

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Curtis Marez. *Farm Worker Futurism: Speculative Technologies of Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. 232 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-9745-8.

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In *Farmworker Futurisms*, Curtis Marez examines how agribusiness utilizes multimedia technologies to “project competing futures,” which he calls futurisms or futurity (p. 3). He differentiates “futurism,” the tendency for agribusiness and other powers to dictate futures for farmworker populations, from “futurity,” which captures “the expectation of the future as possibility, not guaranteed but also not foreclosed” (p. 10). Marez’s expansive analysis succeeds at demonstrating these competing futures in agrarian politics, and also provides support for those outside of the humanities who are continually interested in analyzing the power of agribusiness in policy, governance, and in society as a whole.

To demonstrate how agribusiness uses multimedia technologies to reproduce futurity and futurisms, Marez argues that “visual fields are partially constituted by forms of socially and historically produced perceptual mapping that in turn shape the construction of historical social realities” (p. 7). *Farmworker Futurisms* uses this theoretical foundation to analyze media such as popular films, science fiction literature, art, and photographs. For instance, Marez details how agribusiness utilized cameras and other media technologies to further exploit and create hegemonic narratives during the 1960s. Conversely, he demonstrates how the United Farm Workers (UFW) utilized the same technology to both create an alternative farmworker futurity where workers had agency, while reproducing dominant cultural and political norms of nationalism, patriarchy, and militarism. This analysis demonstrates how visual fields can recreate and/or fracture the way people view farmworker livelihoods and agribusiness.

In chapter 3, Marez also applies this frame to contrast the *Star Wars* series, which he argues reproduces the dominant neoliberal narrative of agribusiness and farmworker exploitation, with art by Ester Hernandez, who he claims reveals the exploitation of agribusiness and works to create alternative futurity for Latinos and farmworkers in California. These examples identify how some artists can encourage agribusiness’s creation of futurisms in popular media, while others utilize art to create alternative, more open narratives and futurities. Where George Lucas appeals to visions of agrarian white populism, Hernandez’s works, “taken together, undermine agribusiness efforts to appeal to wholesome whiteness by revealing the face of death behind the industry’s self-promotional mask” (p. 145).

As a scholar whose works contribute to critical food studies, I found Marez’s book specifically helpful in illuminating new ways in which the agrarian imaginary—that is, the image of the white, male, heteronormative farmer—is employed to render laborers invisible.[1] While the text supports accounts of the dominant agrarian imaginary, Marez also succeeds in the difficult task of identifying spaces where farmworkers have or have had agency in shaping their own futures. In so doing, he reveals how farmworkers and other populations should *continue* to employ technologies to create images of an alternative future or imaginary, one that does not focus on the power and prosperity of agribusiness. Most works focus primarily on identifying either agribusiness power or farmworker agency, but Marez builds his argument to show how each informs the other, and in doing so, he ensures that neither reality is ignored. However pro-

found this approach, Marez does not critique the idea of the “future,” which is arguably a neoliberal concept that supports Western expansion and colonial ideas. An additional critique of the “future” in light of futurisms and futurity would strengthen and clarify the refreshing analytical approach in *Farmworker Futurisms*.

Overall, *Farmworker Futurisms* provides additional, much-needed fodder for what critical food scholars claim as the agrarian imaginary and its capacity to thwart policy aimed at increasing social and ecological justice. I highly suggest this book to those whose scholarly work focuses on farmworker issues, and advise political sociol-

ogists and other social scientists who analyze the “agrarian question” to utilize more analysis from humanities to support claims of agribusiness hegemony. Likewise, I find that social science works that speak to the agrarian imaginary would strengthen and broaden Marez’s important analysis of farmworker justice and alternatives futures.

#### Note

[1]. Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*, second ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 300.

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