

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

No Straight Lines Here: Cartographies of Home

Eliza Rodriguez y Gibson and Josie Méndez-Negrete

Enigmatic and evocative, the cover image for this issue, Claudia D. Hernández's digital photograph, *Alleluia*, suggests some of the challenges and possibilities that face us every day in our personal and professional lives. Holding the skeleton of an umbrella, over which a long white cloth is draped, the subject is partially bent over, and draped in a red cloth that trails on the wooden floor. She stands barefoot, looking down, with an expression that is difficult to read. Her hair is wrapped in another cloth—it's black with white contrast and echoes the simple, long-sleeved t-shirt she wears over a long black skirt. She stands barefoot, the musculature of her bare feet and calves clearly tensed—her body's dynamic strength revealed in the grounded posture. The shapes of the three draped elements engage each other visually even as their colors contrast dramatically. She holds up what looks like protection from the elements, yet clearly that protection is incomplete. The question arises, then: Is she crouching down, or rising up? Is the titular praise for the rain that gets through, or for the rain that's kept off?

This indeterminacy is precisely what makes this image so powerful: It is full of interpretive possibility. The contradictions and tensions in the image are dynamic, suggesting some of the lines of (dis)connection that run through this issue. We often speak of mapping critical territory, but less often do we acknowledge that the mapping is by necessity incomplete; sometimes those lines of connection need to be interrupted. The writing in this issue of the journal is divided into two parts, combining critical and creative work that does the work of articulating themes familiar to *Chicana/Latina Studies*: how we articulate our

voices and find our homes, the work of memory and history, and the ways in which our lived experiences inform our intellectual, creative, and activist work.

I. Interrupting Colonial Genealogies (Or, No Straight Lines Here)

In her essay, "Mapping Spaces, Marking Time: Transnational Subjectivity, Home, and Family in Stories by Manuel Muñoz and Sandra Cisneros," Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano performs a literary analysis that "resonates with queer critiques of reproductive futurity"—that is, she begins with the critique of locating hope for the future within the "straight lines" of biological reproduction (and its attendant structures, like familia) because of the ways it replicates the heteronormative status quo. Home can be an alienating (if not dangerous) place for girls, for women, for queers. Thus, Yarbro-Bejarano's essay centers on "characters who stand in queer relationship to Chicana family romance and transborder family." These figures, she argues, function as sites of potential critique of familia and nation. Linking a well known story, Cisneros's "Never Marry a Mexican," with a short story that has received less critical attention, Muñoz's "By The Time You Get There, By the Time You Get Back," Yarbro-Bejarano develops a reading of border crossing that shows us how queerly gendered subjects experience time and space in a way that resists linear and heteronormative generational logics. In so doing, she performs a reading that articulates how these two writers create narrative spaces and characters that resist singular and oppressive narratives of familia and national culture, which reproduce patriarchal and colonial forms of violence and erasure.

Laurie Ann Guerrero speaks from a similarly skewed position to familia and motherhood in her testimonio essay "School Among the Ruins." Addressing the topic of literal and literary motherhood, Guerrero's narrative about meeting Adrienne Rich is striking for its depiction of the shock of being known—of mutual recognition. The rejection of mother-guilt is not easy, and Guerrero's

essay beautifully captures the ambiguity necessary to her being and becoming both a writer and a mother. She writes, “Mothering has not changed. Poetry has not changed. How I love each a little more than the other.” Articulating the difficulty in dividing time between her academic and maternal roles is inseparable from speaking of love, and how more love is generated in their comparison. In moving beyond the traditional bounds of familia, that is, by neither moving directly into, nor away from it, Guerrero expands her vision of mothering, teaching, and writing.

Interrupting another kind of genealogy, William A. Calvo-Quirós’s essay, “The Politics of Color (Re)significations: Chromophobia, Chromo-Eugenics, and the Epistemologies of Taste,” gives us a history lesson that links enlightenment theories of aesthetics with other discourses of colonialism: Casta paintings are the quintessential Latin American example. Articulating a form of chromophobia, these paintings function as an example of colonial control in the past. In the present moment, this dynamic is visible as tropicalization: both function as a means to control and fetishize the other. In response to these colonizing legacies, Calvo-Quirós points to a Latina aesthetics of resistance, suggesting that “Latina/Chicana artists fight against restricted notions of modernity by invoking a chromo-sovereignty that embraces a decolonial project of collective emancipatory resignification, re-centering their experiences, histories, and worlds of the imagination.” Thus, it is through visual and imaginative means that cultural productions work to disrupt the lineage of colonialism reproduced in aesthetics.

A similarly historicizing impulse drives Lilliana Patricia Saldaña’s testimonio, tracing both the colonizing aspects of her formal schooling as well as the decolonizing potential of critically examining her life experience. In this autohistoria, “Memories of Schooling in the Field,” Saldaña reflects on her memories of schooling and the ways in which this process serves as a theoretical

site for articulating how Chicana feminist theories are made flesh. Focusing on the *consejos* and the forms of home education from both her grandmother and her mother, Saldaña articulates the resistant possibilities of family and community in the face of assimilationist discourses that pose an existential threat to her sense of self and legitimacy. Perhaps most importantly, Saldaña offers some methodological implications for analyzing testimonios of Mexican American teachers in a barrio school, not unlike the ones she attended as a girl.

II. Cartographies of the Corazon

Where the first half of the issue centers of points of disconnection and interruption through which resistant subjects emerge, the second half brings together work that maps some of the ways in which home is imagined, felt, and embodied—and it is never easy, it is never totally safe. Deborah Paredez's poems are brief and brilliant. They give us spectacles of faith: firecrackers and movies, Lupe Velez and King Kong. The forms that fantasy, imagination, and disappointment take are inseparable from the possibilities of redemption in these poems. Identifying the larger-than-life Hollywood icons is dangerous stuff: being "swallowed / whole" is at once threat and fantasy. Paredez's poems let us see through eyes that recognize the poignancy of King Kong, a vision of keen awareness of the possibilities (and perils) of identification.

Leticia Hernández-Linares gives us poetry of story and memory that is situated in objects and places: a post-menopausal female body, a doll, and *cuentos* passed on from poet to reader. They map movements of displacement and of home, including El Salvador, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area. Her poems link music and memory, "A good song rips the roots up from telling / so you can move, hum the edges melodious." In these poems, listening and telling are equally important, and everyone is, if not home, at least more connected to each other for the experience. For example, in "Holy Mother" the speaker listens to

her grandmother's tales of grief and displacement, and falls asleep listening to such stories, "powered by all the tears." However, in her "dream no one gets trapped / in a Maria Félix red lipstick / dramatic movie title kind of way." And though the grandmother grieves, she still recognizes the absurdity of "the holy mother routine," and the final lines in the poem are a kind of rueful joke. In these poems, questions of home and how to find it, what it means, and how to get there, weave themselves through.

In this issue, we have included excerpts from two scripts. The first, taken from Karen Anzoategui's one woman show, *Ser: B.A. vs. L.A.* is driven by a similar searching for home, by where to go, and what to do. It moves between Buenos Aires and Los Angeles, across the protagonist's life, from adolescence to young adulthood. Displacement and longing, being and becoming, are recursive, not only in this script, but across this issue. Anzoategui's subjectivity is made in her movements and momentary connections to others, rather than being fixed in one place. At the end of it, she finds home in her desire for a Chicana who (at first) makes fun of her Argentine accent. The promise of connection is fleeting, playful, and full of possibility.

In another sort of coming of age tale, the excerpt from Monica Palacios's screenplay, *Memory Is in the Heart*, centers on the recently divorced MonaLisa, who is about to turn fifty; the script intertwines questions of aging, love, and memory. The scene between MonaLisa, her ex-wife, and her aging mother (who suffers from the onset of dementia) poignantly and humorously lays out the points of tension and transition in MonaLisa's life. While Palacios is well known as a performance artist and producer/performer of one-woman shows, she has turned to screenwriting, a form that exists in the borderlands between the visual and the literary. As it is presented here, it is a literary text, but ultimately, it is only part of the larger film (once it's produced). These distinctions matter:

Visual discourses are just as powerful as written ones, as Calvo-Quirós's essay reminds us. Moreover, the representation of Chicana lesbians grappling with middle age is all but non-existent in film. We are pleased, then, to give you a sneak peek, as it were, of this screenplay. We would be well pleased to give you a review of the movie once it is made. Keep your eyes open for it.

With this issue, *Chicana/Latina Studies: The of Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS)* continues to create a creative, intellectual, and activist space in which we shape and reshape our various communities—and how we understand them. In this editorial statement, we reflect on the vision of organization as it is articulated in the critical space of the journal and in the Summer Institute. This year's gathering at The Ohio University (OSU) in Columbus, "¡Aquí Estamos! We Are Here! Movements, Migrations, Pilgrimage, and Belonging," brought together, once again, scholars, writers, artists, and activists from throughout the United States and Canada to present their research, performances, and creative work.

About 250 individuals registered for the MALCS 2013 Summer Institute, with a sizable number of participants bunking at the OSU dorms, an arrangement that not only makes the Institute more financially accessible, but also creates community. As has been our common practice, a *noche de cultura*, film screenings, and an awards dinner and dance enlivened the Institute, and created more spaces of *convivencia*. In the scholarly sessions, in addition to twelve Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) panels (a remarkable focal point in this year's gathering), 163 presentations were programmed. With welcoming remarks from department heads and representatives from the College of Arts and Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Multicultural Center, and The Women's Place, Co-Chairs Theresa Delgadillo and Yolanda Zepeda emceed the opening night, Wednesday, July 17. After the OSU welcome, Guisela LaTorre

moderated an Artist Talk and Slide show by Maria Tomasula, “Living in History (And Knowing It),” and “Mapping Out My Migration,” by Mabi Ponce de León.

The plenary sessions that brought us together at the end of each day reflected the specificity of Midwestern location, bringing indigenous women onto center stage and weaving together our various and distinct communities. The first plenary set the tone of solidarity across Nuestra América, with a discussion titled, “On the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” Moderated by Inés Valdez, from The Ohio State University, Professors Eglá Martínez and Kimberly Blaeser, along with Chief Glenna Wallace, spoke to the intertwined issues of transnational indigenous rights, decolonization, and what the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can mean for sovereignty and justice both in the United States and in Latin America. Tellingly, there was no clear consensus: While Chief Wallace spoke hopefully about it as a tool that could be used, Martínez voiced the strongest critique of what she called the “neoliberal politics of recognition” and asserted instead the need for intellectual sovereignty and resisting the epistemic violence imposed by the patrimony of the UN. The second plenary featured Ana Celia Zentella, Professor Emerita of the University of California, San Diego, who addressed a jubilant audience that included a large group of high school students in her talk, “Latinas and Our Language(s): Belonging to/in Spanish? English? Spanglish.” The depth of her knowledge, on display in a multimedia presentation of the main arguments in the field, and her connection to the linguistic practices of those in attendance—along with her timely sense of humor—provided greater insights into the ways in which we retain and shift language, as we contest notions that we live in a monolingual culture. Finally, the third plenary, “Chicana and Latina Activism in the Midwest,” moderated by Ana Puga (The Ohio State University), provided an overview of the ways in which we compose social families to create safe environments in the pursuit of social change.

Professors Lourdes Torres (DePaul University) and Lila Fernandez (The Ohio State University) provided an examination of the ways in which gender and sexual identities become sites of struggle in our everyday lives. Alma Diaz Fisher, from DreamActivistOHIO.org, spoke on the status of immigration rights and activism. All their talks were illustrated with forward-thinking multimedia presentations that brought their various forms of activism to life.

Between the two of us we attended more than twenty-four sessions on transnational workers' rights, methodologies, youth engagement, *mestizaje*, critical indigeneity, queer intellectual production and activism, cultural and literary studies, and decolonization, among other areas. In that respect and with the support of the OSU Site Committee, the Summer Institute opened up a space for attendees to continue grappling with leadership issues that emerged throughout the past year in a forum that reflected on the internal leadership within the organization. Many of the sessions focused, not only on our scholarship, but also in the healing work we must necessarily do to continue thriving in the academy, with several participants sharing their work in progress as they moved into new forms for the first time. At least one primary school textbook, several testimonios, photography, and films were shared in the spirit of mutual trust and respect for the kinds of experimentation we have to engage in to drive our thinking/feeling/teaching and the ways we construct ways of knowing. At least one participant noted that she would never present her creative work within a traditional disciplinary academic forum, which suggests the importance of MALCS as a kind of home, one which we consciously make for ourselves, and which we must continually claim.

With Volume 13(1), we continue to explore and engage in conversation inside the contradictions of our lives. The essays, creative pieces, reviews, and photographs in this issue reflect the spaces we occupy as scholar/activists/artists, as we

continue to document and imagine how we live and know within, alongside, and beyond a dominant culture that aims to erase or minimize our presence and its significance. Latinas, Chapinas, and Chicanas—along with a Chicano *de conciencia*—grace its pages to illustrate, unearth, and voice the many ways in which we articulate critical discourses of resistance and renewal both within academia as well as in communities where we do more than merely survive.