Foreword

Assembling an Intersectional Pop Cultura Analytical Lens

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I am a consummate consumer of all things pop culture. Late at night my laptop glows with blue phosphorescence; wrestling with insomnia I binge on televisual and silver-screen shows. My bed-stand lies buried under a wobbly stack of comics, currently topped off with indigenous-penned, smart and entertaining *Super Indian*, *Quarantine Zone*, *My Hero*, *Marvel 1602* along with *Bitch Planet Vol. 2* and some radical feminist Latinx zines. I wake to music playlists that variously include trip hop (Portishead, Tricky, Massive Attack), drum ‘n’ bass (Peter Tosh, The Fugeess, J-Malik), acid jazz (Jazzmatazz and Digible Planets), Drake, Luis Fonsi, Miguel, and Ana Tijoux. And I wipe the glaze of sleep from my eyes and brain through hours of my thinking, writing, and teaching about pop cultural matters. Morning lectures for signature courses such as “Intro. to Latinx Pop Culture” and “Film & Comics: Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Differently Abled” wake me to the world.

Don’t get me wrong. I love my novels as much as the next. My shelves are filled with book spines etched with names like Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Junot Díaz, Elena Garro, Julia Alvarez, Salman Rushdie, Yasunari Kawabata, Carlos Fuentes, Luis Urrea, Dagoberto Gilb, Michael Nava, Ana Castillo, Denise Chávez, Carmen Machado Assis, among others. These same shelves include poetry collections of the most rarified sort (the maddening Apollinaire, for instance) along with some seriously self-reflexive, meta-critical Criterion Collection DVD films. I even have a Janson history of art tome that’s

gathering dust. And, I occasionally suit up to catch some high-brow live symphonic compositions.

Race, sexuality, gender, differently abled issues come alive mostly in and through my engagement with and thinking through pop culture, however. It's my primordial soup. I felt less different as a kid after having seen how much *fun* the Addams family had together—an Othered family like mine in Sacramento. It was comic books that allowed me to soar far above my modest, single-parent Latinx tellurian confines—and expand my English vocabulary. It was an imaginary lightsaber that allowed me to slice-and-dice the Bros Ortiz, our neighborhood bullies.

I'm not alone. Many of us racialized and historically marginalized subjects can say the same. Sherman Alexie opens his *LA Times* reflection on the joys of writing and reading thus: "I learned to read with a Superman comic book." Comic book creator and scholar, John Jennings reflects: "Growing up black, poor, and Southern made sure of my imperceptibility to the mainstream. So, like most invisible people, I turned to stories in popular media to start to build some sense of self to reflect back to my burgeoning psyche" (*Latinx Superheroes* xi). And, creator of *El Muerto* and Latino Comics Expo cofounder Javier Hernandez reflects: "I don't remember the media itself (in-print comic, film, or TV show) when I first discovered Zorro, but I do recall imagining a character dressed in a fanciful black costume, riding atop a horse while brandishing swords and a gun. No matter his Spanish origin, I imagined myself, a Latino kid with Mexican ancestry, as this superhero" (*Latinx Superheroes* 183).

While I clearly think that pop culture matters in our everyday lives, scholarly inquiry, and knowledge dissemination, not all pop culture is made equally—especially when it comes to matters of race, sexuality, gender, and differently abled subjects and experiences. I had the great misfortune of sitting through Dax Shephard's silver-screen remake of the '70s show, *CHiPs* (2017). Unfortunate because Shephard as director and screenplay writer throws Latinx characterization back to the time of the Unenlightenment: Michael Peña stars as a Frank 'Ponch' Poncherello who is singularly defined by his sexual addiction (hand jerks or any convenient hole)—and sans any winks of irony or self-reflexivity. And, there's the hyperbolic histrionics of Sofia Vergara playing Gloria in *Modern Family* that continue to rankle. I can say the same of J-Lo's role as Marisa Ava Marie Ventura in the film *Maid in Manhattan* (2002) who is redeemed and made *good* (after being bad for supposedly stealing a fur coat) by association with aristocratic whiteness (Ralph Fiennes as Christopher Marshall). Her role as Harlee Santos in the 2016-TV series *Shades of Blue* (2016–2017) isn't much better. The show's creator, Adi Hasak, characterizes her as a corrupted, double-crossing Latinx single mamá, playing into and reinforcing those age-old stereotypes of Latinas as malinches.

However, even these instances that lack a *will to style* (responsibility to representations of Latinx subjects both in form and in content) can reveal much about life for intersectional subjectivities in the United States. They can and do reveal the pernicious legacy of the EuroSpanish *casta* system that continues to privilege light-skinned Latinxs in the hemispheric Américas; they can and do reveal how Latinas are often depicted as bad and all bodied. They can and do shed light on how pop cultura *can* evince a great will to style. I think of how J-Lo turns the tables of whose peeping who, at least momentarily, on this saint vs. sinner, virgin vs. whore stereotyping in her music video “I Luh Ya Papi” (2014). And how corporate megalith Fox can create shows like *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013–) that push Latinx complexity into the quotidian boob-tube lives of U.S. Americans; with Detective Rosa Diaz (Stephanie Beatriz) and Detective Amy Santiago (Melissa Fumero) the show’s creators Dan Goor and Michael Schur serve up some of TV’s smartest, wittiest, badass Latinxs on prime time.

Here and elsewhere we’re seeing what Isabel Molina-Guzmán identifies as “color-conscious” TV programing that develops “characters with ethnic and racial cultural and experiential specificity and thereby more complexity” (*Latinas and Latinos on TV* 9). This color-conscious programming is happening on multiple perceptual levels, including the aural. As season 7 of *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–) unfolds, not only does the narrative move the voice and agency from the Anglo Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) to Latina leaders of the revolution, such as Dayanara Diaz (Dascha Polanco), but also there’s an increased presence of a contrapuntal, English–Spanish bilingual linguisticscape heard between Maritza Ramos (Diane Guerrero) and Marisol “Flaca” Gonzales (Jackie Cruz). Spanish linguistic rhythms become as important an auditory shaper of the narrative as English in a show that radically reveals the deep truths about the racist, heterosexist neoliberalism that undergirds global capitalism.

There’s a certain resplendence of intersectional representation that’s happening in the mainstream. This provides the textured surfaces for viewers like myself to entangle identities and experiences with. It’s more than just the token appearance of a Latinx character or soundscape. It’s casting and writing shows like *I Love Dick* (2017), which features the Mexico-born, mixed Argentinian/Honduran Latinx lesbian actor Roberta Colindrez as the genderqueer Mexican-American, Devon. In a moment of passion, she commands their partner to “suck my cock.” And in the twelve-webisode series, “Brujos,” the creators use the *telenovela* and sitcom formula along with some *brujería* to make new perceptions of how racism, homophobia, and (straight, white male) colonization affect LGBTQ Latinx subjects. And in the Selena Gomez–produced *13 Reasons Why* (2017) the show’s writers create a fully fleshed out Latinx gay character, Tony Padilla (Christian Navarro), with substantive screen time that reveals his complex struggle at home (a machista papá and Catholicism) and with his white boyfriend’s Catholicism.

This isn't to say that pop culture gets it right all the time concerning intersectional assemblages of race, gender, sexuality identities and experiences. Throw a net into the pop culture flotsam and the detritus overwhelms. *Star Wars 8* continues to run with the Latinx actor Oscar Isaac as the central character, but it is color-blind to his Latinx identity; and this in sharp contrast to the writing for the character DJ (Benicio del Toro), whose Latinoness participates in a long history of misrepresenting Latinxs as linguistically inept and double-crossers. In a recent episode of *Z Nation* (Season 2, episode 15) Gina Gershwin appears in brownface as a Latina bruja (and leader of a pack of calavera-painted, machete-wielding Anglos) who imitates a stereotypical speech intonation of an East LA chola.

We need to have our eyes wide open to the continued gatekeeping practices that privilege white, male, and straight subjects. (Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee are talents in their own right, but it wasn't until Justin Bieber tried out his Spanish lyrics that "Despacito" became a huge hit.) And, we need to be especially vigilant in our everyday lives with the threat of U.S.–Mexico border walls going up, white supremacist attacks, along with deportations of our brothers and sisters.

Rachel, Domino, and the cadre of amazing scholars that make up this volume invite us to think deeply about everyday, living, breathing cultural phenomena that richly texture vital intersectional identities and experiences. They invite us to sharpen the analytic lens that sees race and racism, sexuality and heterosexism, gender and sexism as more than a set of binaries. In and through the analysis of *Breaking Bad*, *The Bridge*, *Orange Is the New Black*, *Shakira*, *Niki Manaj*, *Machete*, *Walking Dead*, *Sense8*, *Sicario*, and the bilingual, historically deep *Lucha Underground*, among many other pop cultural phenomena, we see how to construct sturdy yet elastic bridges between theory and praxis, between media studies and cultural studies, between genders and sexualities, between differently ethnoracialized communities; between creation and modes of circulation and reception. As this volume forcefully attests, until we truly live a postrace, postfeminist, postpost world a *pop cultura* intersectional analytic lens is necessary. It is urgent.

Works Cited

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Race and Cultural Practice in Popular Culture