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**Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda by
Deborah R. Vargas
Wild Tongues: Transnational Mexican Popular
Culture by Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz
Performing the US Latina and Latino
Borderlands edited by Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and
Peter J. García**

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Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda. By Deborah R. Vargas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Wild Tongues: Transnational Mexican Popular Culture. By Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012.

Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands. Edited by Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

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Despite the performative turn of the 1990s, a disjuncture has persisted between performance studies, though self-admittedly expansive and porous, and much of the scholarship produced around the diverse acts constituting Latina/o performance. The books reviewed here engage Latina/o performance on its own terms and terrains while reconceiving the limits of the archive as well as the subjects and substance of performance. Myriad works considered here further intervene in debates regarding critical regionalism and transnationalism within Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, as well as American studies, by embracing a hemispheric approach while also being attuned to the inflections of the local. Also contributing to feminist and queer theory, the two monographs and several essays included within the anthology explore the intersections among queerness, race, the body, and performance and underline how these intersections are never innocent formations, at times colluding with systems of power, at others enacting decolonial imaginaries, and sometimes doing both.

As I write this review in San Antonio, Texas, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center located on the Chicana/o Westside is celebrating the release of a Lydia Mendoza stamp as part of the US Postal Service's Music Icon Series, hailing her as "one of the first and greatest stars of Tejano music."¹ In her new monograph, Deborah Vargas points out how Mendoza has traditionally occupied an elevated status within Chicana/o ethnomusicology and her persona, music, and career have functioned as a yardstick up against which other Tejana and Chicana performers must measure. However, Vargas asserts—though she is careful to not detract from Men-

¹ The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, "Stamp Unveiling Honors Lydia Mendoza," <http://www.guadalupeculturalarts.org/tejano-conjunto-festival/stamp-unveiling-honors-lydia-mendoza>.

doza's accomplishments—her “public iconicity has been crafted . . . to fit within hegemonic borderlands parameters of working-class gender” (35), for Mendoza was known as a “singer of the poor” and performed primarily *corridos* and *rancheros*, mainstays of what Vargas calls *la onda*, or heteronormative Chicano ethnomusicology. Rosita Fernandez, Chelo Silva, Eva Ybarra, Ventura Alonzo, Eva Garza, Selena, Gloria Rios, and Girl in a Coma, the subjects of Vargas's monograph, on the other hand, are decidedly “no Lydia Mendoza” (xvi) and have been consequently rendered inaudible within borderlands ethnomusicology. To redress this silence, Vargas unapologetically privileges gender and sexuality to analyze their dissonance within a Chicano soundscape circumscribed by “heteronormative constructions of gender, citizenship, class resistance, home, femininity, and family” (ix).

In reconceiving the archive, Vargas follows the ephemeral contours of power, silences and *chisme* (gossip), and “murmurs” and vibrations, as she tracks dissonance within *la onda* (77). In the second chapter's analysis of Chela Silva, Vargas listens for how *chisme* operates as an “archive of chisme” or “*archisme*” of desire, power, and memory, sounding a history of both heteronormative structures of power and Silva's own cultural resistance through her use of the bolero as an alternative corrido or border ballad, a centerpiece of Chicano musical history (77). In my estimation, the fourth chapter, which reckons with the elusive Eva Garza, most radically reconceives the archive in tracing Chicana dissonance. Here Vargas engages multiple meanings of scale, traversing both the musical and the geographic, the “imaginary” and the “embodied” (176), to compose an alternative sonic compass capable of locating Garza's presence within resounding absence. Vargas charts how Garza's music, such as her diasporic *guarachas* and boleros, which emerged in the Afro-Caribbean and were broadcasted transnationally, in conjunction with her material body, which traveled throughout the United States and Latin America, animated Garza's “subjectivity in process” (177), extending through and beyond the spaces of home, region, and nation. In this way, Vargas contends, Garza's music and career queerly rerouted the “vertical south-north” (167) temporal and geographic trajectory that guides the sonic cannon of the heteronormative borderlands.

Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz similarly uses a comparativist and transnational methodology to recover the complex and binational origins of Mexican and Chicana/o popular culture in the twentieth century, reconnecting what heretofore has been considered mutually exclusive. More specifically, Urquijo-Ruiz traces the cognate figures of the peladita/o, the pachuca/o, and the chola/o as well as the *teatro de carpa*, or tent theater

traditions, within the discursive landscapes of the novel, film, performance, and theater, and she remaps them within a borderlands network of representation and meaning. Guiding her binational focus are the vectors of transnational capitalism throughout the past century, which have leeched surplus labor from brown bodies and galvanized immigration, though concomitantly yielding sites of interaction, transmission, and cultural hybridity.

Rather than explicitly theorizing transnational capitalism, a linchpin of her inquiry, Urquijo-Ruiz instead tactically elects to demonstrate through her sharp focus on circuits of language, representation, and performance how transnational capitalism has shaped and continues to intimately shape the lifeworlds of Mexican immigrants and Chicana/os and how it has incited creative forms of resistance. The first three chapters investigate the evolution of the *peladita/o* and *pachucada/o* as embodiments of social critique. After establishing the binational origins of the peladito, a downtrodden comedic stock character, in the first chapter, Urquijo-Ruiz traces this figure's multifaceted genealogy in the following chapter, where she decenters the masculinist and limited focus on El Teatro Campesino within post-1945 Chicana/o cultural studies by zeroing in on the Mexican and Chicana *peladitas*, Amelia Wilhelmy ("La Willy") and Beatriz Escalona ("La Chata Noloesca"). The third chapter then shifts attention to the transnational moorings of the *pachucada*, whose figuration is informed by African American and Chicana/o cultures as well as Mexican culture, in the US play and film *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez and the Mexican film *El hijo desobediente*, in which Germán Valdés or "Tin Tan" is cast as a Mexican *pachuco*.

The last two chapters are especially compelling because they bring to the fore Chicana feminist and queer iterations of the *peladita/o* and *pachuchada/o*, unveiling how contemporary performances draw upon these variegated and transnational figures in enunciating their own voices of resistance or "wild tongues." Whereas the fourth chapter situates the *chola* within the *pelada* and *pachuca* tradition in the 1990s performance art of María Elena Gaitán, the last chapter explores Dan Guerrero's mid-2000s one-man show *¡Gaytino!* in which Urquijo-Ruiz locates a "queer zone of comfort" (138), a site from which to speak out and in which queers of color may forge nonbiological familial relationships to support one another in effecting social justice.

The anthology under review moves in sync with Vargas and Urquijo-Ruiz to amplify the scope of possibility for approaching Latina/o performance. Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García bring together innovative new essays on this topic and codify and incite a field of borderlands performance studies. Their collection neologically frames

this new field of study within what the editors' introduction terms "decolonial performativity" or "perform antics," the "mestizaje, the hybridity, the bricolage, the rasquache interventions organized around de-colonization" (1). The essays further investigate the multiple tactics wielded by Latina/o performance that enable suturing and re-memorializing of that which has been severed by colonization, including code-switching; *rasquachismo* (a working-class sensibility of "making do"); theater of the oppressed; and *hacienda caras*, or "making face" (remaking the self). All these are positioned within what the editors call "alternative cultural genealogies," such as "US Indigenous, mestizo@, African@, and Spanish-language traditions and epistemologies of dance, food, music, clothing, and language, religions, studies, and identities" (3).

Inevitably, though, some readers will find absent from the theoretical introduction any attempt to situate the essays within contemporary performance studies scholarship. Yet I would argue that herein lies the boldness of the anthology: if the contributors share what the editors call "a commitment to alter-Native cultural engineering" (1) in relation to theorizing performative acts in the Americas, then it follows that they would heed the mandate of the alter-Native, a term originally coined by Alicia Gaspar de Alba to understand borderlands performance as not merely a subculture vis-à-vis the dominant one but instead as its own autonomous cultural formation demanding its own particular lens of seeing and being.² The essays are thus more than gestures of resistance, of re-acting, as they make do, make face, and sidestep the well-trodden grounds of performance studies. As such, the anthology brings into being novel grammars of performance grounded in the marginalized lived experiences of Latina/os and directed toward specific decolonial horizons of possibility.

Accordingly, the anthology is thematically structured into four interrelated "actos," unified by an attention to what the editors, taking a cue from Gloria Anzaldúa, call a "transformative relationship between 'inner work' and 'public acts'" (8), or the relationship between imagination or feeling on the one hand and liberatory action on the other. Essays such as those by Norma E. Cantú, Micaela Díaz-Sánchez, and Pancho McFarland explore the role of indigeneity in various cultural formations, tacitly responding to recent critiques concerning the incorporation of pre-Columbian and Native American iconography in Chicana/o cultural production.³ In response these

² See Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master's House, Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

³ See, e.g., Sheila Marie Contreras, *Blood Lines: Myth, Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

authors have firmly located performativity in their respective material and sociopolitical milieus, and they have underscored the ways in which contemporary indigenous identity and the desire to recover indigenous modes of knowledge production inform Chicana/o subjectivity and decolonizing methodologies. For example, while Díaz-Sánchez analyzes the performances of Jesusa Rodríguez, who is Mexican, and Celia Herrera-Rodríguez, who identifies as Chicana/Tepehuana, to foreground how corporeality “functions as the critical site for the (de)construction of national and Indigenous identities” (31), Cantú surveys the elements of *danza de matachines*, a hybrid of European and indigenous dance traditions, in Laredo, Texas, to highlight the desire to reclaim indigenous aspects of Chicana/o identity and contest historical erasure. Other contributors significantly contribute to a growing body of scholarship on Latina/o music and dance studies by exploring, for instance, the cultural work and transnational sonic circuits of Chelo Silva (Yolanda Broyles-González), Lila Downs (Brenda Romero), and Los Tigres del Norte (Roberto D. Hernández), or by theorizing the decolonial and democratic practices of rumba (Berta Jottar-Palenzuela) and tango (Maria Lugones). There are additionally a number of essays that refuse putative boundaries between dramatic and visual performance as well as live or social and textual performance and consider the performative possibilities of multifarious texts, ranging from Chicana literature (Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, Daphne Taylor-García) and visual art (Mary Karen Davalos), to television and film (Jennifer Esposito and Daniel Enrique Pérez), to an eclectic and dizzying array of visual artifacts (William Anthony Nericcio). Together, these essays paint a complex whole of Latina/o performance and assemble *a lo rasquache* a new field of study and participation.

Indubitably, this trio will become a fixture of undergraduate and graduate course syllabi in women’s studies, performance studies, American studies, literary studies, and Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, among others, not only due to the three volumes’ interdisciplinary methodologies and transnational foci but also thanks to the ways in which they carve out space and provide creative new models for engaging Latina/o performance, bringing the complex negotiations of subjectivity, knowledge production, and performance to center stage. These texts do not lean on tired debates and terms of performance studies but instead engender their own archives and key words, or, simply put: they “make *do*.” |