

The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary

Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions

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In many ways, you need to turn yourself into a monster,
willing to deconstruct and dismantle history,
trying to be free from the constraints of history
in order to study the monsters of history
and the history of monsters.

Monsters and the phantasmagoric have long been central to the Chican@ experience as reminders of our unresolved haunted histories of violence and oppression. Furthermore, the speculative has been a valuable source of epistemic information about those histories of subjugation. The substantial list of Chican@ speculative authors includes Gloria Anzaldúa, Aristeo Brito, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Emma Pérez, and Tomás Rivera, among others. While Chican@ speculative production is not new, as Sabrina Vourvoulias (2015) points out, the process of decoding these productions is only now getting under way in the emerging field of Chican@ speculative studies.

In this essay I first provide a definition of how I understand and approach the area of Chican@ speculative production (CSP), a definition that centers on the concept of proposing (and producing) a new world. It is a world first constructed in the imagination but never completely disassociated from the “real.” Here, the real is perceived as temporal, as a stage toward a world that is based on the premise of equality and social justice. In this way, the real world is the world in the future, not the one in which we now live. In other words, our current world, the one *in* the present, is only a phantom; the real world is the one in which we were meant to live

as full humans. CSPs are concerned both with this end product and with the process of constructing it.

Second, I discuss four main characteristics that define CSPs and differentiate them from mainstream speculative works. In particular, I explore how CSPs enact what performance artist and scholar Guillermo Gómez-Peña defines as one of the central challenges of cultural productions by Chican@s, that of finding a language that articulates their unique experiences (1986, 11). To support this argument, I cite several examples of how Chican@s have consistently developed speculative productions as tactics for emancipation and self-governance. The Chican@ speculative imaginary deeply intertwines sociopolitical and historical oppressive experiences and engenders a unique typology of speculative productions that emerge from the margins for the margins.

Finally, I discuss how Chican@ speculative production is foremost an epistemic endeavor. I frame CSPs as part of a larger interconnected system of Chican@ cultural productions that grant access to the complex ways in which Chican@s make sense of what is happening around them and interpret their histories of resilience and intellectual resistance. As scholars Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson explain,

Looking at ghosts and shadows helps us to understand both ontic and epistemic aspects of diaspora experience. . . . [They] are not merely the spectral recurrences that haunt individual experiences; they often become the source of a structure of feelings, the basis of the mythico-history that allows groups to analyze their collective experience and identity. They are neither objective nor subjective. (2001, 5)

CSPs provide fertile ground for understanding how a community under siege is capable of developing collective epistemological tactics for survival even as it envisions a future free of oppression. These communities are not passive victims but rather active agents constantly trying to make sense of their reality. I contend that border communities understand their oppressed condition, the limitations imposed on them, and the absurdity of their subjugated position. It is precisely because they know “their place” and “their status” within the structures of power in our society that they

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are capable of developing *clandestine* intellectual maneuvers to retain collective memory and *in situ* knowledge to navigate the conditions that oppress them. My point here is that the study of Chican@ speculative arts gives us tools to recognize the power of the fantastic, the phantasmagoric, and the imaginary as unique instruments for the pursuit of emancipation, dignity, and social change.

Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions

As P. L. Thomas (2013) explains, quoting Maxine Greene (1995), one of the functions of science fiction and speculative fiction is to “move readers to imagine alternative ways of being alive” (4). This quality of speculative fiction is particularly relevant to analyzing Chican@ speculative productions. For many Chican@ communities, the monstrous real world they experience every day is one defined by extreme violence—a world where, in Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s words, racialized groups are subjected to the “production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (2007, 28). Under these conditions of extreme everyday violence, Chican@s strive to “imagine alternative ways of being alive,” because in many cases this is the only way to remain alive and endure the challenges of day-to-day existence. Speculative productions for Chican@s are essential components of their survival, allowing them to envision, enact, and work toward an alternative world as they bridge into a world of possibilities.

For Gloria Anzaldúa, the imagination “has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to reimagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our time” (2002, 5). As she writes, the imagination works as a powerful tool with which the oppressed can actively liberate and decolonize themselves and foresee a world outside the norms of subjugation. Here, imagining an alternative world becomes a strategic, political, and epistemic tactic for survival. It is first in the imagination that a community can see itself free from a cruel reality defined by poverty, lack of job security, poor health care access, limited social mobility, historical erasure, and mass incarceration or deportation.

For those at the margins, the realm of the imaginary becomes a medium to envision and put into practice an “alternative” world, one that emerges both from lived experiences and from aesthetic stipulations, language provisions, and cultural categories. I argue that CSPs epistemologically materialize a unique borderland standpoint as they embody what Américo

Paredes identifies as “sabidurías populares” (1982, 2), the vernacular wisdom of the borderlands. However, they do not stand alone, as they are part of a vast network of other Chican@ cultural productions (Saldívar 2006, 56) invested in proposing and enacting new possibilities of being. Furthermore, the processes of imagining and creating speculative worlds manifest Renato Rosaldo’s concept of “cultural citizenship,” putting into practice Chican@s’ “right to be different and to belong” fully as members of society, demanding control over their own destiny (1994, 402–10). For Chican@s imagining a new self, collectively and individually, CSPs become a political project of self-affirmation, valorization, and emancipation.

It is not coincidental that Karl Marx, writing in 1867, described capitalism’s greed as a “vampire thirst for the living blood of labour” (1976, 367) and capital as a “vampire-like” creature that “lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (342). It is precisely because of the normalization of this atrocious vampire world of racial exploitation, division, and segregation that the future proposed by the “real” world is as monstrous and dangerous as the present. Therefore, the imagination emerges as a principal means to envision an alternative non-vampire world and to visualize the steps required for emancipation. Imagining a world free from racism, oppression, discrimination, and bigotry within a “real” world that manipulates differences to perpetuate exploitation is almost an act of madness. It is one that forces individuals and communities to navigate the world of the unknown, and to hope.

As Cherrie Moraga explains in *The Last Generation*, “The Chicano scribe remembers, not out of nostalgia but out of hope. She remembers in order to envision. She looks backward in order to look forward to a world founded not on greed, but on respect” (1993, 190–91). In this sense, the speculative is a cultural genre that fulfills the need to create a world where a new reality can be drawn and new possibilities can coexist. The fight to create a space for the recognition of Chican@s’ knowledge as a valid foundation for their world rests on the speculative. For subjects not meant to survive outside the constructs of exploitative labor or the exotic other, life existence is a brave, tangible demonstration of a new world already in the making. Therefore, for Chican@s the experience of the speculative is intimately linked to the terrains of desire and longing for a future meant to come.

Nevertheless, I refuse to define speculative arts exclusively within the realm of the imaginary. They are not solely a rejection of (or reaction to) the real, but are interwoven with the real. As Jacques Lacan notes, the

real and the imaginary, as well as the symbolic, are deeply interconnected although they occupy distinct spaces (Gallop 1987, 167). Because of the sociopolitical location of Chican@s as racialized subjects—as occupants of a racial category that is in itself fictional, since there is only one human race—their speculative productions do not only move from the real to the imaginary, as both spaces are inscribed within a continuum between oppressive imaginaries and emancipatory imagination. CSPs emerge from a real world dangerously polluted by the effects of racism, a fictional ideology that turns the falsehood of race into uncanny flesh and then into “premature death” (Gilmore 2007, 28). CSPs reckon with the absurd of the present world constructed and haunted by the deadly legacies of colonialism and the violence of modernity. Here, to be haunted, as Avery Gordon underscores, is to be “tied to historical and social effects” (1997, 190). Inspired by Gordon, I argue that in order for Chican@s to be free from the haunting of their colonial past, we must collectively exorcise or drive out those ghosts until a new world based on equality and justice is in place. This decolonial exorcism has both corporeal and incorporeal components. The Chican@ movement has consistently worked on both fronts. Corporeally, it includes the fight for new laws that ensure equal access to education, housing, job opportunities, health care, and so on. Incorporeally, the movement has focused on cultural dignity, historical pride, epistemic relevance of our experiences, aesthetics and beauty, as well as on the power of the imagination. In this case, CSPs work as reminders of what is missing, interconnecting the corporeal and the incorporeal, the real and the imaginary. CSPs share, in this case, the qualities of the uncanny ghosts described by Gordon, as they are “symptom[s] of what is missing” (63) but at the same time represent “a future possibility, a hope,” and “a concern for justice” (64).

The relational tension between being haunted by the ghosts of colonialism (what is missing and taken away) and the desire for change and emancipation is powerfully articulated by Emma Pérez as she describes how the “colonial imaginary” has “influenced” and “circumscribed” Chican@ historiography (1999, 5). As Cathryn J. Merla-Watson explains, to be a colonial subject implies being “haunted by an invisible net of history and embodied memor[ies], specters of colonialism and misogynist transnational imaginaries” (2013, 236). Furthermore, as Merla-Watson notes, in the context of subjected colonial oppression,

The ghost is also a social figure, an absent presence that also functions as a marker of hope and reconstruction. . . . The specter also functions . . . as an entanglement of loss and desire, past traumas and present yearnings,

the embodied and disembodied, or, to restate, structures of lived experience that coalesce in sometimes unexpected and previously unthinkable ways that are not necessarily antithetical or mutually exclusive. (230)

Therefore, the process of speculating and imagining a different world is foremost a method of action. This is how feminists, Chicanas, queers, and people of color (and their allies) were able to first imagine and then bring into life new worlds and norms, new forms of thinking and knowledge for their communities. In this sense, although CSPs are born of this world, they are not enslaved by it. They question and redefine the normativity of this world as they propose a different one: a new reality where the Chican@ experience is recentered and where the possibilities of unity are realized. In this light, CSPs can be read as intentional productions that utilize the tools of the imaginary and the fantastic to move the viewer toward a new and different world and new ways to be alive outside the everyday oppressive limitations of the “real.”

Leading by Difference: Characteristics of Chican@ Speculative Productions

Chican@ speculative productions include a diverse array of visual art forms, literary productions, and academic interventions, from short stories to novels, murals and graffiti, cartoons, imaginary monsters, legends, and music. Despite this diversity, they have, I would argue, four defining characteristics that relate them to each other and differentiate them from mainstream speculative productions: CSPs are (a) politically subversive, (b) alter-Native, (c) transformative, and (d) epistemic. Let us consider each in turn.

POLITICALLY SUBVERSIVE

Chican@ speculative productions are by their nature deeply political. They are tangible manifestations of Gloria Anzaldúa’s “*haciendo caras*,” making face, which she interprets as “making *gestos subversivos*, political subversive gestures, the piercing look that questions or challenges, the look that says, ‘Don’t walk all over me,’ the one that says, ‘Get out of my face’” (1990, xv). In other words, CSPs not only propose a new world, they also valorize and center Chican@ identity. They are not passive but actively engage in challenging the sources of oppression. As Anzaldúa (2002) explains, one of the central purposes of the imagination for Chican@s is to transform society.

One example of the subversive nature of CSP is Laura Alvarez's Double Agent Sirvienta (DAS). In this series, done in cartoon/comic soap opera style, the artist plays with the real and the imaginary (fig. 1). As Laura E. Pérez explains, "While creating an imaginary landscape that in its improbability is often humorous, [Alvarez's DAS project] brings attention to the ways in which the social space of the home is inhabited, gendered, and racialized" (2007, xv). The central character in the series is a female Mexican immigrant turned into an "undercover agent posing as a maid on both sides of the border" with the mission of "stealing secrets and blackmailing authorities for the demands of the less fortunate" (182). The absurdity of the labor exploitation experienced by Latina maids in California is subverted in such a way that the racialized female subject becomes a spy agent, dethroning assumptions about maids. Here, fears of

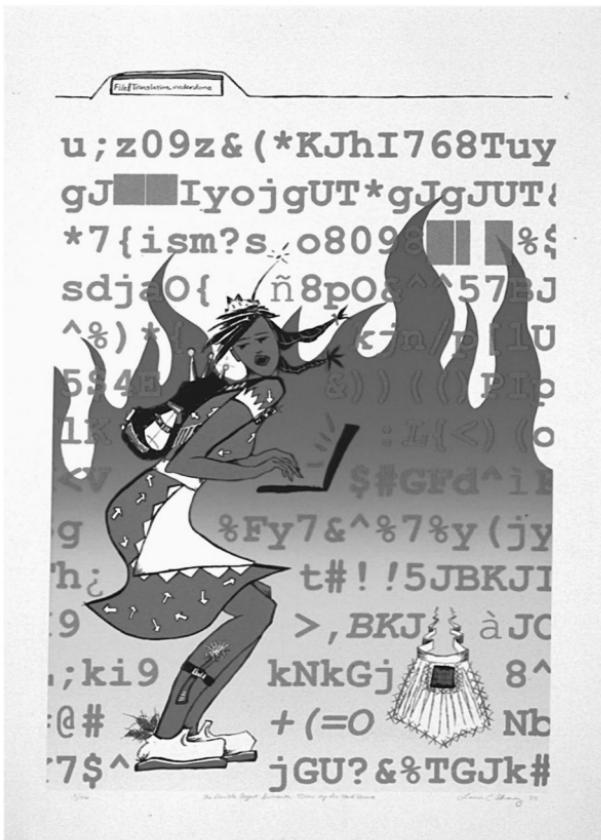


Figure 1. Laura Alvarez, *Blow Up the Hard Drive*, 1999. Silk-screen print, 18 x 26 inches.

the racialized others rebelling against their masters become reality. As Pérez proposes, DAS is “able to penetrate class and cultural barriers and retrieve otherwise inaccessible information” precisely because the “spy and [the] servant are both phantas(ma)tic, only partly visible social figures” (182). In this fictional world, both characters are merged and utilize their social position of *invisibility* to navigate, and in this case subvert, the system, at least momentarily. The artist creates a fictitious parallel world, a space that mirrors the world in which she lives, but she envisions a different way of being, where the rules defined by the market are subverted and a servant is able to navigate with new agency.

This speculative quality of subversion can also be identified in many other cultural productions: murals, artworks, and corridos that map this new world, as well as in the ephemeral performance and spoken word pieces created by Chican@s. This is the case of Asco, the art collective from East Los Angeles (1972–87). It is not coincidental that the group’s name appropriates the Spanish word for nausea and disgust, placing the undesirable at the center. In this case, their new real emerges as a series of ghost-like performances, where the artists challenge the normativity of the ruling-class real and reframe what has been dismissed as absurd or kitsch as the new norm. Many of Asco’s performances were short-lived and done on the move, with monster-like masquerades and gothic costumes. Their No Movies series questions Hollywood’s exclusion of Chican@s, a pointed commentary by artists who live and work so close to, yet so far from, Hollywood. Also a comment on rejection is their famous *Spray Paint LACMA* (also known as *Project Pie in De/Face*), a graffiti piece that comments on the refusal of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to exhibit the work of Asco and of other Chican@ artists. In this act of rebellion and self-affirmation, Asco turned LACMA into a canvas. By painting their names on an outside wall, they publically declared the “first Chicana/o art exhibition in LACMA” (Latorre 2008, 258–59). In their new world, the museum escapes the limitations of the museum and becomes a site of both political decadence and reaffirmation.

ALTER-NATIVE

For those under siege, speculative productions do not exist merely as recreation or an escape from reality; that is a luxury not possible for those who occupy the fraught space of the borderlands, where resources are limited. In response to the normalized, everyday reality of horror, CSPs propose a new

world that heals the effects of violence and simultaneously creates a space where the self is defined outside subjugation: an “alter-Native” world to the one dominated by greed and racial exploitation. I use this term following Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s notion that “Chicano/a culture is an alter-Native culture within the United States, both alien and indigenous to the landbase known as the West” (1998, xvi). In this sense, the new alter-Native world is also a project of resignifications, where articulations and meanings are reassigned and regenerated. Just as Jonathan Inda has illustrated in the case of the term *Chicano* (2000, 74–99), this process of resignification moves beyond the perpetuation of traditional models of subjugation and toward something that is simultaneously new and alien.

The figure of Joaquín, as constructed by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales (1972) in his famous poem *Yo Soy Joaquín*, is an example of a speculative hero who emerges from the ashes of a world in decadence. Joaquín is a new type of human who can only live in a new world that is at once both utopian and real. Despite the poem’s male-centered heteronormative limitations, at its writing in 1967 it was understood as proposing a plan of action for the construction of Aztlán, the original mythical land of the ancient Mexica/Aztec people that turned into a speculative model of the Chican@ community in the United States during the 1960s. Therefore, I frame the reemergence of the myth of Aztlán, during the same period, within this speculative theoretical context and as an example of a CSP, not only because it reimagines a unifying past for a very diverse community but also because it works as a prototype for a different future world. Aztlán eventually became a central symbol for Chican@ epistemic discourses about self, the politics of space, and the reconstitution of a diverse community under a common umbrella for citizenship rights, emancipation, and self-definition.

“El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán) and “El Plan de Santa Bárbara” (The Plan of Santa Barbara), foundational texts for the Chican@ movement, build their pedagogical and political discourses around their speculative interpretations of the myth of Aztlán. Here, the new Aztlán is envisioned as a point of both departure and arrival of a new egalitarian world, one that is centered on Chican@ experiences and struggles for equality. Logistically, the reconstitution of the myth of Aztlán by Chican@s during the 1960s demonstrates what I call the “sticky” nature of speculative productions, or their tendency to introduce multiple points of access or adhesion to a community. As a result, the members of a heterogeneous group such as Chican@s can relate personally to the narrative of Aztlán as an unifying element: despite their differences with regard

to language, citizenship, immigration status, and religion, they identify as members of *la raza*. In this regard, as Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco Lomelí explain, “For Chicanos the concept of Aztlán signaled a unifying point of cohesion through which they could define the foundations for an identity” (1997, ii). The myth of Aztlán allows very diverse Chicano/Latino individuals to unify around one origin myth, with one set of common ancestors and with a shared past of oppression and segregation. As Anaya and Lomelí write, “Aztlán brought together a culture that had been somewhat disjointed and dispersed, allowing it, for the first time, a framework within which to understand itself” as an unified historically subjugated social body (ii). Consequently, Aztlán enabled Chican@s to understand their past, to make sense of their present, and to have hope for the future (iii–iv).

However, Aztlán, as proposed by the Chicano nationalist project of the 1960s–70s, was not immune to the faults of patriarchalism. As early as the 1980s, Chicanas and queer Chican@s denounced the heteropatriarchy inscribed within this nationalist project and called for a new Aztlán, a more inclusive type of speculative production. This task was made possible only by those who were both within and outside the Chicano movement, those who were not afraid of losing Aztlán, in part because they were never fully included in this project. They were able to inscribe a new Aztlán because they were not tied to or constrained by the one already in place. Cherríe Moraga (1993) contextualizes this extraordinary speculative project in her essay “Queer Aztlán.” This imagined new Aztlán exemplifies both Emma Pérez’s (1999) concept of the decolonial imaginary and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) methodology of a mestiza consciousness. In her essay, Moraga applies Anzaldúa’s methodology, moving from a critical “inventory” and the reinterpretation of history to the “shape [of] new myths” (Anzaldúa 1987, 104) and simultaneously creating a new reality toward an emancipated future, one beyond the norms of coloniality of today. Queer Aztlán emerges, according to Moraga, as a new “nation strong enough to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender” (1993, 164). Built from the raw materials of the previous Aztlán project, Queer Aztlán rejects those aspects understood as oppressive. This new alter-Native world, a new semiotic myth, is presented as a path of action for inclusion.

TRANSFORMATIVE

One of the characteristics of Chican@ speculative productions is their atemporal nature, or their capacity to move between times and places without

being constrained by the aesthetic limitations imposed by discourses on rigor or purity characteristic of each period. In this regard they can be interpreted as examples of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias, or spaces of otherness, where the imagined and the real coexist simultaneously. This is possible because, as Foucault explains, a "heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (1986, 25). This transformative atemporal characteristic can be visually represented by the custom paint job on a lowrider car. These artistic productions encompass different elements from different periods, coexisting without apparent conflict, because the emphasis is not on the individual aesthetic elements but rather on the overall visual narration, the interconnection between the images. The power of CSPs (and many other Chicana/o cultural productions) depends heavily on the ability of an artist to collect and select images in order to build a narration. This plurality of symbols, images, and treatments can be overwhelming for the untrained eye or for viewers fixed on puritan aesthetic discourses of historical lineal progression. CSPs hold these atemporal qualities in ways that allow their communities to pick and choose and to relocate an element into the present. Furthermore, according to Foucault, the role of heterotopias is to "create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (25). Therefore the new imaginary worlds created by CSPs are deeply detailed and intentional.

Another example of the transformative resignifying enacted by CSPs can be found in the work of Los Angeles artist Alma López, who utilizes the highly charged semiotic image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to propose a new world, in this case one where queer love is accepted and normalized. She follows the tradition of other Chicana artists, such as Yolanda M. López, Ester Hernandez, Guadalupe Rodriguez, and Isis Rodriguez, in giving a new set of meanings to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. For Alma López, the love affair between Guadalupe and another popular image, La Sirena, places queer love at the same level as heterosexual love. This queering of the Virgin of Guadalupe works as a tool to denounce sexism, homophobia, and the limitations of patriarchy from a Chicana perspective. Alma López frees the Virgin and unveils the woman behind the mandorla, in this case one made of flesh and human emotions. This Guadalupe lives with her lover La Sirena in a *another* world, one that is too close to be unreal but is simultaneously impossible for many to see or recognize. Paradoxically, because of the effects of homophobia in the "real" world, Guadalupe is also

forced to live as a double agent, both as a devoted virgin mother and as a human being with sexual desires and the need for affection and intimacy; both Guadalupes are merged in the same city, Los Angeles, as one single being. In the works of Alma López, the Virgin of Guadalupe is more than a religious icon; she holds a Nepantla passport between our ancestral past and our hopes for a speculative future of equal love.

EMANCIPATORY

One of the most important characteristics of Chican@ cultural productions, including Chican@ speculative productions, is their epistemic value and function. This occurs because of a combination of factors such as the marginalization experienced by this community, their limited access to resources, the guarded access to mainstream sources of knowledge distribution, and the formal and informal colonial policing of knowledge. As we know, the process of colonization of Chican@ communities is manifested partly in the sanctioning, silencing, and marginalization of their knowledge (Santos 2006). It is in this context that speculative productions emerge as venues for the transfer of information about how to survive, decentering power and transforming lived worlds. This transformation happens at the epistemic level, certainly by imagining a new world, but also by questioning and refusing both the assumptions about what it means to be a Chican@ and the binaries created by oppressor/victim paradigms. Even more important, Chican@ speculative productions create new knowledge about the world, about Chican@s, and about their communities.

James Scott (1992), analyzing African American production of gospel music during slavery, observes that behind the obviously religious nature of many of these hymns were concealed discourses of emancipation, social justice, and hope for a world beyond oppression. These hymns spoke about the forthcoming of a new world order defined by justice. Similarly, CSPs are sophisticated knowledge productions that bespeak the possibilities of a new order. Ironically, it is precisely because vernacular speculative productions are dismissed by society that they can be used to clandestinely share knowledge in ways that pass undetected by the mainstream. Behind the apparently innocent nature of these speculative fantasies, fictional worlds, and monsters are concealed the knowledge and experiences of these communities. In this sense, CSP manifests what Rossana Reguillo defines as “critical social knowledge” (2004, 40) and Walter Mignolo refers to as “subaltern modernities” (2000, 13), or sophisticated productions that

subjugated communities use to deal with the effects of modernity in their everyday lives.

It is precisely because of the epistemic nature of CSPs that their forms, qualities, and modus operandi are never random. The characteristics of a given CSP correspond to a specific time, social context, and economic threat. For example, the Chupacabras, a blood-sucking monster, emerged in the mid-1990s as a sophisticated metaphor for the behavior of late capitalism during that period. As policies of market expansion and global deregulation ravaged rural Latin@ communities, the Chupacabras can be understood as neoliberal ideology turned uncanny flesh. The atrocities generated at the “crossroads of a new millennium require[d] an even more complex system of uncanny signifiers to accommodate a new set of hyper-realities” imposed by neoliberalism (Calvo-Quirós 2014b, 230). Confronting the devastating transformations required by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), members of rural communities understood that their livelihoods as small farmers were under threat, being sucked away by transnational corporations, international banks, and global markets. The Chupacabras thus emerges as a sophisticated epistemic product rendering visible the invisible economic policies whose deadly effects were being felt in vulnerable communities. Moreover, the Chupacabras fulfilled a crucial function by transferring information to rural and Latin@ communities under siege. Surviving the attacks of the Chupacabras was synonymous to surviving a wave of apocalyptic economic policies linked to NAFTA in Mexico, Texas, and Puerto Rico during the decade of the 1990s:

Clearly, for those on the losing end, the experience of land dispossession, forced migration, and the loss of their sources for maintaining their families and preserving their culture, could have been perceived as the effects of a monster that was attacking them, one that little by little, was sucking their lives away. In those days, just as today, there were more than just livestock animals dying and succumbing, there were also communal histories, and traditions at stake. (Calvo-Quirós 2014a, 98)

The form and shape of CSPs, as multilayered social texts, tell us about the characteristics of the threats and anxieties afflicting Chican@ communities. Furthermore, the power of a speculative production is not limited to its literary or artistic form, but also derives from its relationship with the community involved. The significance of the Chupacabras is as much about the communities it ravages as it is about the creature itself. Creating a sophisticated “imaginary” creature such as the Chupacabras requires an understanding of the monstrous real.

Finally, because Chican@s use the speculative to create new paths for knowledge and knowledge transfer, researching and theorizing CSP requires unique tools. These include traditional disciplines such as anthropology and history, but also a solid engagement with critical race theory, gender, and sexuality. The integration of multiple methods and analytic processes is essential. For example, while researching CSP I found it essential not only to do interviews, oral histories, and ethnography visits to saints' shrines and sites of spectral sightings but also to analyze governmental archives, newspaper coverage, demographic data, police reports, and economic data as well as other cultural productions such as films, jokes, murals, and corridos. Since these cultural objects are not always what they seem, it is imperative to develop what Emma Pérez calls a "decolonial queer gaze" (2003, 124) or Laura Pérez calls a critical investigative eye that can see between the lines (2007, 128) and beyond what is apparent. This is particularly essential because of the limited official archives available about oppressed communities and because of their limited access to traditional media.

Final Thoughts and Continuing Questions

The development of this essay has been fascinating and provocative. It started with the task of explaining how I understand the area of Chican@ speculative productions, their unique characteristics, and the epistemic relevance of a field of study that has been an important and consistent component of the Chican@ experience in the United States. Simultaneously, this essay also became an intellectual effort to emphasize the significance of Chican@ speculative research within Latin@ studies, Chican@ studies, cultural studies, and American studies, as a medium to study the experience, struggles, and resilience of a community.

Several questions have emerged during this project, and some of them may be central for the future development of CSP as an area of investigation and analysis. For example, how do we deal with CSPs that are obscure because of their producer or topic? How do we deal with those speculative productions that reproduce colonialist violence against women and nonnormative subjects? How does the area of speculative studies justify its existence and differentiate its analysis from more traditional fields of study, like folklore, anthropology, and literature? What are some of the specific decolonizing methodologies required for approaching, analyzing, and studying CSPs? What are the next steps required to advance the development of Chican@ speculative studies?

Certainly, these are exciting times to be a part of Chican@ and Latin@ studies as new and more refined areas of research take shape. As the field grows and matures, the forces that militate against its transformative and epistemic nature are also becoming more sophisticated, toxic, and threatening. More than ever, the need to imagine a new world outside the norms of oppression is imperative for the survival of all. If we cannot use imagination to create change, what is left behind for humans?

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