

## EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

### Remixing: Sampling Memory, Experience, and Words

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Mercury is in retrograde. My friend told me to take precautions. Over the course of a day, three people reach out to share ways in which they feel unsafe on campus, at home, and in their jobs. Their concerns are real, and we sit together and discuss care plans. Save and safe get mixed up in my head; these stories are hard to hold. I cannot use my editorial skills to order them. (As much as I might want.) After work I need comfort. I visit my mom where I eat a warm bowl of stew and let her regale me with the adventures of her outdoor rescue cats. It calms me, resets my inner compass.

Afterward, when I pull out of her house, it is late; I turn onto a dark New Mexico highway and a man dressed in all black is walking erratically up the left-hand lane. I don't see him when I turn onto the lane and then I shriek as I instinctually swerve to avoid him. But rather than get out of the road, he lunges from the left lane to the right, towards the front of my car. I think, "Oh shit! This guy is trying to kill himself!" I jerk the steering wheel, but he manages to slap the side of my car. Boom! "Oh shit! He's trying to kill me!" My hands start shaking as I maneuver my vehicle to the shoulder a way up the road. I am screaming at my car: Call 911! Call 911! It does not comply. In the rearview mirror I see two, then three, then four other cars swerve and pull over. All our hazard lights pound like the blood rushing to our heads.

My heart is in my throat when I finally get through to dispatch, "There's a man on the highway in front of the movie theater, he lunged in front of

my vehicle. Did I hit him?" I have to think. "No. No. But four other cars behind me also pulled over," I begin to sob with the realization, "I think they might have."

"We're on our way, Ms. Trujillo."

I hang up. In the quiet moment after the call, tears flood my eyes and I sit on the side of the road and cry until I see the red flashes of sirens arriving. I find myself rolling the words save and safe over and over in my mind again. The officer takes my info and tells me to be careful driving home. Then I wonder, how did dispatch know my name?

This is the true sequence of events that occurred on my way home from a hard day after a series of very hard days. I planned to relay to my lead editor why my piece—this piece—was going to be late, even later than it already was. In that version of events, I try to be subtly emphatic that this is how my whole week has been! Truly! Can you believe it? I bet it's because Mercury is in retrograde. And when I re-read what I've typed, I think no. This is unbelievable, and yet it happened.

I shift and tell myself that I need to get this done. My night has been too bizarre; I have to do something with this leftover adrenaline, and it dawns on me as I type that the authors of this section play with just such moments. This issue's creative writing is rendered in flashes of reality, remixes of theory, and our shifting relationship to words that form pearls from grains of sand in our mind. These pieces ask us to roll a single kernel of thought over and over to create words and ideas anew. These pieces ask the reader to take fragments of memory and trust that the author will guide us to a resolution, or unifying thought. The word that kept running through my mind as I read and re-read these pieces is remix. How are Chicana, Latina, Afro-Latina

and Indigenous women writing allegories that bring the fantastic, yet often unseen, parts of our everyday lives to the forefront of consideration? They remix memory, experience and language; the authors write creative non-fiction essays and two collections of poems that engage us in deep metaphor, meta-dialog, and metonymy. And just like my return trip home, I think, this 'ish is about to get deep.

Most well-known from hip-hop, remixing is the act of creating art by taking samples from pre-existing materials to combine them into a new song. In the essay, "Regressive and Reflexive Mashups in Sampling Culture" by Eduardo Navas (2020), the author asserts that with a remix "the audience is always expected to see within the work of art its history," which was not always so in modern Western aesthetics, whose preoccupation was art that stood on its own. The remix is always referential to the ethos of the original subject, but it creates a new artwork that is always already in relationship with its own history. In this spring 2020 issue, the essays and poems the authors have produced are not only remixing songs, but rather remixing memories, definitions, and familiar theories. These pieces insist that we see the new story emerging from the histories and their sources, that context is as much a character as the narrators.

In Kimberlee Pérez's essay, "South of Living," we are invited into a structured stream of consciousness that allows us to time travel through the narrator's experiences and her learned rituals of survival as a mixed-race Chicana lesbian through reflections on a series of cab hails. Each taxi hail builds on the previous, and in the intermittent reflections on moments in her personal history, the author shares how it takes years to form understanding and contemplates how time bends and folds into itself. She

reflects, “While cells regenerate in seven years, in the five years that separate Chicana lives whole worlds can be created and destroyed and built up again” (150). The story is her history.

Claudia Rodriguez’s four poems remix critical theory, popular music, and other poetry to create what collectively reads like a love song mix-tape to her influences. She evokes Joy Harjo through framework, she makes a taco out of Emma Pérez’s theory, she writes a love song to Chavela Vargas and haunts the corners of her poems with traditional *inditas* (traditional folk songs depicting *cautivas*) and Mexica gods. These poems stand alone, but together are a powerful *homenaje* to how we seek nourishment from writers and artists to gain strength to provide strength to others. There is an unnamed critic’s voice inserted into the last poem in the collection, “Paradigm Shift,” who admonishes, “Ew, this is bad./Her shits not theory!” (160). But this poet has no problem just picking up another corn tortilla to serve us theory tacos. (Yes, theory tacos— it’s fun and it’s brilliant.)

In “Predatory Reciprocity and the Politics of Chingona Fierce,” Rosanna Alvarez invites the reader into the inner thoughts of a Chicana/o/x studies adjunct instructor narrating her experience in academia. Alvarez remixes those unwritten codes of conduct that reinforce the inequities and fault lines between the words adjunct faculty— how that tiny space creates a chasm within the collective culture of academia that is based on “the reflex response of pimping [adjunct] labor in deference to this lopsided system” (165). There is an absent presence of specificity that often details this genre of essay, the narrator even speaks to the lack of detail, but it is those spaces that this essay creates the imaginative opportunity to fill those blanks with the stories we have heard or experienced in the academy.

Our final contributor is Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, who offers us a final thought on bringing “little fragments of a simple life” to the page, to remind us that “a poem is a meeting/a gift to our clan” (167). The narrator of this poem, like the narrators of the previous pieces in this section, celebrates the power of Latinas/xs writing pieces of their lives into focus. Espinosa-Dulanto’s poems insinuate a mythos, give us larger than life women spirits to inspire us as we are “piecing parts of [our] own [lives]/all together letters and words/ building a text, rebuilding life” (170). She ends her second poem, “Just Life,” with an image of a cosmic hug by a universal circle of women—perhaps grandmothers—to assure us that we get to continue trying and to, as Helena Maria Viramontes has said, “live life like a revision (2010).”

I’d like to note that two of our authors for this section, Kimberlee Pérez and Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, participated in the 2019 *Chicana/Latina Studies* Creative Writing Workshop held as part of the MALCS Summer Leadership Institute at Amherst University. The creative writing workshop is a great way to take a strong piece and strengthen it, to hone your arte in the company of other artists. As I read the revisions of Kimberlee and Miryam’s writing, I was taken back to the support, laughter, and generous dialogues that helped to shape the pieces, and I could see how these writers took in and re-shaped areas of their work in powerful ways. In particular, I want to comment on the importance of sharing work in a brave space and being open to revision prior to the submission process—a first draft is not publishable, even if we can see the brilliance in that first stroke.

Prior to the COVID19 pandemic, we were planning to focus this year’s creative writing workshop on the in-between spaces of Chicana/x and Latina/x non-fiction. In addition to workshopping individual submissions, we hoped to dialogue about creative non-fiction, especially regarding the

critical impact of testimonios and auto-ethnographies, and other writing that blurs between editorial/political/journalistic/scholarly/creative voice. In my years as creative writing editor, I can see the impact that social media has had on the types of essays we receive (as of recent, the majority of our submissions are non-fiction). For all the opportunities that online publications provide, it is also insisting that we discuss how ever-changing writing genres are and are not traditional creative writing. As a journal, we are starting to ask ourselves if we may need an additional section dedicated to these nepantla essays, that can often traverse writing styles from academic to creative to journalism and back again within one piece. In addition to a space for our own work, participants in this year's creative writing workshop will help *Chicana/Latina Studies* think about these issues. We are in the process of possibly moving the workshop online; please check the journal website for updates.

"Now, that's enough," I think as I finish this commentary late into the night. After a lifetime using a computer, I still have to remind myself to save. Save your documents. Save your life. As I navigate my haphazard filing taxonomy, my phone rings. It's 911 dispatch calling to tell me that the officers on the scene were able to get the person in crisis to the hospital. He hadn't been hit. The dispatcher says, "Y'all were so upset, we thought we'd let you know." I exhale and say thank you, "I'm glad to hear he's safe." Mercury is still in retrograde, but at least now the commentary is done, and I can sleep.

## References

- Eduardo Navas. 2020. *Remix Theory* » *Archivio* » *Regressive and Reflexive Mashups in Sampling Culture*, 2010 Revision. Remixtheory.net. <https://remixtheory.net/?p=444> [Accessed 25 Feb. 2020].
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