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Cyborg Jotería Pedagogies: Latinx Drag Queens Leveraging Communication Ecologies in the Age of the Digital and Social Displacement

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Abstract

Researchers and practitioners have much to learn from drag queens, specifically Latinx queens, as they leverage everyday queerness and brownness in ways that contribute to pedagogy locally and globally, individually and collectively. Drawing on previous work examining the digital queer gestures of drag queen educators (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019), this article explores how non-dominant people that exist and fluctuate in the in-between of boundaries of gender, race, sexuality, the physical, and the virtual provide pedagogical overtures for imagining and organizing for new possible futures that are equitable and just. Further animated by Donna Haraway's (2006) influential feminist post-humanist work, we interrogate how Latinx drag queens as cyborgs use digital technologies to enhance their craft and engage in powerful pedagogical moves. This essay draws from robust analyses of the digital presence of and interviews with two Latinx drag queens in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as the online presence of a Xicanx doggie drag queen named RuPawl. Our participants actively drew on their liminality to provoke and mobilize communities around socio-political issues. In this regard, we see them engaging in transformative public *cyborg jotería pedagogies* that are made visible and historicized in the digital and physical world.

Keywords: queer pedagogy, digital pedagogy, social justice

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Introduction

As we write this introduction, COVID-19¹ has ravaged the social, cultural, spatial, and economic landscape, particularly impacting the gathering places of non-dominant people around the world disproportionately. San Francisco's Stud Bar, a queer² space that has had its own history of closure threats, shuttered its doors after fifty-four years. During a Twitch-streamed digital drag funeral held for the Stud Bar on May 31, 2020, the self-identified Trans Latina performer Remy regaled the digital stage with a rendition of Juan Gabriel's³ "Noa Noa": a jubilant anthem to another defunct queer space in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. This layered performance, characterized by Remy serving as both lead singer and two back-up singers through video editing (see Figure 1), punctuated both the grief for the death of yet another queer space and the celebration of the joy these spaces brought our queer communities.

Figure 1

Screenshot from a Digital Drag Funeral for Stud Bar Featuring Performer Remy



¹ In late 2019, COVID-19 emerged as a severe respiratory infectious disease. It resulted in a global pandemic in 2020 that has endured until the writing of this piece, in June of 2020.

² We use queer to denote a space that is inclusive and central to anti-normative genders and sexualities (Warner, 1993).

³ Juan Gabriel was the stage name of the late Alberto Aguilera Valadez, a famed Mexican composer, singer, and queer icon.

Through her playful, gritty performance, Remy leads with hope and possibility as she harkens a not-yet-here (Muñoz, 2009): a future that is perhaps beyond the horizon, so as to say that the closure of The Stud is not the end. In this small vignette, mediated through digital technologies, we see Remy enacting a playfulness, grittiness (*lo sucio*), and engagement with posthuman imaginings of a new possible future.

In the digital age, and more so during the current pandemic, drag queens have taken to performing on the digital stages of streaming and social media platforms as they are no longer confined to the physical stages of nightclubs. This shift to the digital stage has happened gradually for drag performers but has been accelerated given the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing stay-at-home orders. This has led to publics engaging, learning from, and being mobilized by drag queens on their own time, in their own spaces, and without having to, or being able to, go to the club. This is particularly salient as the stages that once existed for non-dominant drag performers have disappeared, given the role of gentrification and the resulting displacement of queer people of color (Hutson, 2015; Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) and pinkwashing (Duggan, 2002) that major cities have undergone over the past 15 years. In this context, Latinx drag queens have amplified, troubled, and connected performance and pedagogy. There are new modalities with which the public can engage in drag performance, such as viral music videos, videogame play on Twitch channels, and digital drag shows, to name a few.

As learning scientists who examine the political and ethical possibilities of relational work, we are interested in the historical formation of authentic and dignity-conferring (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014) relationships that are fostered in digital networks of queer people as they engage publics in practices and activities of social dreaming (Espinoza, 2008). In particular, we are interested in how people build with one another to engage in distributed expertise (Siemens, 2005), and how these practices mediate how people think and act (Pea, 1993). In this respect, given the role that digital technologies play in facilitating new types of collaboration, negotiation, and provocation in everyday practices, we argue that our very bodies are augmented by the everyday tools we use in these new communication ecologies, making us cyborgs (Haraway, 2006). Lupton (2012) further posits that as *cyborgs*, we engage in “regular use of computerised devices [that] shape physical aspects of human embodiment, including changing brain structure and functioning, or consciousness, modes of seeing and operating

within the world” (p. 233). Our leveraging of the cyborg helps us argue against the notions that technologies completely determine the function of our daily lives (an overly structural account) or that we have full reign over what we do with technologies (an overly agentic account). Instead, we propose that cyborgs navigate structure and agency in sophisticated ways that both leverage and subvert the original designs of creators of the technology (Noble, 2018). It is here that we find concrete resonance with the practices of drag queens who, like cyborgs, leverage and subvert the aesthetics of gender performativity (Hewitt, 1993). In the following we further claim that the cyborg drag queen is especially equipped to enact the liminality of performativity across the physical and digital realm in powerful pedagogical moves.

We heed the call of this special issue on *Queer/Trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Pedagogies* to point to the transformational potential of the queer drag cyborg that engages in relational work on digital and social media platforms. In our view, the liminal disposition and pedagogical performativity of the cyborg drag queen is amplified by Latinx drag queens who, as *nepantleras*, navigate the borders of multiple cultural, linguistic, and spatial realities (Anzaldúa, 1987). Moreover, in an age of the digital and technological cyborg, we are compelled by the potential distributed and multi-sited amplification of these *jotería* pedagogies by these queens.

We draw on previous work examining the digital queer gestures of drag queen educators (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) and the *nepantla* literacies (Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018) developed by line-stepping (Gutiérrez et al., 2017) border-crossing individuals, to explore how non-dominant people that exist and fluctuate in the in-between of boundaries—of gender, race, sexuality, the physical, and the virtual—enact *cyborg jotería pedagogies* that are playful, gritty (*sucio*), and decenter the Anthropocene through Posthumanism.

Jotería Pedagogies and Drag Queen Cyborgs

We build upon the work of previous scholars who have outlined a *jotería* pedagogy. Alvarez (2014) offers a working definition:

Jotería pedagogy focuses on the heterogeneous lives and lived experiences of jotería but also on the erasures and omissions of queer bodies of color. Attentive to homophobia, transphobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, ableism, and other forms of institutional and discursive violence, jotería pedagogy is theory and praxis that connects the global, the local, and the individual. It is not shallow multiculturalism, but poses overt critiques of capitalist formations and neoliberal

agendas. (p. 218)

We are inspired by the heterogeneous, and often intersectional, communities that *jotería pedagogy* centers. Further, we are motivated by the activist and counterhegemonic stance such a pedagogy takes against systems that seek to erase and eradicate our queer-of-color communities. Finally, as learning scientists, we are compelled by the transformational praxis that can be animated by this pedagogy.

We aim to complicate notions of transformation that can emerge simply from connection and access via technologies. Specifically, the cyborg helps us see how *transmedia mobilization* (Jenkins, 2016) and *transliterations* (Stornaiuolo, Smith, & Phillips, 2017) can offer collective transformation across digital and physical terrains of practice. These considerations resonate profoundly with the types of transformative and expansive learning potential that have been advanced by learning scientists who have examined learning in today's digital and interconnected world (cf. Garcia, 2017; Kirshner & Middaugh, 2014).

By leveraging cyborg theory, as an active interplay between the human and technological, the structural and agentic, we aim to animate *jotería pedagogy* in ways that do not stop at critiquing formations but rather engage in a reimagining of and organizing toward a new possible world. It is our claim that in order to work towards a queer utopia that José Esteban Muñoz (2009) described as an extension of the not-yet-here, a *cyborg jotería pedagogy* must necessarily engage in both critique and organizing for new possible futures. In an attempt to define a *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, we bring in the analytic of the digital queer gesture (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) that we have defined as one that “blends the semiotic affordances of video, audio, and text in the digital realm and is animated, hybridized, and revived across time and space to inspire queer Latinxs to disrupt taken-for-granted normative practices and discourses” (p. 154). We propose that what makes queer gestures part of a *cyborg jotería pedagogy* is that they are practices that are oriented toward the future. Furthermore, we see queer gestures as, with other enactments of *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, engaging in forms of mediated praxis (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) that animate personal and collective histories and critique of social formations in order to organize for new learning and transformation.

Through our analyses of the virtual practices of two Latinx drag queens and one Xicanx doggie drag queen, we have identified three *cyborg jotería pedagogical practices*, or *digital queer gestures*: playful queerness, lo sucio, and the posthuman. *Playful queerness* refers to pedagogical

practices that center humor and play as avenues for the necessary relational work of teaching and learning. Practices of *lo sucio* (or that which is profane) refers to the enactment of an aesthetic that purposely counters politics of respectability and opens opportunities for imagining decolonial queer futures. Finally, *posthuman* practices move toward challenging human-centeredness in imagined social futures. While we do not claim that *cyborg jotería pedagogies* are limited to these three practices, we aim to illustrate how these three drag queens skillfully engaged in these salient pedagogical moves.

Methods for Examining Jotería in a Cyborg World

In our work we are especially attuned to the ways that digital technologies mediate learning across the virtual and face-to-face. In doing so, we draw from tools in the digital humanities (Jockers, 2013) to capture how ideas travel and are appropriated (Rogoff, 1993) by individuals and communities. The examples presented in this article come from network and textual analyses of Facebook posts and tweets by our participants and those of our canine avatar RuPawl whose content was generated by the first author of this piece.

The initial analyses were triangulated by semi-structured interviews that were conducted and transcribed with two of the participants, Persia and Reina de Aztlán. As will become clear in the sections that follow, we have some familiarity with all the participants involved in this work, as we are active members of the queer community in the San Francisco Bay Area. This is to say that our participants were recruited by virtue of our participation in a shared community. In the case of data collected on the activity of RuPawl on their social network, which was voiced by the first author, we were keenly aware of our roles as participant-observers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this regard we considered our own positionalities as queer scholars of education, how we contributed to the activity of our avatar's online community, and how members of this community responded to our comments and queries.

The multiple data sources that were gathered were triangulated and analyzed using three main processes. First, from a review of our participants' activity on their social network sites of Facebook and Twitter, we tabulated the frequency and types of participants' postings to their digital networks—including their digital artifacts, comments on contributions, and their public communications with others. A second type of analysis was open-ended and focused on thematic codings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dyson & Genishi, 2005) of interviews. Through these

analyses we aimed to elucidate the nature of our participants' engagement online: their semiotic, linguistic, and social choices, intentions, needs, and aspirations. A third cycle of analysis aimed to identify patterns in clusters of data (Huberman, et al., 2014). These clusters and patterns are what inform the findings of this article.

Digital artifacts were analyzed using previously developed multimodal analysis techniques (Hull & Nelson, 2005), focusing on how those products conveyed meaning through different semiotic systems (such as image, sound, and language) and through combinations of multiple modes of meaning-making. Data was further reduced through analytic memos to help identify salient themes shared across all data.

Cyborg Jotería Pedagogies: Learning and Transformation

In the following we present examples of *cyborg jotería pedagogical* practices that we saw enacted by drag queens connected in a cyborg ecology. First, we revisit Persia, a San Francisco drag queen who was the subject of our previous writing (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019). By continuing an exploration of her⁴ online and face-to-face practices, we aim to highlight how Persia enacts *playful queerness* as a central tenet to her *cyborg jotería pedagogy*. We then present Reina de Aztlán, also a San Francisco fixture, to show how centering *lo sucio*, or that which is unclean, is a potent pedagogical move towards critically examining the humanization of queer people of color, and what it means to be a desirable queer Latinx in a rapidly changing city. Finally, we present an example of a virtual canine drag queen named RuPawl to illustrate how a *cyborg jotería pedagogy* that engages in the *posthuman* begins to imagine a queer future that is attuned to the world beyond the human experience.

Persia and Pedagogies of Playful Queerness

As members of the San Francisco queer community, we have known Persia for close to a decade. We are intimately familiar with her drag performances at the, now shuttered, Esta Noche night club: a haven for Latinx queers. We also have come to know her as a gifted elementary school teacher, where he goes by Socrates. In our previous writing of Persia (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) we exalted the potent pedagogical contributions of her *digital queer gestures*, both in her online community and in her experiences as a teacher of fourth graders in a San Francisco Bay Area school. In this aforementioned essay we highlighted the travel of her

⁴ Gender pronouns are self-reported and will fluctuate as we speak about our participants in varying contexts.

famous “Google, Google, Apps, Apps” (Persia, 2013) viral video which offered a satirical yet sharp critique of the technology industry-driven displacement of queer people of color in the Bay Area. In our conversations with Persia, she attributes the success of this video to its humor and playfulness. Persia’s reputation as an educator who leverages her playfulness has garnered wide attention and resulted in a short feature, produced by San Francisco’s KQED Public Media in the summer of 2017, that highlighted her teaching philosophy (see Figure 2). In the following we focus on the signature *playful queerness* of Persia’s *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, a playfulness that was evident in the “Google, Google, Apps, Apps” video and also permeates her practices in other contexts.

Figure 2

Screengrab of Video Feature on Persia (Escobar, 2017)



In our recent interview with Persia, she commented that her playfulness and humor have and continue to be necessary for her survival as a marked queer person. In the context of her upbringing in Southeast Los Angeles, she expressed that play mediated her relationship to hypermasculine *cholos* in her community. She explains:

I was able to make friends with everyone because of my humor and my, I don’t know, my silliness I guess, and the ambiguousness of like “is he really saying sexual queer shit or is he just fucking around?” So I played that very fine line and that was my saving grace. (Interview, February, 2020)

Persia links her queerness to playfulness and humor in explicit ways, explaining that because she has and continues to be markedly queer, she needs to be funny. Persia explained that even as an out queer teacher (where he goes by his given name Socrates) humor and playfulness continues to be a tool for navigating heteronormative spaces where he's been able to "get away with a lot of things because of [his] humor and [has] been safe because of [his] humor" (Interview, February, 2020).

Persia's *playful queerness* manifests in her virtual presence. In addition to her viral "Google, Google, Apps, Apps" video, Persia has collaborated and starred in other music videos that lampoon elite culture: "Santa Claus is Coming" (2011) and "Stop Being Poor" (2014). In these videos, Persia presents a caricature of the hopes and desires of (presumably white) women. Both videos make use of sexual innuendo as well as other playful narrative devices to critique the impending sanitation of the San Francisco Bay, particularly in a time of systemic displacement of the more undesirable "poor" queer people of color. Throughout the years, Persia has been cognizant of how her online activity permeates to other parts of her life, specifically in her work with youth as a teacher. Persia, as Socrates, has reported instances where his students will quote from videos that she has published online, often replacing curse words with more child-friendly ones. For instance, in 2017, Persia posted Excerpt 1 on her social media accounts:

Excerpt 1: Facebook, 2017

When you're on a field trip with the kids and suddenly they start singing, "Google Google Apps Apps, I just wanna be white. For xmas Gurl. Where the fudge are you moving to?" I CANNOT!

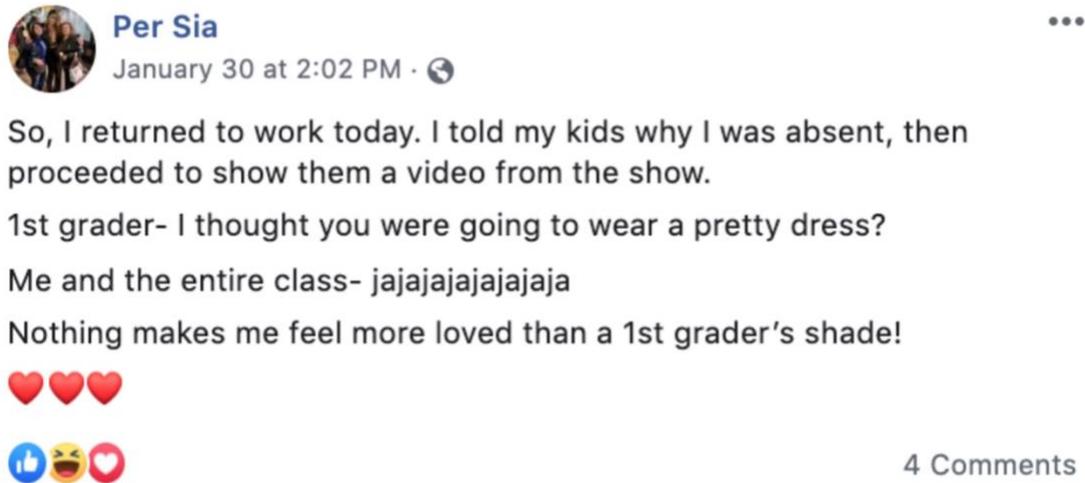
Beyond references to these online artifacts, Socrates also enacts the *playful queer pedagogical practices* with his youth in the classroom. Currently, Persia works as a first-grade teacher at a school in San Francisco, California. In her interview she expressed that she often finds herself enacting playful queer banter with her youth, namely the "throwing of shade" or "reading" each other. In a social media post from January 2020, Persia recounts an interaction with one of her students in Figure 3.

Here, Persia is referring to her absence from teaching due to her performing drag in a local theatre production called "Translating Selena." In her Facebook post, Persia illustrates a

moment where she brings her identity as a drag performer into the context of the classroom that then offers an opening for her student to engage in a *read* of her clothing choice.

Figure 3

Facebook Post by Persia



She confesses that this type of *shade-throwing* is a common practice in her classroom, and is meant to flatten the teacher/student hierarchies. However, she is clear that she draws a distinction between a good-spirited *read* and mean-spirited attack. Moreover, she underscores that this *queer pedagogical practice* is not enacted simply on a relational level but is part of the intentional design of the social organization of learning (Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) of her classrooms. Persia explains how playfulness is imbedded in the design of learning environments where she can have “order in chaos”:

Something that I’ve learned over the years is that when I have classes that like say “this is the goal, these are the supplies, now go.” And so when you give kids agency then, it’s, they’re all engaged and that’s been most of my classes, even with the, quote, uhm, the most troubling, you know, groups of students. (Interview, February, 2020)

This statement illuminates a pedagogical stance that recognizes the heterogeneity of the students in her classroom and a desire to re-mediate (Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009)—or fully transform at the system level—the deficit lenses that are often used to assess young people at her school. It is our claim that a *playful jotería pedagogical* stance is what undergirds her practice. We further contend that the permeability of her online queerness (as seen in

Excerpt 1) allows for this *jotería* to be instrumentalized in the classroom in powerful ways that impact learning for youth.

Alvarez (2014) reminds us that a *jotería* pedagogue “[r]equires the teacher to share some of his or her own story, to become vulnerable, to be a translator and an architect of bridges between different worlds” (p. 218). Indeed, Persia does this as part of her normative practice as a *cyborg* who blends her online, in-person, drag queen, and teacher identities across her everyday contexts. Through her unabashed queer performance across the digital and face-to-face stage, she ushers her young learners to imagine a *queered* social organization of learning in her classrooms where the encapsulation of formal and informal learning spaces (Engeström, 1991) and teacher/student hierarchies are ruptured, mediated by playful queer practices such as “throwing shade.”

Pedagogies of *Lo Sucio*

Our second example of *cyborg jotería pedagogies* revolves around the practices of San Francisco drag queen Reina de Aztlán. A self-professed activist drag performer, Reina is a mainstay of the alternative drag scene. Reina also works as a PrEP and HIV Benefits and Navigation Manager at a local non-profit organization. We first met Reina through mutual friends who are active in the queer health community of the San Francisco Bay Area. We soon became familiar with her edgy, avant-garde drag performances as well as her prolific online presence. In our conversation with her, Reina de Aztlán admits that her everyday activist work and paid job are inextricably entwined and that her online presence is an important part of her practices across the multiple terrains that she navigates. Reina further underscores that her engagement in all she does is marked by an unapologetic grittiness, which we have come to describe as pedagogical practices of *lo sucio*.

Reina de Aztlán boasts an online following of close to five thousand on Facebook. She reports that her following consists of members of the diverse communities that she is part of, including the drag community, the queer of color community, the immigrant community, and the AIDS health communities. In this respect, her online presence has a broad reach and therefore has far-reaching pedagogical potential. Reina states that she curates her content in ways that are intentionally provocative and *unsanitized* in order to have impact in these varied social networks.

Reina is no stranger to controversy and public displays of resistance. In 2015, she was prominently featured in news coverage of a protest calling for an end to the detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants, specifically those who are LGBTQ and have been reported to be abused in detention facilities (Schiavenza, 2015). She, along with four other protestors, were arrested for failure to disperse after an unlawful assembly. The news report (abc7 Eyewitness News, 2015) and images of her arrest were distributed across her social network, sparking conversation and admiration from members of her intersecting communities, namely the queer and immigrant ones (see Figure 4). In her work, Reina explains her position:

The things that I still have tension within this thing around not wanting to conform, not wanting to be, you know, respectable; in the way that I speak, in the way that I dress, in the way that I engage with folks, like at work, or just everywhere. Blurring that line between like professionalism and protocols and like actually connecting with folks. Because from my experience in the healthcare system, these notions of professionalism, these strict boundaries, these protocols, are not just symbolically or figuratively, but they [are] quite literally killing people. (Interview, February, 2020)

Reina de Aztlán's aversion to institutional protocols and respectability stem from personal experiences through the juvenile detention system and being hyper-surveilled and criminalized as a young queer person of color. She also is open about her substance use at a young age. In this sense, she states that for many the interrogation of systemic oppression of people of color is theoretical but for her it is embodied. In our view, Reina animates her *jotería pedagogy* by historicizing these embodied experiences, in ways that are intentionally counter-hegemonic and lack respectability.

Reina de Aztlán's lack of reverence for respectability manifests as a *sucio* aesthetic and pedagogical practice. While she appreciates and is involved in many genres of drag in the San Francisco Bay Area, she is especially drawn to the grotesque, punk, and anti-establishment aesthetic which can carry a strong political message. Further, she states that "the gross is fun and so natural," underscoring that often Latinx drag has to be sanitized and refined to be accepted and legitimized: a cultural practice in the Latinx drag scene that she aims to disrupt. In our interview with her, Reina states that she draws a lot of inspiration from other Latinx activist drag performers who also engage in *lo sucio* and the political. One significant inspiration

is the late Hija de Perras who was active in Chile and engaged in political drag performances. Hija de Perra's work inspired Reina to produce and perform a faux scatological piece at a San Francisco bar. The performance garnered much attention on social media, at times lauded for its avant-gardeness and others derided for its shock value.

Figure 4

Screenshot of Video Showing Reina de Aztlán Being Arrested



However, Reina's performances on the digital and face-to-face stage exalt the profane and unclean as part of the human condition. More importantly, she foregrounds human desire and pleasure that can often involve sex and consuming substances. Reina aims to push the limits of representation on both the digital and in-person stage in an attempt to reach those members of her community who can often feel ostracized for their drug use or other social practices that are seen as profane. Relatedly, Reina explained her desire to trouble the false dichotomy of addiction and sobriety: a dichotomy that she feels leads to the social disposal of individuals who do not conform to these politics of respectability.

Social media posts that arguably glorify drug use, like the one shown in Figure 5, offer openings for Reina's followers to have conversations about substance use that are not framed in the deficit. This is important for Reina's work in public health with vulnerable communities,

⁵ Hija de Perra was a famous drag performer in Chile. Her performances were characterized by a strange, humorous, and hypersexual aesthetic. She was known for her constant critique of Chilean conservative society.

specifically queer people of color. Reina confesses that she does not have sufficient data to determine the broader impact of her pedagogy of *lo sucio* but that she has had individuals tell her that her posts that are accompanied with commentary have helped shift their perceptions on addiction which often hinge on socially discarding those who use substances or forced into coercive rehabilitation.

Figure 5

Facebook Post Caricaturing Reina’s Use of Substances



Instead, these individuals have communicated to Reina their shifted intentions:

This person is like literally saying, like “Here on out I’m able to, whoever I

encounter, approach with compassion, approach with love, with understanding.” And that’s just less people being ostracized, it’s less people, you know, being socially excluded or killed. (Interview, February, 2020)

Reina told us that several people have communicated these types of sentiments and shifts in their thinking about substance use, specifically from a perspective that offers connections on a compassionate level and aims to parse out the individual from broader structural narratives around the addiction. However, sometimes these *sucio* pedagogical moves are not well received by her communities, but she argues for maintaining a more critical view:

Like I said, I’d rather put myself out there and do the best that I can, and feel good and sometimes not, because it sucks you know, I lose friends. People will be like “Oh I have addiction stuff and you trigger me so I can’t talk to you anymore.” Uhm, and those kinds of things hurt, but it’s also like, at the end of the day for me it’s like greater than that relationship, it’s like countless people, literally being harmed because of the way that we see things and I respect people’s boundaries and triggers. But I often think triggers are confused with uncomfortability, as you may know, uhm and they’re just used to justify, you know on the very micro level, ending relationships and on the macro level incarcerating and killing people, and denying them health services, and denying them housing.

Reina de Aztlán is astutely aware of the broader impact of her *sucio cyborg jotería pedagogy* in facing structures of oppression head-on and the potential for changing those structures. Indeed, in her interview, she reveals that she often positions herself, both online and in-person, as a person who has used and continues to use substances, and whose life has been “fucked” up but, oftentimes, not because of drugs. Rather, she explains that her life has been difficult because of a racist juvenile justice system, the policing of her communities, and a faulty education system.

In her work, we believe that Reina enacts Vargas’s (2014), *lo sucio* aesthetic of “lewd, obscene, offensive hypersexual undisciplined bodies” (p. 716) that aids in “cultivat[ing] a presence and lingering perseverance of queer sex and joy within neoliberal hetero- and homonormative violences” (p. 715). She does so in ways that center the human condition as innately imperfect and that critically interrogate the structures that oppress peoples. In the context of a highly regulated society that often seeks to sanitize queer bodies of color, her *sucio*

cyborg pedagogical practices on the digital and face-to-face stage can be met and received varyingly. However, this does not make her pedagogy any less revolutionary.

RuPawl and Jotería Pedagogies of the Posthuman

We end with an example from a personal project involving our chihuahua named Xóchitl, also known as RuPawl, the world's first doggie drag queen. RuPawl emerged as an online creative project after multiple face-to-face interactions with strangers where they aggressively inquired about our dog's gender and were not satisfied with our usual response of "they haven't chosen one yet." In response, the first author, Dr. Lizárraga, created an online identity where they dressed the dog as cast members (Figure 6) from the popular reality television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*. From the onset, the content posted on RuPawl's Instagram and Twitter accounts were meant to underscore the performativity of gender (Butler, 2006) and how people's obsession with classifying the binary of gender extended to relationships with animals. In this regard, we became interested in examining how the online practices of an anthropomorphized chihuahua would engage with *posthuman cyborg jotería pedagogies* that imagine a queer world that considers a broader non-human ecology.

Figure 6

RuPawl Dressed as RuPaul's Drag Race Alum Ongina.



In many respects, RuPawl is a manifestation of both the aforementioned *playful* and *lo sucio cyborg jotería pedagogical* practice, by both engaging in meme culture and countering notions of respectability. Our pivot toward examining RuPawl's online presence and influence as a *posthuman jotería* is meant to underscore the ways in which digitized social media can mediate engagement around key socio-political issues even when the boundaries between the human and machine are blurred, and, indeed, the human face is not visible. We are especially compelled by Gough's (2004) guidance in seeing the "ways that the 'machineries' of texts constitute sociotechnical relations, and the textual and intertextual effects of cyborg relations in transgressing and transforming the discursive fields in which they move" (p. 255). That is to say, that if indeed a cyborg analytic can help us disrupt notions that there is an essential human, then how can a perceived non-human actant (RuPawl) help animate new ways of seeing and engaging in the world? We take heed from this examination of the cyborg and the posthuman to take a close look at how an anthropomorphized chihuahua, who dresses like popular drag queens, can mediate conversations around serious issues by leading with playfulness and their distinct *posthumanism*.

RuPawl has a considerable following on both Instagram and Twitter. Given the liminality of their identity (as a chihuahua who dresses in drag), RuPawl has a following that consists of drag queens (those formerly and currently on RuPaul's Drag Race and queens from local scenes), dog lovers, A-list celebrities, queer communities, and even gay pornography actors. However, they also have a solid following of prominent learning scientists and scholars of queer studies. In this regard, our canine avatar crosses the boundaries of the everyday and the academic, and of the respectable and *lo sucio*. Our claim is that this is facilitated by the *posthuman cyborg pedagogical practice* that obfuscates the human user (the first author of this piece). In one such instance, RuPawl engages in a serious conversation around the merits of a college education with a famous drag queen, winner of the eighth season of the reality television show RuPaul's Drag Race.

In the exchange captured in Figure 7, RuPawl responds to Bob The Drag Queen's initial claim that "college is the biggest and most successful scam" by offering a more nuanced perspective. Namely, our perceived non-human actant challenges the generalizing statement by offering a historical context, specifically in regards to how higher education (while faulty) can and has benefited non-dominant populations in important ways, economically and socially. Our

claim here is that this exchange was made possible by RuPawl’s intersectional celebrity status across multiple terrains: that of the drag community and that of the academic community.

Figure 7

RuPawl Twitter Discussion with Bob The Drag Queen



We propose that someone of Bob The Drag Queen’s celebrity, and status as a public figure, was comfortable engaging in an online conversation that was academic in nature, to the extent that it was being had with an anthropomorphized doggie drag queen. Further, the *posthuman*

jotería pedagogical practice was directed both at the celebrity drag queen and the broader audience that both Bob The Drag Queen and RuPawl reach in their social networks.

RuPawl's playful *posthuman* pedagogy is akin to Gough's (2004) exploration of the enigmatic cyberneticist Mayakovsky's children's book called *Cyberantics*. As explained by Gough (2004), this oeuvre reported Mayakovsky's purported research findings of a cybernetic ant that he had created and introduced into an ant colony. The book was widely derided by the research community because of its fantastical claims and genre. However, Gough (2004) notes a key feature of the book that is instrumental to our argument here:

As I argue at much greater length elsewhere, much fiction (including children's fiction but especially science fiction) is 'more faithful to the aims' of education than the 'dogma and conceit' of many contemporary education texts . . . Also, by being cast within the conventions of a children's talking animal story, *Cyberantics* invites the reader to bring the wide range of cultural meanings associated with this literary mode to bear on the text, such as mocking and subverting the modern scientific practice of maintaining clear distinctions between humans and other beings. (p. 258)

RuPawl, much like *Cyberantics*, subverts the conventions of human to human interactions and pedagogy. As a *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, RuPawl's practices further queer the boundaries of being and knowing by proposing that a queer identity and engagement with deep social issues can extend beyond the human. This was in no small part due to the fact that RuPawl is voiced by the first author who embodies a queer identity and is active in social issues through his scholarship.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

In our view, the vignettes presented in this article illustrate the powerful learning and transformation facilitated by *cyborg jotería pedagogies*—manifesting as practices of *playfulness*, *lo sucio*, and the *posthuman*. From our previously developed analytic, we see these practices as nuanced instantiations of a digital queer gesture that “blends the semiotic affordances of video, audio, and text in the digital realm, [and] is animated, hybridized, and revived across time and space to inspire queer Latinxs to disrupt taken-for-granted normative practices and discourses” (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019, p. 154). As exemplified by Persia, Reina de Aztlán, and RuPawl, everyday queerness, while seemingly innocuous, has the power to catalyze learning across digital and physical ecologies.

It is important to note that there are likely other *cyborg jotería pedagogical* practices that are not accounted for in this article. Further, we hope that we have made clear that all of our participants enacted the three described practices to varying degrees. In this regard, while we have outlined three discrete *cyborg jotería pedagogical* practices through our examples, it is helpful to see them as part of a repertoire of practices that can often be enacted in combination depending on an individual's intent (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Our work aims to contribute to understandings of how to leverage everyday practices of non-dominant individuals. Moreover, we offer considerations for how to design learning opportunities for non-dominant communities in a digitally-mediated ecology that is unprecedented in its connectivity, with access to flows of information and texts on a global and local scale, as Castells (1996, 2011, 2015) reminds us. In this regard, researchers and practitioners must take heed of broad shifts in how access to knowledge is becoming increasingly democratized and how it has charted new possibilities for social transformation (Couldry, 2012; De Kosnik, 2016). An equity focus on teaching and learning in a *cyborg* world is particularly pressing in these uncertain times.

Through the examples described, we offer openings for exploring the critical pedagogical moves that everyday digital technologies can mediate, specifically in advancing *cyborg jotería pedagogies*. We have much to learn specifically from *cyborg drag queens*, whose use of media across physical and digital terrains contribute to the learning of broader communities in ways that shift perceptions around the displacement and visibility of queer Latinx communities. Our analysis reveals that participants actively drew on their liminality to provoke and mobilize communities in local contexts, and beyond, around socio-political issues. In this regard, we see Persia, Reina de Aztlán, and RuPawl engaging in transformative pedagogies that are made visible and historicized in the digital and physical world. By amplifying the powerful transformative work of these *nepantlera* (Pacheco, 2014) *cyborg drag queens*, we highlighted how non-dominant populations leverage and repurpose digital instruments to organize for new social futures.

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