

## Performativity in Yuyi Morales's *Dreamers*

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This essay considers scenes of policing and transgression in Yuyi Morales's *Dreamers*, a picturebook memoir about Morales's immigrant experience. Depictions of (im)migrant and refugee<sup>1</sup> experiences in contemporary United States picturebooks illustrate various forms of rule-breaking with varying degrees of danger—from ignoring no trespassing signage at a local fishing spot in Bao Phi's *A Different Pond* (illustrated by Thi Bui), to evading La Migra in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Friends from the Other Side* (illustrated by Consuelo Méndez); or, contending with migrant predators<sup>2</sup>, ambiguously depicted as human traffickers and/or cartel gangs and/or border police as in Jairo Buitrago's *White Rabbits* (illustrated by Rafael Yockteng) and Duncan Tonatiuh's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale* to circumventing the structurally violent bureaucracy of the immigrant process. Often the semiotic interplay of narrative and image, or imagetexts,<sup>3</sup> in scenes of (im)migrant transgression leverage visual cues to signal the act or moment of transgression, often without explicit textual exposition; in turn, prompting exegesis about what these scenes may communicate about the way (im)migrants negotiate the state. If we agree that children's literature socializes children (González 2009), doing the ideological work of entrenching a recurring set of systems and ideas that maintain a social, political, economic structure, what then might scenes of transgressions in picturebooks impart about (im)migrant subjecthood? I'm interested in the ideological instability and malleability of the sign occurring in imagetexts of (im)migrant transgressions. In particular, how might the picturebook inflect ways of looking and constructing the (im)migrant figure with different messages for subaltern readers? And in inflecting ways of looking, what might these imagetexts do? Specifically, in the case of *Dreamers*, what might its imagetext say and *do* about the American Dream to those sin papeles, the undocumented, incarcerated, separated, stateless, refugee immigrant child?

I examine these questions by reading two double-page spreads in Yuyi Morales's picturebook memoir *Dreamers*. I argue how Morales relies on linguistic assets that mark her alterity as an immigrant to assert transgressive agency in negotiating and exceeding the dominant culture's attempts to police her behavior. Ultimately, Morales's transgressions are made visible through her illustrations, which this essay will show, model a rejection of the state through linguistic acts—specifically, performative speech acts and critical witnessing—leveraging both locution and material objects which embody the conditions of possibility for a dynamic and everchanging cultural perpetuity that rejects the assimilationist ideology of the American Dream. The first section of this essay discusses performative behavior as locution and the second discusses critical witnessing in the material object.

### Picturebook Performativity: Locution, Movidas y de los Imagetext

Laurence R. Sipe's theory of transmediation in picturebooks offers a semiotic analysis to map what occurs in the "conversation between words and pictures" (101). Building on Peircean semiotics, Sipe explains that transmediation is the reading or translation between sign systems, where sign systems include the triangulation of 1) an object (the form/symbol/word/picture); 2) a representamen (the concept/meaning/actual materiality/or performative command done by the object); and, 3) an interpretant (the reader who "tells us something about the meaning of that relationship" (102) between the object and representamen or, in Saussurean terms, the signifier

and signified. The interpretant is key in Sipe's formulation because it is the interpretant that enacts an ongoing give and take between words and images in reading picturebooks. That is, in moving between the sign systems emergent in the words and the sign systems emergent in the visual images, the interpretant produces knowledge: "For in picture books, we must oscillate, as it were, from the sign system of the verbal text to the sign system of the illustrations ... Whenever we move across sign systems, 'new meanings are produced,' because we interpret the text in terms of the pictures and the pictures in terms of the texts in a potentially never-ending sequence" (102). Bringing the performative to this formulation of semantic meaning-making is particularly critical as investigating picturebooks through the analytic of performance studies offers an understanding of what *Dreamers*, as a text, "does in the world, what it does politically and materially" (Muñoz, interview in "What is Performance Studies?").

While we may attend to the "never-ending sequence" or inexhaustible play of interpretation that the imagetext in *Dreamers* may unfold, readers cannot ignore that the picturebook's creation, and its publication in 2018, is a direct artistic response<sup>4</sup> to the contemporary, but not historically unique, relentless white supremacist hate and political/militaristic machinations against (im)migrant and refugee children.<sup>5</sup> Since its publication, the shift between U.S. federal administration from right-wing conservative to liberal democratic power has not changed the actual biopolitical management of children and young people crossing into the United States southern border—a biopolitics of cruelty that obscenely incarcerates children, indefinitely separating children and young people from their parents and caretakers. *Dreamers* is a political work, a type of aesthetic political act whose context as a rejection to the cruel anti-immigrant governmentality remains salient today. Thus, an understanding of what *Dreamers* does politically and materially remains urgent.

Duncan Tonatiuh's distinction between the archive and the repertoire—a key formulation in performance studies—helps us consider what *Dreamer* does politically and materially. In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* Taylor distinguishes the archive from the repertoire. Taylor describes how the archive — "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs" — embus memory with a stabilizing, fixed, documentable, institutionalizing, enduring, and often misperceived objective power (19): "[T]he so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge ... on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (19-20). While the archive may be misread as transcending time and/or space by enabling the seeker to "go back" in time/space through the medium of archival material to "reexamine," trace or uncover some past history (19), the ephemeral repertoire of embodied and transferable knowledges are often *not* attributed the same authority, particularly at the site of disciplinary strongholds and canonical investments privileging writing systems over oral, visual or otherwise performed systems. Yet, Taylor theorizes that the performative, i.e. the ephemera of repertoires, also does the work of creating and perpetuating knowledges. Taylor explains:

My particular investment in performance studies derives less from what it *is* than what it allows us to *do*. By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storying, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by 'knowledge.' This move, for starters, might prepare us to challenge the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies ... Embodied

expression has participated and will probably continue to participate in the transmission of social knowledge, memory, and identity pre- and postwriting (16).

The picturebook as an art form situates in both the archive *and* the repertoire. As literary works, often maintained, collected, and organized in libraries, picturebooks offer a record of literary canons, counter-canons, offer a source from which to trace economic, political, geographical, curricular trends, anxieties, social forces, etc. Indeed, content analysis and statistical methods form significant approaches in the study of the picturebook and its historiography. Yet, the performative aspects of picturebooks are undeniable, particularly in the field of children's library services and storytimes. Augusta Baker and Ellin Greene in *Storytelling: Art and Technique*—a mainstay text in Library and Information Sciences curriculum—map how the craft and technique of storytelling formed a bedrock in the establishment of library services for children in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Children's librarians during the formative years in the institutionalization of children's services underwent systematic "rigorous training" in the craft of storytelling—skills of orality and formal public performance including "affected speech and gestures of elocution" (Baker and Greene 4) the memorization of folkloric stories and rhymes—as part of a standardized professionalization model (McDowell "Paradoxes" 33) practiced up until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Children's librarians of this era read aloud picturebooks to complement their storytelling performances during story times. While contemporary children's librarians no longer undergo similar training in storytelling craft the picturebook has remained a central object of the storytime space.<sup>6</sup>

Baker and Greene describe the performative power of storytelling and what storytelling *does* at the level of affect—a gift that cultivates good relations and transference of knowledge:

Lewis Carroll called stories 'love gifts.' It was an apt description, for the story is, indeed, giving a gift. Storytelling brings to the listeners heightened awareness—a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life. This nurturing of the spirit-self comes first. It is the primary purpose of storytelling, and all other uses and affects are secondary.

Storytelling is a sharing experience. When we tell, we show our willingness to be vulnerable, to expose our deepest feelings, our values. That kind of nakedness that says you care about what you're relating invites children to listen with open minds and hearts. Enjoying a story together creates a common experience. Storytelling, properly done, produces a relaxed, restful feeling. It establishes a happy relationship between teller and listener, drawing people closer to one another, adult to child, child to child. This rapport carries over into other areas as well, for children tend to have confidence in the person who tells stories well. (Baker and Greene 18)

In the context of children's library storytimes, the affective bounty of storytelling, be it oral cuentos or picturebook read alouds, also resonates at the quotidian level, or what Taylor calls "'the aesthetics of everyday life'" (15). This aesthetic space is necessarily political as everyday life requires a negotiation, if not an engagement with the broad governmentality around structures racial capitalism and settler colonialism that organize social forces, broadly. Performance, theoretically and in praxis, "carries the possibility of challenge, even self-challenge, within it ... [a mode for transference of knowledges and a] means of intervening in the world" (Taylor 15.) Here, Baker and Greene's theorizing on the affective power of storytelling, its own type of

intervention in the world where stories embodied in sound, vocal inflection, movement of the body, gestures volleyed from teller to listener through story, activate imagination, visualization, and play (22). And to this, Taylor’s question — “How does expressive behavior (performance) transmit cultural memory and identity?” (xvi) comes into play. Moreover, how does expressive behavior, the repertoire, embodied through the performativity of the picturebook, enable a vehicle for a type of cultural transference that denies assimilation, denies acquiesces to domination and foster cultural perpetuity in dynamic ways? My reading of the following double-page spread in *Dreamers* shows how Morales deploys a repertoire of linguistic moves that both mark her alterity as an immigrant and empowers a political resistance, if not rejection, the dominant culture’s attempts to police the (im)migrant.

Building on personal memories, Morales describes in her picturebook memoir *Dreamers* how she and her son “became immigrants” after moving from Xalapa, Veracruz in Mexico to California’s Bay Area (n.p.). Morales describes her negotiation with the dominate culture, recalling: “There were so many things we didn’t know. Unable to understand and afraid to speak, we made a lot of mistakes” (n.p). (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Ay, no hablamos el inglés. From Yuyi Morales’s *Dreamers* (2018).

Morales expands the textual narrative (Nikolajeva and Scott 12) in three vignettes to visually elaborate the “so many things” she experienced as a newly immigrated person. The key imagetext across the vignettes centers Morales’s deployment of Spanish in her negotiations with the English language and the state as figured of the police. The first vignette shows Morales and her son. Morales holds a phone to her ear, with her other hand she holds her child’s hand, who himself holds with his hand a toy phone on wheels. A speech balloon carries the words coming from the other end of the telephone line (“Hello, ma’am ...”), interrupts Morales’s attention to her son. Morales lets out an “¡Ay!” also visually depicted in a speech balloon. She uses this same

expression, Ay!, in the second vignette which shows mother and son translanguaging their reading of a BART metro transit map, whose San Francisco streets they read as “Embarcadero, Poguel Esete (Powell Street Station), Cibic Center, 16teache Esete Misión” (n.p.). The third vignette takes up the entire second page in the double spread. Here we see Morales bathing her child in a public fountain<sup>7</sup>, recalling the Vaillancourt Fountain at Embarcadero Plaza. A police officer, arms akimbo, baton dangling from the waist, back facing from the viewers perspective, takes up a large portion of the left-side of the page. Surveilled, her behavior policed in this public space, Morales looks up at the cop and lets out another “¡Ay!”

The expression “Ay!” is not singular in meaning. Its connotations are multiple, complex and dynamic. I read Morales’s “ay” as a performative in that the “issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin 6). Ay is performative in locution and its varied inflections are understood as such by those who can decode its multiple uses and doings. Morales’s “ay” signals to these knowers and invites them into linguistic play. Players, interlocutors, will know that depending on the situation and depending on the intended effect, “ay” may work innocuously or deliberately to express any of the following: frustration, preoccupation, surprise, a warning or even a lighthearted low-grade expletive, etc.

The picturebook as an artform is the perfect medium for this type of interpretive play. W.J.T. Mitchell’s formulation of imagetext meditates upon the entanglement of images and words working together. This relationship, while mutual, co-constitutive, and at times, but not necessarily, complementary, does not limit the text and image to communicate one thing. Imagetexts engage meaning-making processes between text and image simultaneously but not statically. For Mitchell, this meaning-making process also holds the ability to destabilize and interrupt the perceived “heterogeneity of representational structures within the field of the visible and readable” (88). Interrogations of the imagetext must necessarily contend with its non-compliance against any attempt to posit one way, or the best way, or even a scientific way for reading it. Interpretation of the imagetext in the picture book medium is a wide-open field. The situatedness of the viewer, particularly the child as the primary interlocutor of the picturebook, has bearing on the interpretive take.

Yet the child’s take is not neutral nor natural. Perry Nodelman reminds us that the pleasure of interpretation comes at the hand of a set of understood narrative conventions that give shape and order and thus meaning to the story being told in the picturebook. He writes: “The most significant fact about such representations is the degree to which we take them for granted ... it takes effort to become aware of the arbitrary conventions and distinctions we unconsciously take for granted, to see the degree to which that which seems simply natural is complex and artificial” (“Decoding the Images” 72). If we are to take on Nodelman’s challenge to read critically and make visible the ideological construction which narrative and visual conventions may hide, and by this very technique, reproduced, we might in turn ask what imagetexts like Morales’s effect for the subaltern child, the minoritarian child.

In their work on intertextuality in picturebooks, María José Lobato Suero and Beatriz Hoster Cabo assert the centrality of cultural knowledge to the aesthetic enjoyment and meaning-making that emerges from drawing connections between image and text. If all texts are intertextual and draw from references to other texts, what might it mean for the (im)migrant child to read *Dreamer* alongside associated texts that comprise the complex juridical and racialized discourses of the border? The picturebook situates the child as primary reader. How might then the alterity of the immigrant child in experiencing overlapping colonizations relate to what Ana González theorizes as the subversive socializing function characteristic of Latin American children’s literature? Might

immigrant transgressions and negotiations with the state, as depicted in picturebooks, serve as “lessons to learn [about] how to resist submission or submit with dignity; how to fight the odds and insist on cultural, if not political, independence; how to get what they want without appearing to do so or without angering the dominant class; how to speak through silence and have the last laugh”? (1). Does the picturebook as a socializing object smuggle in strategies to empower and encourage agency for children who must negotiate and contend with constructions (usually racialized and devalued) that circumscribe (and for some, literally incarcerate) them as immigrants?

In *Resistance and Survival: Children’s Narrative from Central America and the Caribbean*, Ann González theorizes a heuristic for reading the subversive in children’s literature which promotes a denaturalizing, defamiliarizing process that allows for unruly eyes with which to read the aesthetic. For example, Morales’s “mistakes” may communicate to a reader of the dominant culture how the immigrant complies and assimilates to the dominant culture. It’s a story of hope and happy endings, and perhaps assuages our complicity—gives us some relief—with systems that order and prohibit and regulate human value. After all, immigrants may learn from their “mistakes.” If they comply with the rules and meet the criteria, perhaps they may even be allowed “in.” Such is the reality of *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals*—*Dreamers*.

For *el Migrante*, the *Dreamer*, the *Clandestino* y el *Quebra Ley* (Manu Chao), Morales’s examples may communicate a capacity for risk-taking and agency at the site of language and movement across geographies and borders. These dynamic assets ensure more life. Morales renders their liveness, employing swills/clouds that move the reader’s eye from one vignette to the next. She offers multiple viewpoints, moving the reader’s perspective from police to mother and son. Throughout, Morales fashions herself in a skirt of chillante multicolored tongues/flames. Elena Avilés’s chillante aesthetics offers a way to read color Chicana picturebooks. Chillante colors “shout, yell, or brawl” (Avilés 40). When paired with artworks that resonate politically, chillante aesthetics communicate a “cry for social justice ... toward a new vision of storytelling in literature that queers traditional ideologies about how books can educate children” (Avilés 41).

Social justice storytelling through picturebooks connects to Avilés pedagogy and resonates with the testimonios and autoethnography in Chicana writing. Gloria Anzaldúa, describes the politics of writing one’s stories, or autohistorias: “[W]riting about one’s personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir ... is a personal essay that theorizes” (“now let us shift,” 578). Morales’s autohistoria renders her experience of being hailed as an immigrant in the U.S. The ongoing negotiations entailed in this interpellation tells a larger story about immigrant agency against, in and beyond the dominant culture. Morales evidences the subaltern’s negotiation with the terms that inscribe subjecthood in the dominant system. *Dreamers*, insofar as it may serve to socialize the child, communicates that despite being hailed as an immigrant, there is always a way to resist and exceed capture.

### Critical Witnessing through Material Objects

One day  
we bundled gifts  
in our backpack,  
and crossed a bridge  
outstretched like the universe.

—Yuyi Morales, *Dreamers*

*Dreamers* locates Morales's personal memories and experiences as a Mexican woman, a Veracruzana, who becomes an immigrant, a status circumscribed by the apparatus of U.S. immigration law and enforcement. This specificity then opens up to illuminate a collective immigrant experience—a collectivity whose networked meeting points rest on the necessity of the specific. The interplay between specific to collective operates simultaneously through a textual and visual dance. I suggest how Morales leverages specific memory practices to illuminate collective experiences or cultural memories that demands an intertextual reading that interrupts the normative assimilationist or American Dream script for immigrants. In moving from specific to collective, Morales avoids homogenizing the immigrant experience by indexing necessarily specific cultural objects, both material and discursive, that situate her lived experience. This specificity skillfully avoids homogenization of the immigrant experience through her aesthetic choices in composing the imagetexts used throughout her picture book.

W.J.T. Mitchell's term, imagetext describes the entanglement of images and words working together. This relationship, while mutual, co-constitutive, and complimentary, does not mean that text and image effect the same meaning. The imagetext engages meaning-making processes of both text and image simultaneously. For Mitchell, the "problem of the image/text" lies in this meaning-making process, and its ability to destabilize and interrupt the desire for scientification in the study of visual/literary texts. Because of the "heterogeneity of representational structures within the field of the visible and readable", interrogations dealing with imagetext must necessarily contend with its non-compliance with attempts and preoccupations that seek to posit a unifying science of the image.

The imagetext's resistance to homogenization of meaning-making allows us unruly eyes with which to read Morales's aesthetic choices in *Dreamers*. Morales's art-making process in *Dreamers* pulls from and embeds material artifacts specific to her home including "a brick from [her] house," a *comal*, a photograph of a mural in her hometown of Xalapa, Veracruz, plants from her garden, the childhood drawings she made while her mother sewed at night, along with acrylics, inks, brushes, and digital software. What does this eclectic mix of personal, domestic objects and painting media enact in the visual/verbal interplay characteristic of picture books? I explore this question by considering how Morales's material and visual assemblage of cultural objects activates critical memory and critical witnessing practices that center Mexicana and Chicana modes of holding and transmitting knowledge that in turn ensure cultural perpetuity.<sup>8</sup> Tiffany Ana López theorizes trauma and memory within Latina/o and cultural studies, situating her essay, "Reading Trauma and Violence in U.S. Latina/o Children's Literature," within this larger project to explore how Latinx writers of adult literature enact "critical witnessing" (25) in their works for children. López theorizes "critical witnessing" as a type of storytelling which leverages personal experiences of violence and trauma to create stories for healing and transformation. Gloria Anzaldúa's classic formulations of personal/social transformation (i.e. *mestiza consciousness* in *Borderlands=La Frontera*) inform López's analysis of how Latinx writers engage an ethics of care and responsibility for community well-being through storytelling as critical witnessing. Her analysis shares affinity with Rudine Sims Bishop's often-cited observation that African American storytelling counters the effects of marginalization by attending to psychoaffective traumas of racism ("Reframing" 25). Lopez's scholarship in children's literature resists disciplinary silos by engaging seriously Latinx writing for youth.

I read Morales's narrative and visual text through the lens of "remixing," or the collection and curation of site-specific objects in Chicana cultural production. Karen Mary Davalos's scholarship on Chicana feminist art and archival practices, theorizes remixing as a praxis of critical memory and critical witnessing which culls knowledges and stories embodied in traditional cultural objects to refashion contemporary imaginaries that articulate political strategies resistant to normalized scripts. To develop her theory of remixing as critical memory/critical witnessing praxis, Davalos examines Chicana artist Sandra de la Loza's digital performance piece "Action Portraits," which pulls images from the classic era of "Chicana/o murals painting of the 1970s, superimposing or digitally painting them onto the present-day bodies of Chicana/o/x muralists. Davalos demonstrates how de la Loza, in attending to the seemingly small visual details, motifs and patterns contained in this canonical archive of Chicano mural art, shifts the viewers' eye to see what had previously been invisible or hidden in an act of critical witnessing. Davalos explains how de la Loza, "by directing us to the multiplicity of these motifs ... undercuts the anticipated and conventional art discourse [of Chicana/or mural art]. By manipulating and reframing the very objects—East Los Angeles murals—that have become canonized as Chicana/o art, or that have been dismissed as cliché in some circles, "Action Portraits" invites a rethinking of Chicana/o art ... aesthetic in a framework that makes Chicana/o cultural production visible" (9). Important in Davalos's analysis is not only the remixing of visual iconography to create new ways of looking, but also the act of embedding this iconography onto the specificity of the Chicana/o/x body. By digitally painting the body, the racialized and gendered subjecthood of the Chicana/o/x body becomes obfuscated or taken over by the visual image imposed onto it. In this way, as Davalos points out how this visual vocabulary or iconography moves "between public and private representation," and thus effecting a "resonance of a communal location and place" (10).

Morales's aesthetic in *Dreamers* enacts a similar practice of critical witnessing by embedding material objects specific to those memory and location, to invite a meditation on the larger collective experience of migration. Morales, as her memoir *Dreamers* describes, did indeed cross a bridge in 1994 "with [her] two-month-old son, Kelly, from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico to El Paso, Texas" (*Dreamers* n.p.). It is this very event, this factual occurrence that then enables Morales's discursive move into the figurative, the metaphorical and the affective. For the "bridge" here exceeds Morales's specificity, becoming in turn an index to a collective crossing over to another place. The "bridge" signifies both the physical, geographical separation of homeland as well as the crossing over to a new home, a new culture, a new social system, and in this way brings the immigrant experience into sharp, concise focus.

This dance between the specific and the collective, further operates simultaneously in the visual text. Morales's Mexico, for example, is symbolized by the iconic Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl volcanoes. Known as the warrior and the sleeping woman, these volcanos spread across the background in this scene. The Iztaccíhuatl volcano or "La Mujer Dormida," "The Sleeping Woman," —her four peaks resembling the silhouette of a woman lying down—evokes the wide signification of "Dreamers" that Morales chooses for her title. The iconography and mythology of Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl remain central to contemporary Mexican and Chicano culture, as it was to ancient Aztec art and iconography. From the precolonial illustrated manuscripts of the Náhuas, to present-day visual art and cultural production, Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl remain the subject of art works, capturing the deep sensibility of Mexican and Chicano culture. Fernando del Paso and Guadalupe García Miranda's art history of the iconography of these two volcanos notes the essential connection between humans, nature, and cosmologies, describing how pictorial representation in pre-Hispanic codices were not limited to registering occurrences or



historic events, but rather, with one image, could capture complex cosmologies and beliefs of the people. (Miranda, 2005, 50). Here then, we see how Morales deploys the specific symbolism that this iconography has to Mexican culture, to then represent a wider, collective connotation where the visual vocabulary of the volcanoes comes to “symbolize the feminine power and the waking up of the power of people,” as Morales herself explains in a video blog about the making of *Dreamers*. (Morales “Dreamers Video”).

As the woman and child cross the bridge in this opening scene, we are reminded of what philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* regarding the power of images and their ability to register on affective and collectively relational levels:

*An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness (69).*

Morales, in her author’s note to *Dreamers* describes her experience reading picture books for the first time when she migrates to the Bay Area in California, an experience which, finds affinity with Anzaldúa’s formulation where images bridge an affective register between heart and mind, emotion and thinking, and I would add, between specific and collective. Morales writes:

We discovered the public library, and it was SPECTACULAR! I had never been to a place where you could just take books from the shelves without asking and without being scolded for taking them. And there were *picture* books, something I had not encountered before. I could not believe how beautiful and sturdy they were—and then, when I opened them, I was amazed at the power of their illustrations. Even though I could understand very few of the words, I realized that I could understand the story through those images—a realization that would come to inspire me later on (n.p.)

The affective register which Anzaldúa describes in her formulation of the power of the image, that is, the move from emotion/intuition to “conscious knowledge” has bearing on Morales’s experience with picture books. Morales’s affective response to the image is what enables her to understand the story, despite not knowing how to read the words. The movement from the space of personal register to a broader collective register, which the image affords, is reinforced by the rhetorical strategy and narrative effect nascent to the memoir as a genre. It makes sense then to connect here to Anzaldúa’s technology of writing auto-historia-teoría, which also moves from specific to collective as a way to stake political claims through the very act of writing. In her essay, “now let us shift ... the path of conocimeiento ... inner work, public acts,” Anzaldúa writes: “autohistoria... [is] a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one’s personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an auto-historia-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes” (“now let us shift,” 578). Morales employs a type of auto-historia-teoría rhetoric in order to stake political claims about what it means to be hailed as an immigrant in the U.S. and what the ongoing dynamic negotiation of this interpellation looks like by using her personal experience and memories of immigration to tell a larger collective history of immigrant resilience and resistance to the domination of the state.

Interpretation of the imagetext in the picture book medium is a wide-open field. The situatedness of the viewer, particularly the child as the primary interlocutor of the picture book, has bearing on the interpretive take. Yet this take is not neutral nor natural. Perry Nodelman reminds us that the pleasure of interpretation comes at the hand of a set of understood narrative conventions that give shape and order and thus meaning to the story being told in the picture book. He writes: “The most significant fact about such representations is the degree to which we take them for granted ... it takes effort to become aware of the arbitrary conventions and distinctions we unconsciously take for granted, to see the degree to which that which seems simply natural is complex and artificial” (72). If we are to take on Nodelman’s challenge to read critically and make visible the construction of narrative conventions represented and reproduced in picture books we might circle back to consider how Davalos’s remixing framework offers a method for critical interpretation which promotes a de-naturalizing or defamiliarizing process that allows us to see with unruly eyes and read aesthetic conventions in new ways, under different lights.

For example, Morales attends to the ways in which ideologies take shape discursively through naming or categorizing. In their journey north, Morales writes, “We became immigrants.” This is important because it evidences how the subaltern understands and negotiates the terms that go on to inscribe her subjecthood in the dominant system. Here, the narrator is both aware of being hailed by the state as an immigrant, in contra-distinction to the normalized dominant positionality of the non-immigrant, while at the same time resisting the state’s full capture. She and her child bring them stories and incredible gifts, strategically holding them in the backpack that she carries. The intentional curation of these gifts suggests their necessity. They are essential items needed to complete the journey.



Fig. 2 Bundled gifts. From Yuyi Morales’s *Dreamers* (2018).

In a guest blog about her creative process in making *Dreamers*, Morales describes how she visually renders these gifts without textually naming or categorizing them. She writes:

I brought stories, myths, legends passed on to me through generations. I brought the feelings of the clouds, the warm rain, and the blooming of the fog forests regions of Mexico, where I was born. I brought emotions and my passion. I brought playfulness and delight for life. I brought soothing and healing. I brought my intuition and my unique vision. I brought community and wisdom. I brought the power of the Son Jarocho, the music from the state of Veracruz. I brought my talents and creativity. I brought my capacity for happiness, and my light.

Assimilationists will read these gifts of the immigrant as offerings to the dominant order in exchange for their entry into the nation-state. Challenging this normative reading by examining how Morales locates the gifts she brings with her in such a way that exceeds assimilationist capture. A gift, as one definition in the OED notes, is something given at “the price of nothing.” Moreover, gifts connote “a faculty, power, or quality miraculously bestowed.” Or in Anzaldúan terms, *la facultad*.

I leverage these definitions to argue how the gifts which the narrator brings have resonance that exceed the frame of gifts as possession, commodity, or property value. This excess thus escapes the full interpellation of the state. In hailing the immigrant, the state wields a script for the immigrant, which positions the immigrant as having to contribute something of value to offer to the state in exchange for her acceptance or assimilation. Even the most perfunctory look at the history of U.S. immigration legislation will clearly show how narratives of beneficence, this supposed welcoming of the immigrant, comes at a cost. The cost is valued at what the immigrant can give to the state’s wealth and power in exchange for being accepted into the nation. However, the gifts which Morales enumerates in the contents of her backpack are all affective sensibilities and sensations that in turn cannot be quantified nor commodified in and of themselves.

Davalos’s remixing framework is helpful here too, especially considering her historiography of Chicana/o art collection. Davalos’s oral histories of Chicana/o art collectors illuminate how their curation practices that are not possessive. For many Chicana/o art collectors their curation of Chicana/o art works is not about showing off treasures of accumulation. Davalos notes how for Chicana/o/x art collectors the impetus for collecting aesthetic objects of cultural heritage is not about “consumption.” Rather, what often drives Chicana/o art collection is “a desire to respond to emotional and ethical—not financial—logic” (159). Indeed, Davalos’s oral history research with Chicana/o art collectors, such as Rosalie González, the first Chicana to attend MIT, evidences an aesthetic-political praxis vis-à-vis art collection. In describing her motivation behind collecting Chicana/o fine art, Gonzalez notes an activist imperative grounded in deep responsibility that she, as a Chicana has toward contributing to the well-being of her community, both in her immediate East Los Angeles and the broader Chicana/o community. She notes: “I don’t go out and protest a lot but I am furthering the cause by supporting the arts ... I always felt this responsibility to my community, to do well, and work hard, as my migrant farmworker grandparents did. I felt a sense of responsibility to take advantage of those opportunities and give back to the community, and collecting is part of it” (Gonzalez qtd. in Davalos 159).

Davalos further describes how Chicana/o/x art collection functions as a mechanism of “critical witnessing,” which serves as a mode of storytelling that attends to the erasures wrought by dominant narratives. Critical witnessing, as a mode of storytelling deploys a wide array of

material and discursive objects, often beyond narrative writing, to illuminate the interstices and networked meeting points that remain illegible and discounted and incomprehensible to the normative eye.

Morales, in a similar fashion, participates in critical witnessing, by curating and gathering gifts that will sustain her in her immigrant journey. Moreover, through the materiality of picture book production, Morales extends this strategy of cultural survivance and perpetuity by smuggling her specific stories and gifts into the institutional sites of the state, for instance the library or the classroom. The lens of remixing as a critical witnessing praxis makes visible the memory-making capacity of these things tucked away and concealed in her backpack. These gifts of cultural perpetuity then emerge, spill out, and flood in excess at the site of the institution.

In using remixing praxis in her picture books, Morales also points to strategies of cultural survival by engaging the reader's recognition of linked cultural text. Encouraging intertextual practices in reading visual/verbal texts, Morales's artwork rewards interpretations that make visible the stories, histories and epistemologies of marginalized people as represented in her picture books. Morales's artistic contributions to Chicana critical witnessing and memory-making art practices have the potential to inform both children's storytime programming and collection development.

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<sup>1</sup> Leisy J. Abrego's articulation of the categories of migrant and immigrant in relation to transnational families in El Salvador and the United States informs my use of the term (im)migrant throughout my essay. In *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*, Abrego notes how "[t]he word 'immigrant' ... captures the more long-term settlement and incorporation that often unexpectedly becomes the goal once [Salvadorean] parents arrive in the United States" (x). The term migrant, Abrego writes, "captures the movement in flux" across geographical borders and the separation experienced by those "those who stayed behind in the homeland" (x). In the appended author's note in *Dreamers*, Morales captures the experience of flux and settlement in the juridical and ontological process of becoming an immigrant: "I had come [from Mexico to the United States] so that my son [Kelly] could meet his great-grandfather Ernie, who was very ill and not expected to live much longer, and to marry Kelly's father, a US citizen. I wanted to return to Mexico soon afterward but was shocked to learn that because of US immigration rules my new status as 'permanent resident,' I was now expected to remain in the United States. I had become an immigrant. But could I possibly call this new place my home?" (n.p.).

<sup>2</sup> My term "migrant predators" is informed by the Global Migration Group's 2013 discussion of international migrants in irregular situations and their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, violence, discrimination, and exclusion from juridical recourse. The report defines: "An irregular situation ... generally refers to entering and/or remaining in a country without required documentation. The term therefore applies to people who begin migrating regularly, but their status subsequently changes, thereby finding themselves in irregular situations." For more detail, see [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2013/2013\\_GMG\\_Thematic\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2013/2013_GMG_Thematic_Paper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The term "imagetext" in this essay refers to W.J.T. Mitchell's formulation whereby imagetext "designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text" (*Picture Theory*, 89). Mitchell differentiates between imagetext, image/text, and image-text, noting "the typographical convention of the slash to designate 'image/text' as a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation ... [and the hyphenated spelling] designates *relations* of the visual and verbal. Joshua Ware's essay in the web-magazine *Entropy* provides a helpful explanation of these three like but distinct terms in visual studies and picture book theory, noting how "the slash refers to a certain incommensurability, the concatenation specifies a type of work, and the dash indicates a particular relationship." See Lawrence R. Sipe's essay, "How Picture Books Work- A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships" for an excellent review of visual theory, semiotics, and aesthetics used in the study of picturebooks.

<sup>4</sup> See Deanna Day and Barbara A. Ward for a discussion about editor Neal Porter's work with Morales regarding the creation of *Dreamers* as a "counterpoint to the anti-immigration rhetoric" in the United States (82).

<sup>5</sup> See Cristina Beltrán's *Cruelty as Citizenship: How Migrant Suffering Sustains White Democracy* for an astute analysis "performative cruelty" at the site of both governmentality, criminalizing policy, and inhumane processing of (im)migrants and refugees and its libidinal affect, noting how "policies that make life more violent and precarious for immigrants have long been a bipartisan affair. Before Trump, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama all supported legislation and policies making migration a more punitive and perilous process. Yet notwithstanding this long history of both parties criminalizing migration, a growing share of GOP politicians and voters appear to seek something beyond enforcement—they also desire visible displays of cruelty and suffering. Increasingly indignant over what they perceive as government tolerance for 'illegal' immigrants, nativists take satisfaction in the violent targeting of those they feel have broken laws with impunity" (9-10). See also Burke et al. "Revealed: Biden Administration Holding Tens of Thousands of Migrant Children." *The Guardian*, 2021 May 11, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/11/us-migrant-children-opaque-network-facilities>.

<sup>6</sup> The organization structure of large public library systems of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century included top administrative positions such as Head of the Children's Department, Superintendent of the Department of Work with Children, Supervisor of Storytelling. From this organizational authority, leaders such as Effie Louise Power and Anne Carroll Moore, and their protégés Mary Gould Davis, Anna Cogswell Tyler, Francis Clarke Sayers, Pura Belpré, Augusta Baker, systematized storytelling programs, organizing, training and assessing the work of branch-level children's librarians responsible for developing storytimes and literacy programs. Children's librarians at all levels assumed additional leadership roles, liaising with publishers and educators, presenting in storytelling circuits, partnering with community leaders and teaching graduate courses in library science. Marilyn Berg Iarusso describes how NYPL's training model for children's librarians changed in 1975 when it adopted a new "generalist training" in order to survive the impact of New York City's financial collapse (33). Virginia A. Walter and Melissa Gross similarly describe a trend toward "a more generalist approach" characteristic of this time period, noting how domains of expertise shifted toward the expectation that all public service librarians be competent enough to serve patrons of all ages (877).

<sup>7</sup> Yuyi Morales won the 2019 Boston Globe-Horn Book Picture Book Award and Illustrator Honor Award for *Dreamers*. In her acceptance speech, Morales recalled: "I reminisced about our steps, our struggles, the many mistakes I made—yes, I did go into a public fountain to bathe my baby—our discoveries, and our love. At the end of the day I had written the story of *Dreamers*, and although there was much more path to walk, I had found my first steps." See Morales "Dreamers: Yuyi Morales's 2019 BGHB Picture Book Honor Speech." *The Horn Book Magazine*, 03 Jan 2020, <https://www.hbook.com/?detailStory=dreamers-yuyi-moraless-2019-bghb-picture-book-honor-speech>.

<sup>8</sup> Tiffany Ana López uses the term "Critical Witnessing" to encompass Chicana and Latina cultural production that moves audiences and readers to become involved in social change. For more, see López, Tiffany Ana. "Critical Witnessing in Latina/o and African American Prison Narratives." *Prose and Cons: Essays on Prison Literature in the United States*. Ed. D. Quentin Miller. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005. 62-77;" and "Suturing Las Ramblas to East LA: Transnational Performances of Josefina López's *Real Women Have Curves*." *Performing the U.S. Latina and Latino Borderlands*. Eds. Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012. 296-308.