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## Reclaiming Poch@ Pop: Examining the Rhetoric of Cultural Deficiency, by Cruz Medina

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most “sense” from a U.S. perspective. It’s a powerful and much needed book, but it reveals only the “Rio Grande” part of the equation. How does the *other* side of the border—those that reside on the “Río Bravo” side—understand Latina/o rhetorics of belonging and citizenship? As a work of critical, transformative scholarship, *The Border Crossed Us* encourages us to cross and engage the other side of the U.S. border. I am strongly encouraged and inspired by Cisneros’ work—especially for the cross-hemispheric conversations that I hope his work inspires. I look forward to more work from this scholar—we all should.

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As postcolonial studies and decolonial thinking continue to intersect with the field of rhetorical studies, two primary aims are articulated. The first aim speaks to how language, knowledge, and rhetorical occasions are part of colonial projects that reflect a diaspora of power and coloniality. A decolonial counter-vision is then offered to support new rhetorical frameworks, methodologies, and transnational/hemispheric cultural production(s). The second articulation reflects a shift in our field toward “defining a rhetoric or a system of rhetoric to the interpretation of the cultural exigencies that enable or encourage multiple modes of rhetorical response” (Graff and Leff 23). The goal here is to produce histories of rhetoric(s) that attend to issues of race, ethnicity, and oppression that manifest in racialized and minoritized populations. There remains, however, the exigency from which decolonial rhetoricians work from; a colonial imaginary within the field wherein rhetorical practices of the Americas stand “in unique position vis-à-vis” the development of modernity, colonial modernity, and coloniality (Baca and Villanueva 2). We have begun to stake out spaces where we acknowledge the colonization of time, space, and peoples (Mignolo xii–xvi) as they are promoted in the image of progress and development (Quijano 216–218). We have begun to trace genealogies (Mohanty 192) to decenter totalizing narratives in the academy (Gold

19) and destabilize U.S. nationalist historiography (Saldivar 59) that has become the “substance of [our] collective thinking and collective fantasies about history and reality” (Saldivar 13).<sup>1</sup> In illuminating the limits of an ideology of exclusion, we have begun to work from and respond to local histories, geopolitical contexts, and the intellectual cultures that have been negated and neglected by global systemic inequality. However, there remains the pressing exigency to foreground our own methods/methodologies as we stand at the intersection of postcolonial and decolonial thinking. There is much work still to be done.

*Reclaiming Poch@ Pop* is a decolonial project that brings together border studies, Chican@ pop cultural production, and rhetorical studies to reveal the successive layers that frame Latin@s as deficient. From colonial instruments of power to the political desires of policies (rhetorical occasions) such as Senate Bill 1070 and House Bill 228, Cruz Medina interweaves critical conversations that overlap with the academic and public spheres. Working from a local context (Arizona), Medina attends to the colonial legacies of the Latin@ population. He analyzes rhetorical occasions that exhibit on the one hand the rhetoric of cultural deficiency and the adverse affect of rhetoric(s) that link bodies to certain subjectivities and deficiencies, while on the other hand a type of cultural critique and intellectual/political emancipation that seeks to deconstruct logics of colonialism and provide possibilities of decolonization. These are Medina’s two central focuses. And, the latter occasion Medina refers to as poch@ pop cultural productions. Understanding these productions represent the core of his book, which is organized around five primary chapters that recuperate pocha/o from its colonial frame and signification of cultural traitor/bastard and re-articulates poch@ as a decolonial trope of resistance and agency through a tracing of its etymology and epistemology. Whereas poch@ reflects a “transgressive and decolonial stance” (5), poch@ pop demonstrates the artistic possibilities to disrupt political and material discourse communities “without resigning to the neocolonial ideologies reinstated by Standard English and English only policies in the U.S.” (47). The rhetorical strategy of a *rascuache methodology* functions within this context as making due “with what is at hand even if there is no community network or platform for support” (48). It reflects a system of working with/against (26) by “(re)appropriating and recycling available resources” (76).<sup>2</sup> This is referred to as subversive complicity.

With the preface, Medina situates his ethos of interjection with a conversation on a proto-poch@ film, *Stand and Deliver*, and the role Edward James Olmos embodies. Both reflect Medina’s argument that “the rhetoric of pop culture inspires, as it entertains, and disrupts oppressive narratives that dominate political and material

<sup>1</sup>From Martin Bernal to Xiaoye You to Arabella Lyon to LuMing Mao, each criticizes the imperialist and exceptionalist narrative incumbent with an Aryan Model and Eurocentric ideology of rhetoric that erases or pits other rhetoric(s) against Euro-American rhetorical frameworks.

<sup>2</sup>A poch@ aesthetic functions similarly to James Paul Gee’s application of mushfake, making due with what is at hand and (re)appropriating cultural symbols a tactic for resistance against deficiency-based colonial narratives (48).

discourse communities” (4). *Stand and Deliver* interrupts the “dominant political and social rhetoric by reaffirming to Latinas/os that they can achieve with the important message of: si se puede” (4). Interruption, therefore, stands as a metaphor for re-articulation, a modification of identity as a result of material conditions that articulatory practice itself creates (Laclau and Mouffe 105). Such articulation, Medina suggests, can expand our understanding of rhetorical theory (7). On the topic of proto-poch@ cultural productions, Medina deploys a framework of cultural materialism to examine the positive representations of two proto-poch@ pop production, *La Bamba* and *Selena*, in chapter 2. Medina first critiques the Hollywood stock genre, which created archetypical inscriptions that perpetuated deficiency and/or misidentifications of Latin@s.<sup>3</sup> Then, Medina situates both productions.<sup>4</sup> Both proto-poch@ films disrupt the “silencing of Latin@s in mainstream pop culture” (Medina and Martinez 26), by communicating a bi-cultural experience of pocha/os in the United States, allowing the audience to identify with the positive representations of Latin@s. Because of the pathos involved in the genre of biopics, both films complicate the hegemonic narrative that portrays Latin@s as culturally deficient. Both films signified a shift “of poch@ stories from the margins to center stage” (42). Proto-poch@ films, Medina claims, provided a foundation for social and cultural participation, which is realized and articulated concretely by poch@ pop cultural productions.

In chapter 3, Medina focuses on poch@ pop as interstitial spaces in the “pop cultural landscape where poch@ pop artists create productions that contest, challenge, and interrupt politicized discourse” (42). First, Medina must recuperate pocha/o from the colonial paradigm that has become part of a discourse of “cultural deficiency rhetoric that permeates mainstream pop culture and politics” and reifies myths of the Latin@ community into “laws and policy that subjugate Latin@ in the U.S.” (47). In making his case for subversive complicity, Medina examines the methodology and methods pocha@ embodies and how poch@ pop cultural production(s) enact a “brand of culture created to entertain and subvert neoliberal and ultraconservative narratives” by humor and satire within a rascuache methodology. For example, Medina’s focus on the timely rhetorical occasions by poch@ artists Lalo Alcaraz and Guillermo Gomez-Pena and how they re-appropriate rhetoric and symbols to create “cultural productions in English that challenge the enduring colonial fictions in ultraconservative legislative policy” (52), is fully articulated in chapters 4 and 5. Whereas Alcaraz’s political cartoons (e.g., *Whitewashing Arizona*, *Ethnic Studies*, and *Sherriff Joe: America’s Top Hog*) offer a critique through a “process of (re)appropriating and recycling available resources” that bring about

<sup>3</sup>Medina describes these archetypical inscriptions as bad Mexican, greaser, fiery Latinas, banditos, or border immigrants.

<sup>4</sup>*La Bamba* is a depiction of a post-World War II era, produced amid neoconservative policy and neoliberal rhetorics of the Regan era, while *Selena* reflects the bi-cultural tension of Mexican Americans in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands feeling torn “between two cultures and two colonial standards” (39).

a challenge to “clichéd assumptions that portray Latin@ culture as deficient” (76),<sup>5</sup> Gomez-Pena’s work in *Codex Espangliensis* “incorporates pop culture icons such as Mickey Mouse and Superman in a recreation of the Conquest of the Aztecs” (92). The purpose is to blend the indigenous imaginary with U.S. iconography and to illuminate the ecology of colonization and neocolonialism that surrounds iconic figures such as Mickey Mouse and Superman. I conclude by returning to Medina’s second claim. Medina illustrates how the rhetorical strategies of the pochteca are an enduring historical tradition that reiterates a fluid social identity, knowledge of other cultures, and ability to re-articulate. The pochteca “subverted colonial opposition by appropriating the figures, images, and symbols” (119). The pochteca and poch@ enacted political poch@ aesthetics that are generative heuristics for cultural productions.

Medina expands the parameters of rhetorical studies while revealing a colonial imaginary that functions within the “public.”<sup>6</sup> Medina’s use of narrative voice and narrative counterstory, however, as a method and methodology, serves the “purpose of exposing stereotypes,” “offering additional truths through narrating author’s lived experiences” (Martinez 51) and intervenes in research methods “that would form master narratives based on ignorance and on assumptions about minoritized peoples” (53). The central aim is revealed in the paralleling relationship between the pochteca and poch@ producers. Whereas the pochteca “subverted colonial opposition by appropriating the figures, images, and symbols” (119), the poch@ producers “de-mystify through their master of the colonial tongue” and reconfigure pop symbols today as they appear within a disguise of assimilation and complicity (120). Both are generative heuristics for cultural productions, Medina argues. Poch@ is re-contextualized outside of its connotation and stands as a metaphor of agency, illustrated in the ways poch@ producers “symbolically oppose conquest and assimilation” yet appear “to be complicit with mainstream assumptions, worldviews, and expectations” (58).

There is one limitation. I am reminded of Diana Fuss and Gayatri Spivak who forward essentialist discourse but caution that departing from generalizing and universalizing discourses is still a performance of essentialism. Medina is careful in speaking of a tension between Mexican Americans, Chicano/as, and Pocho/as, but his analysis is lacking. There is a problem in the field when scholarship identifies all Mexican American students as Chicano/as and refers to “one” borderland as a space of homogenous groups and monolithic experiences. In tackling issues that face the community, strategic essentialism is necessary for political agency and tactics for

<sup>5</sup>Alcaraz also provides a critical critiques on Disney’s colonial move to subsume and erase cultural difference by attempting to copyright Dia De Los Muertos.

<sup>6</sup>See Cruz Medina and Aja Martinez’s response to Jennifer Asenas and Kevin Johnson’s article in *Present Tense* that demonstrates how the colonial imaginary functions in multiple ways.

resistance. I must caution though as it also flattens and/or erases local/regional rhetorical practices and subjectivities.

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