs* continue on the trend to make the Latino/a community visible whether it be in communication or in physical spaces.

The *Cut-Outs* establish contemporary images of labor in the United States. In other words, you could tell the subject in the cardboard figure was enacting labor intensive work. Gomez's artwork showcases the menial labor of undocumented bodies in Los Angeles. The types of labor that is performed by undocumented bodies is used to position the Latino/a into the labor market (Maldonado 1020). This type of job, whether it be gardening, nannying, or construction work, each represented the labor in these communities. It was the work that had created the city of Los Angeles, but no one noticed. As explained in the book, *Domestic Scenes*, the images of labor were recognizable by "the tired slope of their shoulders, the bend of their knees, the tilt of their heads, all of it conveying the weight of their experiences, the sag of their days" (Welscher 19). Gomez's depiction of labor signifies that is difficult and tires the immigrant body. It shows how important the contributions of undocumented immigrants are to the United States. So in being faceless, an audience member who has had similar experiences to that of Ramiro Gomez

would be able to identify with the depictions of labor. It made the undocumented experience into one where every Latino/a can relate to.

In being faceless, Gomez's *Cut-Outs* allow for the non-Latino/a audience to recognize the undocumented experience and know its existence. Contrary to that belief, dominant images of immigration force us to view immigrants as an "impossible subject", or something that cannot be fixed (Ngai 22). Images like these continue to complicate our relationship with undocumented immigrants because we are not able to view them as equals, let alone as people. Therefore, Gomez's rhetorical strategy in recognizing the undocumented experience is similar to undocumented immigrants revealing their citizenship status. Rose Cuison Villazor explains the idea of the Undocumented Closet, which also for undocumented immigrants to "come out of the closet" and reveal their citizenship status in order to become accepted into society (Villazor 7). The LGBTQ community is known for using the term. It refers to when a member of the LGBTQ community decides to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, as Villazor contends the motivation behind coming out is to be accepted into society, "specifically, coming out draws direction attention to immigrants' desires to be seen and be accepted as members of the polity" (Villazor 7). Since there is a such a negative connotation towards immigrants, coming out of the undocumented closet means that immigrants are able to prove to non-Latino audiences that they are criminals but rather humans. Gomez does the same thing with his *Cut-Outs*. He makes non-Latino audiences think about immigrants in a different picture that isn't about criminality. The picture of an undocumented immigrant in front of a lawn is making non-Latino audiences confront their views on immigration. As Gomez points out, he hopes that audiences will stop and stare at the *Cut-Outs*. In doing so he hopes that non-Latino audiences are able to acknowledge their existence and hopes to integrate them into society. The creation of art like this

warrants visibility and subjectivity for undocumented bodies in American spaces. I offer, this type of rhetoric not only has the ability change these perceptions of criminality, but rather should. Changing perceptions of brown bodies in this country will be a continuous process, therefore rhetorical strategies, like Gomez's, should continue to make these experiences into humane ones.

Gomez simplifies images of undocumented immigrants to empower them. As mentioned in previous chapters, Gomez's artwork follows the thematic trend of empowering the Latino/a community through his placing of undocumented bodies in American spaces. Gomez tells Lawrence Welscher in the book *Domestic Scenes* how throughout his life, Gomez has witnessed undocumented bodies be treated unfairly in the United States. Therefore, he focuses on the undocumented experience as a way to empower them. Similar to the ways other Latino/a artists had done so with murals (LaWare 144). However, those paintings tend to be involved with various symbols related to the Latino/a experiences. On the other hand, Gomez's *Cut-Outs* reach the same goal but in a different, more simple manner. As the professor of sociology and black studies, George Lipsitz tells the *Washington post*, "there are never any words, never an Aztec eagle or an American flag. What Ramiro does through these images is assert a kind of common destiny" (Montgomery Pr. 16). In other words, Gomez's simplicity of his artwork has created a need to empower the undocumented body. For example, Gardner (Figure 1) features no words that would hint that he is undocumented. He doesn't the words "undocumented" or "no papers" anywhere on the artwork, rather it is a brown body doing labor in Los Angeles. For non-Latino/a and Latino/a audiences they can associate this image to an undocumented body. These audiences have witnessed this labor and will associate it to a brown body. So, by associating images of real labor workers to the images of Gomez's *Cut-Outs* they are able to understand what the figure

represents. This rhetorical strategy by Gomez is what Sonja K Foss tells us in her visual rhetoric that images communicate meaning. The creation process of the *Cut-Outs* focuses on the simplicity of its features to draw conversations about undocumented immigrants and labor in the United States.

Cardboard as Pollutant

Using cardboard material serves as a troubling metaphor for the undocumented experience in the United States. As Chapter Three explained, there are negative connotations associated with foreign bodies in the United States. From metaphors of the brown body as a pollutant situate the Latino/a experience as a criminal one. Furthermore in the media, “Latinos are more often represented in stories related to crime and participate in a disproportionate amount of conversations about crime and violence” (Rivadeneira et al. 263). Therefore, Gomez’s *Cut-Outs* function to overturn those negative connections into a positive light. Gomez explains his reasoning behind cardboard as a personal taste. He explains, “cardboard feels more natural to me, more casual, less indulgent than canvas: more immediate” (Welscher 18). However, I argue cardboard has a deeper meaning in the ways the United States view undocumented bodies and labor. Previous chapters have touched on the Latino/a community seen as a destruction of the American way of life. Specifically, -our discourse problematizes the way we view undocumented immigrants as pollutants. Cisneros offers, “when the nation is conceived as a physical body, immigrants are presented either as an infectious disease or as a physical burden” (“Contaminated Communities 572). This language towards undocumented bodies hints that they are a problem. This use of language is why Ramiro Gomez’s usage of cardboard makes sense. Cardboard is a pollutant. In other words, the ongoing production of cardboard has adverse consequences on the well-being of the environment by contributing to

pollution. So by using cardboard, Gomez is damaging the ecosystem and the well being of the environment. Additionally, cardboard is also the color brown. This further associates the Latino/a identity as to be only brown skinned. Similarly, the United States views the constant crossings of undocumented immigrants into the country as a factor that deteriorates the well-being of the nation. The rhetoric is how proponents of laws like Arizona SB 1070 wanted to limit immigration because of the anchor baby myth. Enforcers of stronger immigration laws supported the myth that Latina women came into this country to breed children who will one day grant them citizenship (P. Huang 385). As long as this rhetoric continues to dehumanize undocumented bodies, we will never see them as a people. So in reality, Gomez's rhetorical choice has ramifications on the representation of undocumented immigrants.

The creation of the image has highlights the invisibility occurring within the undocumented community. These are choices that are made to confront the negative perceptions of undocumented immigrants to non-Latino/a audiences. Rhetorical choices have made the undocumented body into a criminal or an enemy to the United States. Therefore, it has been easier to pass legislation towards this group of people. This is why Gomez is making these bodies be viewed positively. It is a way to see the human side of immigration that our policy makers don't want us to see. From their faceless easy to identify features to their cardboard materials, each of these elements during the creation phase are rhetorical choices meant to make non-Latino/a audiences confront images of undocumented labor. It is an attempt to view them as humans in the United States. Essentially, even though they might be American citizens, they are still human beings. At the same time, it creates identifiability with Latino/a audiences because they are able to put themselves in the shoes of the *Cut-Outs* and see their labor being represented. For Latino/a audiences they are able to relate with their experiences with undocumented bodies.

Placement of the Cut-Out



Figure 2 We Are All American, Clooney Mansion, 2012

Power Dynamics in American Spaces

Placement is an integral part of Gomez's rhetorical strategy to highlight the power inequalities in the location of the image. The following looks at how the placement of the *Cut-Outs* create arguments to audiences about the role of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Rhetoricians have looked into place-based arguments or how rhetors invade a particular place as a warrant for the claim (Endres and Senda-Cook 276). They find place and location play a role in the messages and arguments that the rhetoric is trying to make. Additionally, critical rhetoric calls the influence of place in discourse (McKerrow, "Space and Time" 271). So in having Gomez place an image in Los Angeles, he is establishing the undocumented experience at the backdrop of the dehumanization of immigrants in the United States. Thus, the place is important because it confronts the harmful images of undocumented immigrants to audiences in that location. Therefore, the placement of the images in certain areas and locations takes into consideration the power dynamics occurring in a particular field. It helps non-Latino/a audiences understand that undocumented immigrants are treated as inhuman and more importantly, confront those power dynamics.

The site in Ramiro Gomez's *Cut-Outs* is Los Angeles. As Chapter Three discussed, border states, like California, represent the United States problem with immigrants with their anti-immigrant legislation. Border states like California, due to their "regional nature of immigrant settlement" are more likely to pass legislation stopping the flow of immigrants (Burns and Gimpel 210). Because of this Los Angeles, California is a productive site for having conversations about undocumented experiences. Gomez's installs these cardboard figures in places where workers had completed their labor. Gomez's cardboard installations are placed within areas endemic to undocumented labor. For example, *Gardener, North Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills* is placed in Beverly Hills, an area that is regarded as one of the wealthiest in the country, and where migrant women seek employment these affluent areas (Hondagneu-Sotelo 53). Therefore, our understanding of area is a marker that determines income inequalities, and racial and ethnic population differences. The city of Los Angeles is no different in those regards, specifically the Beverly Hills and Hollywood area. The city classifies as an American space, meaning it is a geographical area that has its own "unique material, symbolic and embodied qualities" on what it means to be American (Endres and Senda-Cook 260). The qualities of Los Angeles as a location place the city in a larger social discussion about the American ideology towards immigration. Like many cities across the United States, some areas are easily more affluent than others, and that plays a role in the type of people that populate those areas. When applying this to Gomez's work, the placement allows the analysis to focus on location as a marker for power inequalities. In placing the images in these regions, Gomez's message of showcasing immigrants as less than equal, "translates to any location that recognizes the class differences that permeate the city and our country at large" (Recinos Pr. 3). In doing so, the placement of *Cut-Outs* around Los Angeles echo the immigration problems within the broader

United States. By placing these images around these areas in Los Angeles, Gomez's artwork translates that is not only Los Angeles that has this problem but rather the entire country. Their placement influences the undocumented immigrant's body as a primary subject within the larger discourse of Latino/a labor and presentation.

The undocumented body is dehumanized in the power dynamics relationship with the United States (Hing 83). *We Are All American* opens up conversations of subjectivity in American spaces during the midst of political upheaval. Critical rhetoric and vernacular discourses explore how it "makes visible power relations among subjects is possible" through avenues like symbols and visuals (Calafell and Delgado 6). For example, Figure 2 *We Are All American*, Clooney Mansion, 2012 shows a portrait of a brown body carrying a water hose. The image communicates the performance of manual labor like landscape (Figure 2). However, the final leftmost panel of the portrait is the most interesting of them all. It includes a worker holding a sign with the words "We Are All American." When applied to Gomez's *Cut-Outs*, the portrait establishes power dynamics by focusing on the relationship between the United States and immigration, specifically President Obama. However, the larger feature of them all are the words "We Are All American" drawn into the painting (Fig 2). The placement of the image outside of Clooney's home acknowledges the United States' dehumanizing communication of undocumented brown bodies as being a problem (Williams 334). The placement of the *Cut-Outs* are "multi-dimensional structures that implicated the relationship between discourse and power" within the United States (McKerrow, "Space and Time" 287). However, that same logic acknowledges that American was dominant and above everyone else. Where American meant that, "white Americans elevated themselves above all other people", and leaving marginalized groups on the outskirts (Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising* 65). It is inherently robust in the

rhetorical construction of what American means and places those who are not American at the bottom of the food chain. This cast brown bodies and those that are different as un-American or different. Thus, in the context of Gomez's artwork to be American would mean to share the same beliefs held by the majority of the United States. As previously mentioned, everything that encapsulates being American applies to being white. Thus, those who do not meet those standards are less than equal. Therefore, when looking at the power in Gomez's installations, the placement of images, like *We Are All American*, forces the audience to acknowledge the current state of the undocumented body in the United States in 2012 during the first term of the Obama Presidency. Since the rhetoric during that time continued to view immigrant bodies as objects, Gomez's rhetoric continues to confront those misconceptions of undocumented immigrants. By mentioning that they are American, Gomez places the undocumented body to subjectivity, but more importantly humanity. It visualizes the labor workers as humans who are American because they are people. It does so by recognizing that they are already not viewed as humans in the eyes of non-Latino/a audiences, then it confronts that notion and proposes those audiences to change their views. Proponents of stronger immigration laws have failed to look at immigrants as subjects in their discourse, therefore Gomez's rhetoric counters those beliefs to non-Latino/a audiences. Thus, it clearly expressed that the United States had power over the undocumented experience, or rather they were invisible altogether. It is what American means that makes us realize that America is not brown, it is not brown labor, and above all, it is not undocumented.

Immigrant Identity as Labor

The placement of the *Cut-Outs* attaches labor to the immigrant identity. Immigration debates tend to center their discourse on Mexico labor while neglecting issues on other parts of Latin America (Barreto et al 745). Gomez's installations invent the Latino/a way of life for the

undocumented community and forces the American political arena to acknowledge their labor. However, to acknowledge Gomez's artwork is to look at how complicated immigrants are. They are not one-dimensional; rather they are a mixed group of people that range from different parts of Latin America. Whether it be how immigration debates focus on being a Mexican issue, or criminality of immigration, immigration tends to be narrowed down to a particular instance or population. Chapter Three looked into the ways President Obama's approach to immigration, crafted the "token immigrant" to focus labor on entrepreneurship. The focus on entrepreneurship was a subtle attempt to separate the immigrant's groups within the United States further. Language like this ties the immigrant experience to labor. In doing so, the outcome of the labor cannot exist if the body wasn't present. Therefore, the subjects in Gomez's artwork fit the bill of what an immigrant was supposed to be. Thus, placing them in areas like Beverly Hills or Clooneys Mansion ties the immigrant experience to that specific location, or that specific type of labor and acknowledges it. Essentially, the cardboard reassures to white audiences that this labor would not be possible without the bodies in the figures. Our current discourse made them into objects of the economy that were only profitable towards the economy regarding cheap labor. However, Gomez's installations tied labor and immigrant identity together in the form of a cardboard figure so the audience cannot disassociate the two.

The placement of the *Cut-Outs* communicates agency towards immigrants and their labor to non-Latino/a audiences. The American ideology is related to being white. In other words, to be "American", one must follow the economy of whiteness, or the discourses that focus on "values, competence, hard work, and respectability" (Cisneros, "A Nation of Immigrants" 360). Therefore, to be successful you must work hard while sharing the values of the United States. However, those characteristics do not apply to foreign bodies, like

undocumented immigrants. This moral economy of whiteness applies to the phenomenon in *We Are All American* because those are qualities we don't apply to undocumented immigrants. So by including the phrase "We Are All American" it establishes that immigrants are, in fact, hard working and competent (Figure 2). In being Americans, rather than undocumented immigrants, gives the immigrant agency over his work. Therefore, his work or labor is able to become valuable to non-Latino/a audiences. It makes them stop and realize the multiple types of labor immigrants do during their everyday lives. They are gardeners, they are nannies, above all they are contributing members of the American economy. Rather than pollutants that simply take American jobs. As Gomez explains in an interview with the Washington Post, "it's my hope to get people to stop and stare at these pieces so the next time they see a real person working it pauses them as well" (Montgomery Pr. 5). In doing so, Gomez acknowledges to non-Latino/a audience, or rather the United States, that this labor is important. It is the labor that makes up the country.

Communicating Citizenship

There are some adverse negative consequences to the undocumented community as the subjects of these images. Citizenship is tied to the idea of belonging within the boundaries of the United States (Carrasco and Seif 281). Gomez worries that he will expose undocumented members of the Latino/a community. He says, "it's a tricky position to be in when I want to bring attention to people who sometimes don't want the attention in the first place" (J. Huang pr. 30). The reality is that the undocumented community lives in constant fear because of their citizenship status. Due to criminalization and fear of deportation, many undocumented immigrants do not reveal their nationality situation and would rather let it be a secret. There are dangers in communicating images of a group that lives their lives in the shadows. For many

immigrants, hiding is a tactic of survival (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 425). In hiding immigrants are able to camouflage their way through society to avoid encounters with the law. Therefore, Gomez's artwork forces to question how vernacular discourses that are meant to empower people can hurt them. As his artwork begins to gain more media attention and surrounding communities begin to understand the concept behind his artwork, some worry that he will expose the status of the workers. It tells non-Latino/a audiences the number of undocumented immigrants present in their area. Or even worse, it tells them that there is a foreign body in their own property. By increasing visibility to an invisible population to non-Latino/a audiences can expose the undocumented community. It offers the possibility to associate these cardboard installations to negativity rather than subjectivity. After all, his work is being featured in art galleries all over Los Angeles and is on popular internet websites. So the possibility of American audiences acknowledging the purpose behind his work is a real fear for some.

The placing of the figures communicates the lack of citizenship to non-Latino/a audiences. The audience is prominent quality in visual rhetoric. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Sonja K. Foss explains that visual rhetoric allows for the image to have symbolic action that is arbitrary ("Theory of Visual Rhetoric" 304). In being arbitrary, an image's symbolic action differs from audience to audience member, therefore, who the audience is a major factor in determining the effects of the picture. Additionally, Foss provides three distinct characteristics that make images rhetorical than those who are not. These are the image must be symbolic, there must be human intervention, and there should be an audience. Gomez's artwork meets each of these qualifications. The *Cut-Outs* are symbolic in the fact that they represent undocumented bodies and labor as real people. For example, a brown faceless body holding a rake in front of a

lawn in Beverly Hills would serve a laborer doing their gardening work. Additionally, there is human intervention in the process of Ramiro Gomez's putting these cardboard figures in some locations around the Los Angeles area. The images are in areas where these workers have been working, and not at random. Therefore, when applying this to Gomez's images, Gomez is communicating citizenship to non-Latino/a audiences. The audience component of visual rhetoric brings important conversations about the role of subjects as objects with no agency. Additionally, this forces us to discuss how those at the margins can make their messages heard through vernacular discourses. Again, this artwork is for non-Latino/a audiences. This audience doesn't relate to the immigrant experiences; they are the ones that view them as criminals. These images should constantly confront them about their attitudes and beliefs towards undocumented immigrant. However, to fully encapsulate the experiences of the Latino/a community would mean to understand it beyond a single measure. Gomez's discourse implicated white audiences in confronting their perceptions of the immigrants in the United States. The Southern California Public Radio reports, "I think this makes some people feel uncomfortable...Most of them are white people, and it's kind of like, 'Interesting, I hope you you're able to realize the reality of our lives and your lives and how they differ'" (J. Huang pr. 40). Essentially, it puts the placement of the *Cut-Out* as a factor that influences meaning towards an audience. On the other hand, the location of these cardboard visuals allows for Gomez reinterpret on what it means to be undocumented in American spaces. Immigrants are multiple individuals from various parts of the world. I argue, similar to the ways Calafell and Delgado claim for the acknowledgment of Latino/a expression creation. They mention, "Americanos is a plea to Latina/os within Anglo-America to re-interpret their own ambiguity from a celebratory, inventional, or constitutive perspective" (Calafell and Delgado 8). In doing so, Gomez's artwork takes the approach to

actively create an image for what the immigrant is to white audiences. The *Cut-Outs* place the profile of an undocumented body performing their labor and offers the opportunity to see them as humans rather than objects

Overall, the placement of the *Cut-Outs* was a rhetorical move by Ramiro Gomez to make sure the images of undocumented and their labor was made visible. However, as a previously mentioned these American spaces only enforced the power dynamics between the American ideology and undocumented immigrants. A vernacular discourse like the *Cut-Outs* help us explore the ways that visual images are a means for argumentation against dominant ideologies. In doing so, it acknowledged its existence while calling for its subjectivity to white audiences.

Disposability of the Cut-Out



Figure 3 Gardner, Hotel Bel-Air, 2013

Immigrants as Disposable

The disposability of the cardboard figures attaches the undocumented body to deportation. The property owner or sometimes the workers themselves, remove the cardboard figure. If the *Cut-Out* is supposed to represent an undocumented body performing labor in the

United States, then the disposal process brings about discussions about the removal of brown bodies in our country, most notably deportations. Latino/a communication studies is constantly looking for the ways brown bodies find their place and maintain that in the United States. Essentially, the act of deportation is “a way for the state to manage concerns about social proximity of those perceived as threatening and dangerous” (Maldonado et al. 322). In that same fashion, the removal of the *Cut-Outs* warrants questions about subjectivity in uninviting spaces, and specifically, what does removal mean to our understanding of undocumented bodies as subjects. To analyze the disposability process, I look into the ways non-Latino/a audiences approach this act and the disposal into the unknown.

Initially, disposability of the image is inevitable from both audiences. In creating his artwork, Gomez’s knew if he wanted to place these images in physical spaces around Los Angeles that removal of the figure would occur. For starters, Gomez never removes a figure. It is its position until removed by a person or the environment. In this sense, I am referring to the removal of the *Cut-Outs* by non-Latino/a audiences. Lawrence Wechsler tells National Public Radio, “invariable the owner gets pissed off and removes the piece -- or, more accurately -- orders it removed by the help” (Stamberg pr. 16). Essentially, the property owners are indeed removing these figures because they are invading their property. The *Cut-Outs* were placed without their permission so they have right to take them away. However, as communication scholars, we should always question the rhetorical strategies of individuals. Sonja K. Foss argued that visual rhetoric includes symbolic action. And in this moment, in that symbolic action of removal, I cannot help but question how the disposal of a *Cut-Out* closely resembles the removal of an immigrant. The disposal process closely echoes what Latina rhetorician Lisa Flores explains as the deportation drive or the ideological need to dispose of brown bodies from the

country. She contends it comes from a place disagreement about the placement of immigrants or rather, “competing public narratives about the place of Mexican immigrants in the U.S.” (Flores 367). This process of removal assures there is no place for Mexican immigrants in the United States. In the case for Ramiro Gomez, after they have completed their function the figures end up in the trash. Similarly, for many undocumented workers in the United States, once their physical bodies aren’t able to perform their desired function, they are rendered incapable of doing their labor and therefore disposed of.

For Latino/a audiences the disposability process symbolizes the removal of the message from the public. For example, if the real life counterpart of the painting were to remove the artwork from its position and put it in their living room, that act is still a process of removal. Sure, the actors are different but it complicates the communication of the message. So even though it was removed by the worker in the picture, that cardboard figure is no longer a part of the conversation because it is now in a private space. In other words, it is no longer communicating the humanization of undocumented bodies to non-Latino/a audiences. This is to say, that the removal process from either audience complicates the message of the artwork.

Additionally, removal by any audiences has the possibility to monetize the immigrant body. There’s no question that Gomez’s artwork has gained the attention of local and national communication channels. The more prominence this artwork attains, the higher its value becomes. In this situation, Gomez’s *Cut-Outs* become a commodity, or a trophy, that is worth selling for profit. This heinous act puts a dollar sign on the labor of undocumented immigrants. Thus, it brings conversations about the role of undocumented immigrants in the United States’ economy in full circle. I argue this because Gomez’s artwork was an attempt to contradict perceptions of undocumented immigrants and to view them as people rather than just tools of the economy.

However, the removal process opens up the opportunity of the profitability tied to immigrant labor in the United States' economy.

The final destination is unknown to the artists. Their disposal destination is often the trash can but other than their whereabouts are unknown to Gomez. The Seattle Times reported that Gomez includes his contact information on the back of every *Cut-Out* in hopes that he will one day be able to track their existence (Bermudez pr. 12). Yet he has not received any confirmation yet. In other words, they just disappear like the workers in Gomez's life. The disappearing of brown bodies is also a similar trait in deportation narratives, as sometimes family members in the United States are unable to figure out where their family member ends up once being deported. Gomez's *Cut-Outs* essentially enter the unknown and never come back into their physical space. This level of unknowingness acknowledges their invisibility, and forces their need for subjectivity in American spaces. As mentioned in the *LA weekly*, "He's presenting work to people who have some power to make change. He allows us to expand the conversation" (Wagley Pr. 10). It is the hope that in their disappearance that questions begin to surface about their existence or whereabouts. Gomez's *Cut-Outs* continue bring conversations about immigrant subjectivity to the forefront of discussion.

Immigrant Belonging

The disposability of Gomez's *Cut-Outs* establish the undocumented immigrants lack of belonging in the United States. The Latino/a community identity in the United States is shaped by their sense of belonging (Coll 205). In other words, how well a Latino/a incorporates themselves into the American way of life has an influence on their identity. For example, those who are treated unfairly because of being Latino/a might not want to identify with the images. This is due to the negative connotations that comes with that population. Therefore, some

Latinos/as find it necessary to assimilate to American culture. It is the idea that by sharing the same values as American citizens they too will be viewed as one. However, assimilation in the Latino/a community is a difficult task because it is regarded as moving away from your culture (Jacoby 21). For example, in becoming more like an American, you face the risk of becoming less Mexican. This applies to Gomez's *Cut-Outs* because they fail to assimilate to American culture. Instead the images stick out in the public spaces. Figure 3 Gardner, Hotel Bel-Air, 2013 is clearly a brown body doing labor. The figures do not have any of the physical characteristics as their non-Latino/a counterparts. In other words, they clearly depict brown bodies. Aside from Figure 2 We Are All American, Clooney Mansion, 2012, there isn't any American features like patriotic colors or symbols. In other words, the images communicate brown labor that has not assimilated to American norms or values. However, in doing so it brings about conversations about the role of Latinos/as in the United States who don't assimilate. Because the images in the *Cut-Outs* are blatantly about undocumented workers, they don't seem to fit in the front yards of the property owners. The images seem out of place, and because they clearly stick the *Cut-Outs* are easier to dispose of. So the images inability to blend in with the rest of the scenery, or rather the United States, makes it possible for them to remove. Because at that point the undocumented body becomes a disturbance that needs to be removed. Similarly, in the immigrant discourse, those immigrants who don't assimilate to the United States way of life have a false sense of belonging (Nelson and Hiemstra 231). Due to things like lack of citizenship, undocumented immigrants find it difficult to call the United States their home. Thus, Gomez's artwork communicates the undocumented body as subject not willing to assimilate but still wanted to be seen as an equal. Undocumented immigrants need to be viewed as people, rather than just tools of the economy. Disposability only enforces that we are capable of removing objects we will do

not belong in our spaces.

Conclusion

By at Ramiro Gomez's *Cut-Outs*, Gomez positions undocumented bodies and labor into subjectivity in American spaces. Every stage of the process played an important role in bringing undocumented bodies and labor into subjectivity. Gomez employed rhetorical strategies from the creation, to the placement and the disposal of the image. The creation of the image acknowledges the features of the *Cut-Outs* as an attempt to humanize the experience. It is through the relatability of images of labor, that these *Cut-Outs* were able to become recognizable. This places the undocumented experiences as identifiable with Latino/a audiences since they are able to recognize the people in the installations. Additionally, placement of the *Cut-Outs* takes into consideration place and geographical location as a rhetorical space with its own power dynamics. In doing so, we are able to see the power relationships between the American ideology and undocumented immigrants. Gomez's choice of Los Angeles as the backdrop for the *Cut-Outs* is a rhetorical choice. Los Angeles echoes its sentiment towards immigration with the broader United States. Additionally, the placing of the image ties the immigrant experience to labor. Gomez's placing of the *Cut-Outs* acknowledges the labor being done by these bodies to non-Latino/a audiences by having them confront those images. Finally, disposal of the image recreates the deportation narrative for brown bodies. It affirms their disposability in the United States and more importantly, forces audiences to realize the ramifications removing undocumented bodies from their position. It places a dollar sign on the undocumented body. Disposability by white audiences opens up opportunities to profit off of immigrant labor. Additionally, the disposability of the figures places the bodies inability to assimilate and fit in with American culture. Non-Latino/a audiences are not comfortable with the images of undocumented immigrants so they

rather remove them from their front yards.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Even though it has been years since Ramiro Gomez first debuted his first series of *Cut-Outs*, he is still inspired to continue his paintings. He is now 31 years old and resides in West Hollywood, California. Galleries all over California feature Gomez's artwork. He has already completed his third show at the Charlies James Gallery. Gomez is also currently showcasing his *Cut-Out* titled "Laborers at Lunch" at Boston University's protest-themed exhibition that looks at the ways artists have used bodies as a form of protest to take a stand regarding an issue (McQuaid pr. 2). The art show highlights how his art has reached audiences beyond the state of California. The Mexican-American artist, who was once a nanny, has made a living through his artwork. Currently, in 2017, Gomez still continues to look for opportunities to make undocumented bodies visible in American spaces and shows no signs of slowing down. Over the past couple of years, Ramiro Gomez has been fortunate enough to be interviewed by well-established news outlets. For example, his artwork has been the subject of various local Los Angeles news outlets, such as The Los Angeles Times and L.A. Weekly. However, national sources such as The Atlantic, National Public Radio, The New York Times, and The Huffington Post have also picked up on his artwork throughout the years. This media circulation ensures that audiences are discussing his artwork and what it does for undocumented people and labor. These conversations open up discussions conclusions and implication regarding the use of vernacular discourses to make undocumented bodies and work into subjects in American spaces. Additionally, when looking towards the political climate of the future and the current president

of the United States, Gomez's images become even more important in their discussion. I will first give an overview of the study. Next, I will discuss the implications of this project, directions of future research, and conclusions. These findings and implications are crucial components to the study and present opportunities for undocumented bodies in their fight for humanity.

Results of Study

This study has looked into the ways the physical placement of images of undocumented immigrants and labor in American spaces can render them into subjects. It looked at the rhetorical strategies used by Ramiro Gomez in his process of creating and installing his *Cut-Outs*. Through their phases of creation, placement, and displacement, Gomez encapsulates a different element of the undocumented experience. To theorize the process of Ramiro Gomez, I looked to theoretical frameworks within the realms critical rhetoric, vernacular discourses, and visual rhetoric. These were needed to ground the strategies in a rhetorical lens to better understand Gomez's *Cut-Outs*. Before moving into the conclusions and implications of the study, I will briefly provide some of the findings in each chapter.

Initially, Chapter Two discussed the complexities of the analyzing works like the *Cut-Outs*. It begged us to examine Gomez's rhetoric through various theoretical frameworks to adequately theorize his choices. Through this process, we can see how Gomez's artwork can send messages about undocumented bodies through the power of the visual. More importantly, how the visual can serve as a vernacular discourse to empower undocumented identities in the United States. The *Cut-Outs* as a critical rhetoric continue to question the power dynamics between the United States and undocumented bodies. It helped theorize how power exerted itself

over marginalized bodies, but more specifically, how marginalized bodies can resist that power to fight back.

Additionally, Chapter Three put Gomez's work in the contemporary socio-political context. In other words, it established how the relationship between the United States and undocumented immigrants after 9/11 was filled with nativist and American ideologies to minimize foreign threats. The chapter looked into the ways the United States had criminalized Latino/a identities by associating those identities with negative images of criminality and fear. Therefore, a series of legislative acts keep undocumented bodies and Latino/a identities at the bottom of the power dynamics. Additionally, It also acknowledged that the Latino/a community had once resisted the country's anti-immigrant feelings by employing their rhetorical strategies. These rhetorical strategies of Ramiro Gomez showcased themes of empowerment and visibility.

Chapter four analyzed a series of *Cut-Outs* through their creation, placement, and disposability. The reason for this was because each stage was a different rhetorical strategy by Gomez. The creation of the images as faceless figures performing the labor suggested their invisibility but also their interchangeability. Through a visual rhetoric, it made the *Cut-Outs* easily identifiable with anyone who associated undocumented people with the characteristics of the *Cut-Outs*. The placement of the image centered the location of the image as a possibility for discourse. More importantly how power functions to separate identities within spaces to dehumanize certain marginalized populations. It brought into discussion how American areas had treated undocumented bodies as non-human. Therefore the placement of the *Cut-Outs* forced audiences to confront their preconceived notions of undocumented people in a physical space. The disposal of the installation, by either a bystander or property owner, is the final stage to show us how undocumented bodies are disposable.

The disposability of the picture forces us to view the removal of brown bodies as a symbolic process. Ultimately, I argued each of these rhetorical strategies help bring the undocumented body and its labor into subjectivity within American spaces. Gomez's rhetoric creates opportunities for rhetors from oppressed communities to create discourse to disrupt power dynamics. More importantly, it brings about questions of what we qualify as discourse. Considering the findings of the study, I highlight implications of the analysis.

This study provided an analysis of Gomez's artwork in his efforts to make undocumented bodies and labor into subjects in the United States. Through the placement of cardboard figures, Gomez put the immigrant body on the faces of both Latino/a and Non-Latino/a audiences in the United States. In doing so, the analysis warrants questions about how images of undocumented bodies can affect perceptions over these people. The following implications will begin establishing the opportunities that present themselves when attaching the Latino/a identity to labor. Second, I will discuss how vernacular discourses could be used to encapsulate more experiences from marginalized communities. After the implications, I will draw some directions for future research, and finally, I will conclude the study.

Hypervisibility of Labor

The *Cut-Outs* explicitly tie the immigrant identity to labor. Initially, the analysis of Ramiro Gomez's is an attempt to make undocumented bodies into subjects in American spaces. It uses of images of work in the United States as a way to humanize or make the undocumented population visible. Chapter Four discussed the creation of the image as a process where the undocumented body became recognizable and identifiable. In other words, viewers of the image would understand the images represented undocumented immigrants because of their clothing, faces, and labor. However, I argue that by creating these images Gomez's artwork can

problematize images of work for non-Latino/a audiences or those not familiar with the undocumented experience.

Gomez's work brings up important discussions on how we should view immigrant bodies as more than just simply labor. Current depictions of menial labor are considered as simply "Mexican work" and therefore tie the Latino/a identity to acts of labor (Hurtado et al. 148). Additionally, in an interview with the LA Times, Gomez is asked about this possibility, and he responds, "that fear is there. As an artist, I want to represent truth without stereotyping and reinforcing...I'm just putting something in a context that allows contemplation of the issue" (Miranda pr. 30). Gomez's fear of stereotyping the undocumented body is reasonable since images can communicate meaning over a group of people. Communication and media studies have looked into the ways stereotypes that are grounded in a race can negatively affect marginalized groups (Alexander et al. 79). They can lead audiences to associate those images to the entire population, therefore affirming how they feel towards a particular group of people. When applying this to the *Cut-Outs* of Ramiro Gomez, this problematizes the undocumented experience for those in the United States. It questions whether undocumented people are only capable of doing labor. This classification of immigrant workers is a rhetorical strategy to justify comprehensive immigration reform and grant amnesty towards undocumented workers because they only "take jobs that Americans do not want" (Lapinski et al. 357). In being tied to hard work in the blistering sun, the undocumented immigrant is only a part of the larger economy. The constant labor becomes the centralized idea of how Americans should treat menial work because they don't complain about the work. Thus, Gomez's images of labor recognize the importance of the work to non-Latino/a audiences. However, in doing so, non-Latino/a audiences will only continue to view immigrants as labor.

The hypervisibility of labor centers immigration discourses around the economy. Latino/a immigrants contribute to the productivity of the economy that is tied to work (Sisk 41). The United States relationship with undocumented bodies relies on labor and in doing so, proponents of immigrant rights focus on an immigrant's ability to perform labor. The hypervisibility of work centers the immigrants experience around performing menial tasks. Chapter Three provided context to how the current state of the economy dictates the level and amount of immigration discourse. Essentially, the economy and social views construct the discussions around immigration in the United States (Johnson 125). Therefore, in only considering the immigrant experience to labor, it removes their agency to do anything else. Their existence or sense of belonging exists when the country is doing badly economically. It is only then that politicians and media outlets decide to speak about the immigrants entering the country. The *Cut-Outs* by Ramiro Gomez fall victim to the country's broader outlook on immigration as an economic opportunity for cheap labor. Problems arise when the state of the economy and immigrant experience depend on one another. It disregards that immigrants are humans before their labor. It neglects that immigrants are also students, artists. As long as the dominant views of immigration rhetoric continue to justify entry of immigrants into this country as an economic opportunity, we will continue to make it difficult to detach labor from the immigrant experience.

Attaching the immigrant experience to labor enhances the threat of deportation for undocumented immigrants. As proponents of stronger immigration laws continue to support the deportation of immigrants, undocumented immigrants will continue face discrimination. Donald Trump's presidency has led to stronger immigration enforcement through the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). States across the United States have raided communities in search of undocumented immigrants. Many of these places are centered around the jobs of

undocumented immigrants. Areas that have a higher population of undocumented immigrants are more likely to be raided for deportation. Therefore, associating the immigrant experience with labor forces us to reconsider what these images are communicating. In some ways, they are presenting the undocumented body as disposable figure that can be easily removed from the United States. Audiences must reconsider how they view undocumented immigrants in public spaces in order to combat these images.

Opportunities for Vernacular Discourses

As rhetorical critics, we should constantly look into the ways discourse from Latino/a communities can empower those members like Lisa Flores, Karma Chavez, Bernadette Marie Calafell, Michelle Holling, JD Cisneros, Fernando P. Delgado and others. Gomez's *Cut-Outs* bring forth conversations about undocumented immigrants in the United States, and do it through a vernacular discourse. It is in the streets, in Los Angeles, disrupting the power relations and confronting the negative representations of undocumented bodies. Through various theoretical frameworks, we were able to situate Gomez's rhetoric regarding subjectivity towards undocumented immigrants and labor in American spaces. Rhetoricians should continue to look at the vernacular discourse occurring at the margins to voice the experiences of those on the outskirts. In doing so, rhetoric can have a more material and critical approach that attempts to break the power dynamics.

Vernacular discourses provide opportunities for knowledge production in the Latino/a community. As reiterated in chapter two, vernacular discourse advances the study of voices linked to cultures to challenge the constant focus on dominant discourses (Holling & Calafell 18). Regarding Gomez's installations, he addressed the need to disrupt dominant discourses that are, "reflective of elite tastes" and, adhere to keep "manual labor firmly out of public view"

(Miranda pr. 12). Gomez's artwork should serve as a platform to other Latino/a artists to make artwork about the issues facing the Latino/a community. There just isn't enough occurring, and if Gomez's work is able to combat the negative images of immigrants, then it opens the opportunities for other artists to do so. Rhetorical critics should be more open to analyze performance art as a way to dismantle dominant, pervasive images of marginalized groups. As long as undocumented workers are continued to be viewed as outsiders their labor will be rendered useless. Dominant depictions of immigration have made the United States population believe that their labor is the only thing they can do. Therefore, rhetorical critics should continue to dismantle those powers.

This study has looked at the ways Gomez's *Cut-Outs* serve as a vernacular discourse to disrupt the power dynamics between immigration and the United States. Through cardboard installations, Gomez was able to create that opportunity for both Latino/a and non-Latino/a audiences. Therefore rhetorical critics should continue to expand criticism to more vernacular discourses, like poems spoken at the street corner, conversations by immigrant women on the city transit, paintings on city buildings. In doing so, it opens opportunities to analyze works from marginalized communities that are actively trying to become visible in dominant oppressive spaces.

Directions for Future Research

This study has looked into the ways undocumented bodies and their labor can be subjects in American areas through the artwork of Ramiro Gomez. Gomez's efforts are in the city he grew up in, Los Angeles. Chapter three gave context to the border states, like California, and their dense Latino/a population. A potential direction for this study might want to look at the opportunities or disadvantages that present themselves in areas with a significant less Latino/a

presence than California. Latino/a scholars have explored the possibilities of being Latino/a in a region that isn't influenced by Latino/a culture. For example, areas like Nebraska and Ohio have been sites of rhetorical study for Latino/a bodies. More importantly, how they navigate their experiences in places like those. The positioning of Latino/a immigrants in rural areas or other areas of the United States could open future directions of research. It opens up discussion on how immigrant views differ from region to region. The positioning of the bodies will also highlight the type of labor done.

Gomez's images focus specifically on labor. Therefore, a future area of research could look in different images tied to the immigrant experience. In doing so, it could not only dissociate the immigrant experience with labor but also combat the various stereotypes of the Latino/a community. Gomez's artwork could look at fighting troubling images of immigrants such as the anchor baby myth, or the humanitarian crisis occurring in South America. If Gomez's artwork can communicate pictures of subjectivity within the Latino/a community, then it can do so with other areas.

Gomez's artwork forces us to think about the ways audiences react in the disposal process. In other words, if audiences are aware that the *Cut-Outs* are communicating images of undocumented immigrants, then they must know their role as audiences. For example, what does it mean for Latino/a audience to dispose these *Cut-Outs* and place them in the trash can? Ideally, they are participating in the removal process of undocumented immigrants. Perhaps it also communicates that some Latinos/as would rather remain silent in times of immigration discussion. However, audience interaction with the *Cut-Outs* could differ from audience to audience. For example, if a white person were to dispose of the image, then that would communicate much differently. More importantly, what does it mean whenever a member of the

community begins to collect the *Cut-Outs* and sells them to other people. In doing so, white audiences could profit off of immigrant labor. Gomez's artwork has stated that he has no idea where his *Cut-Outs* end up. Therefore, future directions of research could look into the ways audiences play a role in the positioning of immigrant bodies.

Discussing future research is important because it helps understand some of the limitations in Gomez's *Cut-Outs*. Ramiro Gomez's work is no different. As rhetorical critics, we should constantly push rhetors to engage those communities at the bottom. There's no doubt that Gomez will continue his artwork, and one can only hope that he continues to empower the Latino/a community through his discourse. Now that we have explored the potential areas of future research, it is important to draw some final conclusions over the study

Conclusion

Through rhetorical analysis, I have analyzed Gomez's *Cut-Outs* and how they attempt to make undocumented bodies and labor into subjects in American spaces. After discussing the implications and directions for future research, I believe there should be continuous efforts to humanize the undocumented experience through these types of strategies. Strategies like Gomez's placement of undocumented bodies in front of an audience who have understood what it meant it's like to be an immigrant. It is up to rhetorical critics to be more open about these strategies and be willing to analyze and critique them to create change within the most marginalized communities. As immigration continues to look for ways to remove immigrants from the United States and separate families, it is important more than ever to be discussing the neglected humans at the outskirts of the community. They are people with families, stories, and experiences that belong in the country of opportunity. Only time will tell if more artists, like

Gomez, will continue to bring their experiences as first generations Latinos/as into their discourse as an avenue for change, before it's too late.

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