EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Knowing, Feeling, Doing: The Epistemology of Chicana/Latina Studies

Tiffany Ana López and Karen Mary Davalos

Our cover art is by Linda Arreola, whose training in architecture makes her comfortable with geometric forms. She seeks to detail the underlying structural system that supports a constructed object, and she finds quiet power in the parallel lines, arches, or intersecting points that emerge from humanity. Arreola traces for us the grid of humanity because she sees connections that do not easily appear to our senses. This concern with the simple geometry of the cosmos emerges from the influences of her indigenous and Hispanic ancestry, which both pull toward the metaphor and symbol. Although her abstract paintings are frequently overlooked in Chicana/o art history, her work is not vaguely Chicana, as some critics have claimed but definitively central to Chicana/o cultural production. The desire to map the lines of our heritage and future has been critical to Chicana/Latina studies. This desire also emerges from a corrective impulse to get it right, because some maps incorrectly configured our experiences, emphasizing passivity or fate rather than human agency. Linda Arreola's work on the cover and within the pages of this double issue marks the close of six years of generous support from Loyola Marymount University and the lead editorship by Karen Mary Davalos. Arreola's devotion to the map, the grid, the structural support underneath all things, echoes the task we have taken up through *Chicana/Latina Studies*—to document the histories, experiences, arts, and literatures of Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women in the Americas, a task that will

continue at the University of Texas, San Antonio, under the editorship of Josie Méndez-Negrete.

There are two patterns we see characterizing the works that comprise this double issue: ***vivencias*** and ***critical witnessing***. The first convergence is provided by Rosa Furumoto's article about parents caring for their schools. She creates the term vivencias to capture the critical practice of caring, and it serves as a launching point for her essay's discussion about the relationship between teachers and their students and the politicized role of caring within education. It also provides a powerful structuring thread for the works gathered together in the first section, which also collectively engage with caring as both a political and politicized practice. The second convergence is drawn from Tiffany Ana López's work on trauma and violence in which she coins the term critical witnessing. More than a focused act of looking or bearing witness, critical witnessing entails working from a story's impact as much as its intention as a means to spotlight the very conditions that brought the story into being, actively insisting that an event is pivotal and in need of expanded context and critical address. "Critical" is the operative word for it signals this work as engaged in a pedagogy of social justice whereby the story instructs in order to reconstruct. The works in the second section of this volume all engage in the practice of critical witnessing as they concentrate on the performative forces of lived experience in the making of social change. They explore how our relationships—as they run the spectrum from fiscal and emotional to political and intellectual exchanges—provide the grounding point for our making, feeling, and doing of theory and politics.

In her lead essay in section one, ***Vivencias: The Politics of Caring***, Furumoto speaks as both a teacher-activist and parent-leader of the education system that tragically harms Latino and immigrant youth. (The article itself has its

own traumatic history that beats in the background of this work.) *Tomboy*, the animated color film based on the book *Are You a Boy or a Girl?* (Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 2000) by Karleen Pendleton Jiménez, acknowledges the pedagogical force of teachers and parents who care for Alex, the film's young queer protagonist. As reviewer Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz notes, the film is not just about the painful yet empowering process of Alex's subject formation but also the way in which the filmmaker was able to signal without obvious symbols that this is also a story about Latinas, queers, and members of other underrepresented groups living in Canada. Pendleton Jiménez thus traces our diversity and locates our thinking within a transnational context. Notably, the teacher in Carla Trujillo's short story, "The Saints of Santa Fe," is a healer, *una curandera*, who teaches her male patient to care for himself, representing another complex dimension in the transmission of Chicana/Latina epistemology across the boundaries of gender and culture. This excerpt from Trujillo's forthcoming book by the same title also translates her scholarly attention to matters of Chicana health and labor across genres, from the critical essay to creative writing. She traces caring as a politicized theme that informs the measuring of social and economic capital, emphasizing hidden dangers: as much as it might appear to nurture or fortify, the American dream can kill. The important question here: how—and for whom—does our caring hold measure and worth? At whose benefit and at what cost?

The significance of learning to focus on caring for the self is interwoven within Monica Palacios' excerpt from "The OH Show: Old and Horny." In Palacios' performance, self-care is serious business with humor and laughter strategically employed to usher audiences into a position of action. Palacios shares how caring for the self requires vigilant attention to the physical and the emotional as intertwined, especially as we age, and that our sexuality never stops being generative to our wellness. Additionally, we need to think about environmental

as well as ideological hazards. In her selected excerpt from *The Heavens Weep For Us and Other Stories*, Thelma Reyna writes about the tragedy that comes when caring is absent. We include her narrative within this section because it so loudly and clearly insists on a structure and politics of caring for children. Section one concludes with a review of an anthology on Chicana/Latina education in everyday life edited by Dolores Delgado Bernal, C. Alejandra Elenes, Francisca E. Godinez, and Sophia Villenas, which further illustrates the importance of vivencias to Chicana/Latina pedagogy and epistemology. Notably, as reviewer Leticia Oseguera reminds us, the editors have systematized a research practice of collaboration: four people editing a book, reading each other's work, and in the creation of the manuscript, performing the feminist practice that MALCS has been honing for several decades. Because of her extensive labor and insight about the feminist editorial practice, we invited Magdalena Maiz-Peña to share her observations in an editor's commentary, which we here understand and describe as an "editorial poetics." As one of the most active members of the editorial board, Maiz-Peña has reviewed works for each volume, facilitated a writing workshop at the MALCS Summer Institute, and served as a guest editor for the Spanish-language article that appears in this double issue. (We have more to note below about Maiz-Peña feminist editorial insight.)

The second pattern we identified as characterizing this volume is ***Critical Witnessing: Performative Forces and Social Change***, which we see powerfully illustrated within Rosana Blanco-Cano's discussion of the feminist theatre group, Fronteleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA) from Chiapas. The workshops and performances of FOMMA are radical spaces that document and sustain indigenous women's empowerment. In this essay, Blanco-Cano documents the critical observations that Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and her colleagues make about society. Challenging the nation-state and its racist, sexist, and material bias, FOMMA re-imagines how Maya women experience

themselves as agents. Performance artist Raquel Gutierrez also bears critical witness to forms of violence that circulate across various borders. She documents the damage of environmental injustice on the body, the family, and the community across several spaces (geographic, physical, and emotional). Similar to Blanco-Cano, M. Bianet Castellanos also writes about Maya women. She makes connections between the unseen and unacknowledged emotional labor of migrant Maya women and men in Yucatán, Mexico, and their documented and traceable monetary transactions across geographic spaces. This article looks at non-monetary contributions that migrants send back to their native community and engages an important debate in development and migration studies. Within the social sciences, emotions are largely unwritten because the nation-state cannot quantifiably measure their contribution and impact. Castellanos makes a significant reconfiguration from the viewpoint of a feminist scholar who does not read nurturing as a feminine experience of caring: rather, her work shows how men and women are involved in caring for elders in their communities and for their families as part of a personal commitment and politics of community building linked to material survival. Castellanos calls us to witness these remittances of affect because of their power and force to sustain relations and communities.

These three works also trace a transnational pattern within Chicana/Latina studies. Blanco-Cano's article marks how theory migrates across geo-political borders, and she applies Chicana feminist thought to her analysis of FOMMA activities and performances. Making a powerful claim, Blanco-Cano documents that FOMMA is part of larger radical, Chicana feminist transnational discourse. In her performance piece, "Malathion: Low Human Toxicity," Gutierrez embodies movement as she locates her body and her family's experience at specific points in the grid of latitudes and longitudes. As she names the transnational migration of her family, we witness the shifting

sites of trauma from home to body. In Gutierrez's case, transnational migration is both escape and rescue. Extending this conversation, Castellano's article is not about migration across a geo-political border but suggests a new subject for transnational studies: the movement of affect and its role in sustaining natal communities. Notably, her article also implies a challenge to land-based identity formation and authenticity. Were emotions to travel, would they link social and political struggles across national boundaries? These three pieces urge readers to take up questions of indigeneity and transnationalism and document them as central not peripheral issues to Chicana/Latina studies.

Another important element that structures the reading of these pieces is their movement from spatial analysis to temporal considerations. This volume's second section on critical witnessing includes the lyrics of three songs from Rusty Barceló's latest CD because they so powerfully illustrate the moral imperative of feminist practice that emerges from, among other standpoints, a mother's lessons, women-centered relationships, and a practice of sisterhood that acknowledges race, class, and sexuality. The moral imperative named by Barceló requires a temporal expansion; no relationship is fully formed or static but requires time and reinvestment of time. Freely sharing her songs for several years at the MALCS Summer Institute, Barceló now offers all sales of her CD to benefit MALCS. It is available at the Summer Institute in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Within this section is Karma R. Chávez's review of Marie "Keta" Miranda's ethnography about homegirls in Fruitvale, California. As co-participatory ethnographer, Miranda situates herself as a critical witness to the complex lives of young Latinas grappling with the pressures of patriarchy, racism, and material inequity. Rounding out the section, Mary Pardo reviews Karen Brodkin's *Making Democracy Matter*, which looks at how political consciousness emerges among new and younger activists in Los Angeles at the end of the millennium. Brodkin finds that classrooms of

ethnic and women's studies are the very core site at which students transform themselves into activists. It is their combined pedagogical forces that calls students into a position of critical witnessing that forms the roots of their conscious and their sense of the change their interventions can make as well as the further political work that needs to be staged. The DC Commentaries authored by visual artist and political activist, Barbara Carrasco, and graduate student and political activist, Joelle Guzman, document the intersections between feminist engagement and empowerment. We are excited to have these two timely essays in the volume, archiving Chicana/Latina response to the inauguration of Barack Obama.

The themes we publish in this volume also emerged as central to the 2008 MALCS Summer Institute in Utah. However, before we document the debates and topics of this summer, we wish to acknowledge the generous $5,000 gift from two anonymous MALCS members who pledged this amount at the Summer Institute because they firmly endorse the work of the journal. We graciously thank them for a gift that will make possible the transition between LMU and UTSA, and it will no doubt generate other financial donations for the journal's future self-sustainability. Also announced at the Summer Institute was the launch of the journal's searchable database (http://malcs.net/journal.htm and link to "search issues"). Created by Lisa Justine Hernandez, the database includes all back issues of *Chicana/Latina Studies*. Scholars and students can search for keywords in the title, abstract, and text of articles, creative works, commentaries, and reviews. Electronic files in PDF format are available within one year of publication. This incredibly important and valuable work of Hernandez makes available the archive, and we acknowledge her contribution to sustaining MALCS. When we create an archive, we endow the future of the field so that scholars can survey its evolution and identify its benchmarks.

This summer's meeting was one of the best attended in the history of MALCS. The theme of this year's Summer Institute, "Mujeres (Re)member: Creating Spaces of (Be)longing Across Latinidades and Indigenismas," sparked panels and presentations that consistently visited questions about the epistemology of our field. The theme and spirit of this past summer's institute is wonderfully encapsulated in Maiz-Peña's "Editorial Poetics: Nopalito words and MALCS feminist editorial practice," in which she documents the affective and physical labor of writing within and for a feminist collective, illustrating our crossing of multiple latitudes. Similarly, at the Summer Institute, the entry points for discussion followed a series of vital questions: What is the historical role of personal experience in carving out a critical discourse for Chicana/Latina studies? In turn, how does our critical work illuminate our relationships with self, family, and community? Importantly, sessions explored the ways Chicana/Latina studies presumes certain positions that are problematic for other disciplines. Because testimonio speaks to community formation as much as personal survival, it is part of the very foundation of Chicana/Latina epistemology. However, as Cindy Cruz pointed out in her presentation about her work with queer homeless youth, testimonio as method is not yet immediately nor fully recognized within the academy. As a social scientist in the field of education, Cruz had to cross great bureaucratic hurdles before she could get her study approved with the IRB (Institutional Review Board). Working to document the lives of an economically impoverished subject group presented specific challenges to the institution that illuminated the often unquestioned and invisible workings that profoundly impact whose stories get told, whose experiences get validated, whose histories and bodies ultimately matter as worthy of critical inquiry. Notably, Cruz's findings confirmed testimonio as paramount to any work about disenfranchised and at-risk communities and perhaps the most vital means by which to gain access to information otherwise

not available. As she explains, "So much of our scholarship is about our traces, the ways history is embedded in our lives and lineage."

Because the Summer Institute focused on the themes of remembering and belonging, it is not surprising that reference to the testimonio surfaced throughout the conference. As one panel emphasized, the distinction of the testimonio as a genre is that individual stories place communal struggle at the center of their understanding of the world. The testimonio is, therefore, a discourse that simultaneously engages and performs the personal and collective aspects of identity formation. An example that illustrated this force of the testimonio is the phenomena of mentoring that charges our participation in MALCS. At the opening plenary session, "We Belong: Re(claiming) Our Bodies and Ways of Knowing," Antonia Castañeda and Cecilia Burciaga, two senior leadership voices, were joined by Cindy Cruz and MaryAnn Villarreal, early career scholars whose work reflects the dramatic inroads that have been forged in the field. Castañeda began the panel by asserting, "Our experiences are imprinted on our bodies. Like the maguey, as new shoots grow, the old shoots become embedded, thus fortifying the plant." Her image of the maguey offered a potent metaphor for the symbiotic relationship between the personal and the collective, the way we are fortified by the field and, in turn, fortify one another through our scholarship and meetings and, too, cultivate and sustain our mentoring networks.

Indeed, the intellectual energy of this moment at the conference could not be divorced from the emotion that charged the room. In the audience were many who had been Castañeda's and Burciaga's students, among them, the editors of this journal. Their mentorship helped so many of us to successfully navigate the treacherous terrain of all stages of higher education, from the bachelor's degree to the doctorate and beyond into related administrative and diverse

professional careers. A testament to their work: sitting next to us editors at the conference were our own students, both undergraduate and graduate, adding to the long reach of history measured by this gathering. Significantly, Cecilia Burciaga's daughter, Rebeca presented with Lidsay Perez Huber, a scholar, who came to her own work in testimonio through having been a subject in Rebeca Burciaga's dissertation research on testimonio. Rebeca Burciaga's findings make clear that participants who give researchers testimonio about their experiences come to an important junction in their healing process. Researchers serve as engaged witnesses that recognize the contributions of their co-participants as critically important, which then powerfully reveals the very fact of their struggle. This recognition becomes a crucial moment of empowerment, one only revealed and affirmed by the testimonio process. Emphasizing the power of this process, Castañeda closed the plenary urging us to "see your connections with all people who struggle—struggle with them, and fight like hell."

Another critical theme that emerged at the conference concerned the importance of emotional and physical health to engaging in the production of intellectual work, a theme that resonates with Monica Palacio's and Carla Trujillo's contributions to this volume. Cecilia Burciaga began her plenary address with a story about the papelito guardado her mother would leave for her to read, urging her daughter to confront the ways her health was suffering as a result of privileging work at the expense of personal well being: "Mi'ja, why do you smoke so much? Why don't you eat more vegetables and get more sleep? Slow down, mi'ja, make time to relax and have fun. Take a walk. Eat right. Stop smoking." Burciaga reflected on the ways terms such as "broken-hearted" and "heart-ache" speak to the relationship between emotional and physical exhaustion. Burciaga cast a spotlight on the ways we too easily loose sight of what is lost in our struggle for success and the making of social change. Reflecting on her career as an administrator, she spoke of her daily

prayers to "St. Sisyphus," remarking, "I felt like everyday I had to prove my competence, over and over, returning to the same battles." She added the term "adobe ceiling" to our vocabulary and reminded "sisterhood is complicated." As among the first generation to initiate affirmative action policies in higher education, Burciaga witnessed firsthand the very real pain involved in the struggle to obtain a degree in higher education and to establish the policy changes needed to open doors to others, eloquently emphasizing, "all the crap you face is ultimately not about you, but about the process. You will emerge and be victorious. The trick is not to lose your way, and not to imitate and replicate the brutality performed on other sisters." Burciaga spoke frankly about her own process of coming to listen to the heart again, "I am now in the process of removing my mascaras. Age brings a lack of tolerance for suffering fools and suffering absurdities." She then encouraged us to seek our own forms of healing and concluded by marveling at the ways life comes full circle: at this Institute, she witnessed the daughter she once brought to the very first meetings of MALCS now attending and presenting at MALCS and bringing her own son as well as her own students.

These conversations resonated throughout the conference, evidenced in a panel titled "Sociocultural Violence and Narratives of Remembering," the second part of a larger session on "Narrative of Memory: Navigating the subjectivity of positionality in cultural research" that included Josie Méndez-Negrete and her student and mentee Sandra D. Garza. Méndez-Negrete, spoke about what she terms "methodologies of memory" to describe the process of self-healing and her own ten-year therapeutic process of coming into her survivorship from growing up in a house of incest (the theme of her book, *Las Hijas de Juan: Daughters Betrayed*. [Revised Edition. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006]). Garza's paper further illustrated the employment of Méndez-Negrete's methodology in her focus on the problem of weight gain among Chicana

students, in which she emphasizes the need to take into account the impact of social factors, for instance, the pressures of work and family demands—to name a few. The launching point for Garza's paper was her own experiences of struggle to complete her BA and the toll the stress took on her health, including weight gain, resulting from late night studying with limited options for food. Unhealthy snacks and friendly junk food or the option of simply not eating in the attempt to remain focused on her work over a lengthy and uninterrupted course of time were her options for so-called nourishment. She details being struck by a graduation speech by Raymond Paredes in which he cited the link between level of education and improved health. Garza's experience had not shown that to be entirely true, at least not in the short run. The question posed by the panel: What does it mean to get someplace at your own expense? The panel, composed of mentor and mentee speaking in conversation, further evidenced the ways we pass on knowledge and how this knowledge informs our engagement with personal and social change. The centrality of mentoring to both our scholarship and activism thus continued to resonate from the plenary.

The Summer Institute also featured a session with Laura Garcia, Felicitas Nuñez, Sandra Gutierrez, and Delia Rodriguez reading from their memoirs included in the newly released *Teatro Chicana: A Collective Memoir and Selected Plays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008). They read selected excerpts from the book, presented a slide show which documented the evolution of the troupe, and spoke about the enduring resonances of their work with the teatro they formed as students and the bonds that remained firmly in place well into their adulthood, inspiring one another to continue remaining strong and united as women in struggle. Their first theater piece was written and performed for their mothers to show them what their life was like at college, something they had not experienced and could not easily imagine. Indeed, the

support of women for one another across generational boundaries remained foundational for the teatro. At the panel, Rodriguez spoke in depth about being diagnosed with breast cancer and then gaining the support of Nuñez and Delia Ravelo, both of whom had waged their own battles with cancer. Here, the audience was invited into an intimate circle of witnessing. Rodriguez also recalled the day she went on a rant about the enduring stereotypes of women as mothers, virgins, and prostitutes paraded at a recent Latino film festival she had attended. "But my teatro sisters pointed out that I really needed to write plays with intelligent and proactive roles for women. In other words, 'Do not whine. Act!'" Delia Ravelo succumbed to cancer in 2002, but not before fulfilling a dream to travel to Europe and learning a new language. The panel thus urged us to act on both the pages and stages of our lives.

While this issue marks Karen Mary Davalos' tenure as lead editor, it by no means is the last issue to carry her imprint. In the next volume, Davalos will contribute an essay in which she reflects on her time and role as lead editor and her work to craft a feminist editorial process. It promises to be a meditation on what portends for the future of our field as captured and envisioned within the pages of this journal.