

Review:

Cruz Medina. *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop: Examining the Rhetoric of Cultural Deficiency.*

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In an era of endless emerging digital possibilities for visibility and representation, popular culture continues to stumble its way through what to do with bodies of color. No longer do hegemonic forces have complete control over signification. For every racist remark made by public figures like Donald Trump, there are numerous respondents replying instantly with memes and tweets.

Poch@ pop is subversive because the texts resist proclaiming their opposition, they appear to be complicit with mainstream assumptions, world views, and expectations
—pg. 58

The *mezcla* of experiences within Mexican communities are often glossed over to essentialize Mexican Americans as a monolithic people. In *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop*, Cruz Medina does the important work of engaging with the messiness of these ongoing discourses that are often taboo within the Mexican community,

liberating within the academic community, and compartmentalized in mixed company.

Medina makes the Poch@ his main topic. A word that is only known amongst Mexican American communities and Latin@s with close proximity to Mexicans, the Poch@ becomes an important site of discussion that Medina attempts to not only define and contextualize but theorize as a rhetorical position. For Medina the Poch@ was a trope that “traditionally signified the negative connotation of a ‘cultural traitor’ in the Mexican dialect of Spanish” but now he is seeking to reclaim the word through the work of self-identifying artists who “negotiate the expectations of mainstream audiences, while often subverting these very same assumptions” (15). Because traditionally a Poch@ is seen as deficient due to their lack of Mexican authenticity and the “influence of Anglo Culture” on them, these artists Medina argues, “incorporate critical consciousness and love of cultural contradiction that allows the trope to be woven into a much more elaborate tapestry of cultural and linguistic *mestizaje*” (16). This push to theorize Poch@ Pop creates scholarship and research that refuses to be commodified, therefore allowing for more fluid understandings of identity and race.

The discussion of Poch@ Pop opens by identifying “Proto-Poch@” representations in film, specifically the films *La Bamba* and *Selena*. These films contribute to the ethos of an emphasis on Pop Culture because both of these films are bio-pics about Mexican American singers who in their own right broke into the mainstream. Medina emphasizes that while neither of these films are perfect, they center Mexican American protagonists and portray them as developed humanized characters. A feat that according to Medina was not present in Hollywood films. While I would offer the 1954 film *The Salt of the Earth* as a possible pre-cursor to these films, Medina’s examples point to stories that put non-Spanish speaking or Spanglish speaking Mexicans who still acknowledge their Mexican heritage as central to their identity. Because the earliest representations of Poch@s in text spoke to the inability to speak Spanish or Anglicize Spanish words, this attention to language is significant to identity. In this early framing, Medina left me wondering why he chose to focus on Poch@s without distinguishing the term from Chicanx or Mexican

American. What is the difference, if any, between these identifications for Medina? Specifically I am interested in his thoughts about the difference between Chicanx and Poch@ because he goes on to argue for the Mesoamerican history of the word Poch@. Regardless the ambiguity of Poch@ best serves a post-modern aesthetic that is representative in the work that Medina analyzes. Finally Medina offers film-maker Robert Rodriguez and his use of exploitation cinema to make an initial claim about what Poch@ Pop represents. Rodriguez's film uses exaggerated scenes of violence and sexuality in order to appease Hollywood sensibilities while inserting political commentary relevant to Mexican and Latin@ populations. A film like *Machete* is self-aware in its over the top violence and sexualization of Jessica Alba's character; however, we do also see this character lead a revolt against a racist sheriff and government in a border state.

Medina argues through Rodriguez that, "socially conscious rhetoric in films continues to be subversive serves as a reminder that resistance to internalized colonialism and neocolonial narratives requires that the message be encoded in a satirical or irreverent genre" (42). The "Proto-Poch@" examples set grounding for discussing Poch@ Pop as a method and site of enunciation. Like the pochismos in language (Anglicized adaptations of Spanish), Poch@ Pop productions are the manipulation of mainstream American culture to created coded statements that reflect experiences of Mexican Americans. Specifically because Poch@s grow up with American culture and few representations of Mexicans in popular culture as Medina argues, the Poch@ Pop aesthetic relies upon whatever is at their disposal. The act of producing something out of nothing for Poch@s is named *rascuache* and is the main methodology that drives Medina's argument. Citing Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *rascuache* methodologies are "strategies for recycling and recontextualizing ideas, images and texts" in performance, and Medina extends this to include the drawings of Lalo Alcaraz and the low budget film-making of Robert Rodriguez (59). The multimodal examples that Medina emphasizes opens this methodology to be considered in writing studies. Specifically in working with Students of Color, Medina provides familiar ground for students who normally feel alienated in the *White* spaces of academic discourses. In these ways, the work of reclamation become vital for teaching because students can connect to rhetorical

history that aligns directly with their personal experiences of being Mexican in the U.S.

Rascuache like Poch@ has roots in negative connotations of deficiency. By identifying artists and performers who self-identify as Poch@, Medina is demonstrating examples of the reclamation of Poch@ as a site of enunciation that is not deficient but rather inventive, subversive, and counterhegemonic (62). The combination of subversion and resistance allows for Poch@s to make safe travel in rhetorical spaces that are usually unsafe without sacrificing substance. While Medina does gesture towards strategic essentialism in his discussion of Rodriguez's films, there is an important conversation around Poch@s and their ability to use "Passing" as a rhetorical strategy. While I do think Medina does acknowledge this as a rhetorical tool of Poch@s, there are some powerful implications for toeing that line of racial passing that is often only from a guilty perspective. Medina's argument for subversion in Poch@ Pop performances lends itself to thinking about more everyday embodied acts of resistance. Regardless, Medina's work towards linking Poch@s and rascuache creates rhetorical ground for a historical legacy that stretches back to Pre-Colombian Meso-American Rhetorics.

In an attempt to further reclaim and possibly de-colonize Poch@, Medina argues for the acknowledgement of the etymologic historic root of the word Poch@ to be drawn from Pochteco or Potchtl. In Pre-Colombian history, the Pochteco was a traveling merchant who changed their appearance and method of speaking to adapt to whomever they were getting ready to sell to on their journey. Medina's interest in this reclamation is directly tied to his reading and engagement with Guillermo Gomez-Pena's *Codex Espangliensis*. Gomez-Pena's text is a re-telling of the colonization of the Americas using pop-culture icons of contemporary history and art. This historical and contemporary linking of Meso-American and Contemporary histories calls to attention the legacy of colonization and creates a discourse that otherwise, because of hegemony, is kept separate. Medina argues that the Poch@s of today have a stake and responsibility in engaging with this history through their rhetorical means to make these stories more widely available. I will caution that this text and its arguments are more post-modern and post-colonial

than de-colonial. For me, the key difference here is the continued privileging of the colonizers gaze, specifically in reference to land. All mentions of land are always in reference to geo-political borders and in direct relation to the State. While *la frontera* is important to Mexican American people, as scholars, we must be careful in the ways we make our arguments when we seek to make leaps between re-claiming and de-colonizing. If we seek to make arguments about Pre-Colombian rhetorics, then why rely on only those written? Furthermore, if *la frontera* is important to Poch@s, why not emphasize migration as a rhetorical practice, particularly since the Pochtecos were traveling merchants. This would not only open the door to discussions of land for Poch@s but more importantly, would trace a history of a relationship to land that is not contingent on citizenship, ownership, or settler-colonialism. The recent works of Gabriela R. Rios and Steven Alvarez have made connections between land, migration, and literacy through civic engagement projects. Their work and Medina's engage in some sense of dismantling deficiency narratives around migrant peoples. However, Rios and Alvarez are not interested in emphasizing a relationship to the state but rather how they transform spaces to serve their needs. For researchers in rhetoric and writing who aim to do de-colonial work, there has to be special attention paid to where the signification comes from and whom it is centering. Lacking de-coloniality does not negate the subversion of dominant discourse nor does it strip *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop* of its merit. To me, it embodies the struggle of being a Poch@ *atravesado* navigating the colonial matrix of power.

Ultimately, the Poch@ Pop artist for Medina is similar to Gloria Anzaldua's *nepantler@*. Both act as "artists and activists" who help us navigate *conocimiento*. The emphasis on Poch@ Pop artists' abilities to operate within pop culture makes them important rhetoricians and communicators for Mexican Americans. Because of the myriad of experiences and political leanings within the community, the role of the Poch@ becomes vital towards creating a familiar ground for inter-generational belonging within and for Mexicans within the United States.

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