

## RUNNING INTERFERENCE: Editors' Commentary

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**Interference charges** this issue in both content and form. Notably, its varied definitions powerfully reflect the subject and methodology of Chicana/Latina studies: involvement without invitation, an unwanted signal that disrupts reception, a hindrance or obstruction that prevents an expected outcome or thwarts an opposing player, a process that produces a new pattern. Following the lead of Nayda Collazo-Llorens, our guest visual artist, we selected the theme of interference and broke established format by orchestrating a fluid juxtaposition of creative and critical works. We did not follow conventional distinctions between creative writing and scholarly articles because we aim to challenge and enact the underlying foundation of Chicana/Latina scholarship, while mapping a space for transdisciplinary reading that also conveys the generative exchanges at the recent annual MALCS Summer Institute, the playing ground of our discipline where we interfere, make noise, and restart. As the flagship journal of MALCS, *Chicana/Latina Studies* is the litmus paper for our field, measuring its path of interference from discursive protest to performed activism.

Certainly, the position of journal editor provides a vantage point from which to survey the field. At the University of Minnesota for her August 2007 MALCS conference paper, "Sin Vergüenza: Chicana Feminist Theorizing," Karen Mary Davalos, coeditor of *Chicana/Latina Studies* for the past five years, outlined six trends in Chicana/Latina scholarship: 1) the autobiographical voice as methodology; 2) a transdisciplinarity that crosses and unties disciplinary

boundaries; 3) scholarly activity based on collaboration, conversation, and debate; 4) queer theory as paramount to feminist analysis; 5) alignment of previously separate theoretical domains; and 6) an ambivalence in citing work in Chicana/Latina studies.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, MALCS' choice to organize its annual meeting as a Summer Institute rather than a conventional conference reflects the political and scholarly commitments necessary to advancing Chicana/Latina scholarship. The pieces brought together in this issue evidence these trends and press some vital questions.

Mónica Russel y Rodríguez asks us to consider our ethnography as an advanced methodology that unravels the tidy expectations and assumptions of social theory. Writing in several registers—first person, third person, private memory and collective history—Russel y Rodríguez demonstrates that all of our social positions are critical to the project of emancipation. She provides us with new tools—messy and complex—to force back the tide of anti-immigration and sexism that attack, in particular, the brown bodies of working-class Latinas. In the vein of this discursive protest, the journal begins with an excerpt from Yxta Maya Murray's latest novel, *Dark Sex*. The legal scholar and novelist also challenges persistent and simplistic representations of womanhood, feminist collectivity, and cultures of resistance. Her characters are mean, sexy, intelligent, and stubborn. As she imagines a future in which Homeland Security is the violent force against women's physical power and political control of their own bodies, Murray's tale communicates a call for critical reflection about justice at home and abroad. The dominating force of a masculine nation-state is also a problem explored in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. In her analysis of this play, Tanya González offers feminists important leverage for understanding so-called monster mothers and the process of "making familia from scratches"—a phrase she borrows from Moraga but modifies to emphasize the injuries caused by the heterosexist family. Together,

Murray and González explore the ways stories of violence foster reading practices toward social change. Their work also illustrates the centrality of queer theory to feminist theorizing, a position further voiced in the eloquent claiming of queer experience in fiction by Felicia Luna Lemus whose two novels are reviewed here by Lisa Justine Hernandez.

The spectrum of pieces assembled into this issue also illustrate how the autobiographical voice charges the very structure and organization of our projects, seen in the stylistic blending of genres, the joining of creative writing and scholarly articles, and the insistence that both are enactments of our theoretical and experiential knowledge. Patricia Valdés and Unasirena map the energy and spirit that empowers our resistance and feeds our strength. In her review of Helena Maria Viramontes' novel, *Their Dogs Came with Them*, Eliza Rodriguez y Gibson reminds us that our call for social justice comes from deep springs that appreciate, cultivate, and inspire human dignity. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi frankly elucidates the fraught process of making allies. The contributors to this issue join in the transdisciplinary styles so powerfully illustrated by Gloria Anzaldúa and Moraga that expand dimensions of cultural analysis by moving across genres to engage in libratory praxis.

Collaboration, conversations, and debate characterize Chicana/Latina methods and knowledge production: in research centers, seminars, workshops at MALCS and other professional meetings, or through more intimate circles of *colegas* who are willing to read each others' writing in process, engagements which are exemplified in books such as *Telling to Live* and *Chicana Feminisms*.<sup>2</sup> Our strategy of collective intellectual engagement resists and challenges the image of the unique genius who climbs the academic ladder alone. Editor and fiction writer Carla Trujillo acknowledges that MALCS was the "spark" that ignited *Living Chicana Theory*.<sup>3</sup> This reference places the book in a

“long line” of activist-scholarship generated or inspired by MALCS, such as *Chicana Critical Issues* (1993), and *Building with Our Hands* (1993),<sup>4</sup> works that represent a major transformation of an academic industry predicated on individualism. The evidence of our collective engagements is perhaps most visibly seen in print within our acknowledgements, footnotes, and other genealogical footprints. These citations provide an archive of personal, institutional, and textual influences.

Reflecting on our experiences at this past MALCS Summer Institute, one of the issues that most strikes us is that while we readily engage in conversation about one another’s work at conferences, when it comes to publication, our intellectual footprints do not fully acknowledge the paths we have been walking. Davalos’s observations about trends in current Chicana/Latina scholarship seek to inspire and incite us not only to bolster our practices of reading, but also, and most especially, our practices of **citing** scholarship by Chicanas/Latinas. In discourses such as psychoanalysis or postmodern theory that are broadly recognized as intellectually relevant, scholars are expected to demonstrate their engagements and intellectual development through citation, a process which indicates the conversation being entered into and the debate the work wishes to generate. This disciplinary respect is not equally afforded to Chicana/Latina studies. The result is measurable ambivalence around our own making Chicana/Latina studies the central discourse. The anxieties authors have communicated about publishing in our journal or any other journal that takes seriously the blending of genres further speaks to this ambivalence. Too much work manifests a pull between fully engaging in Chicana/Latina studies and focusing on related but peripheral discourses. This tension reveals a desire to make the work legible, to legitimate it to those outside the field and, ironically, those within the field as well.

What is our practice of scholarly community on the page? To cite one another's work is to document the collaborative process that informs each individual's coming to critical consciousness. In her plenary panel presentation at this past MALCS Summer Institute, Celia Herrera Rodriguez declared, "Everything is always a question. I don't know anything by myself." In her talk, Inez Talamantez asked, "How do we politicize and utilize the research we do?" She asserted, "Not all wisdom exists at the library." Ines Hernandez-Avila affirmed that our truths derive from our sense of origins and inform our originality, points echoed in Amanda Nolacea Harris' piece, *Our Stories*, which also reminds us that our tales, cuentos, and remembrances are the vital force of our communities and the foundation for knowledge. At MALCS, Reid Gomez queried, "What origins and philosophies are we embracing and what are the consequences?" She observed, "Raced-based identity leads to raced-based actions." Victoria Bomberry spoke urgently of the need to create our own archive, to remember those who set up the organizations designed to be a repository of memory. When we battle each other for status and recognition—which is effectively what we are doing when we create work devoid of rich citational footprints—we fail the efforts of our precursors, whom we otherwise celebrate in the substance of our work and in the practices of our teaching and activism.

The question, then, is how does one practice transdisciplinarity in a way that does not succumb to hierarchies of knowledge production? In her MALCS presentation, Davalos reiterated Chela Sandoval's insistence that cultural critics addressing matters of social justice cannot continue to ask or search for liberation unless they read our scholarship. And we must also address and rectify our own ambivalences. What is lost in our focus on justifications more so than citations? How does this impact the future of the field? With whom are we seeking to generate conversation and debate? What figures and works have brought us to this critical moment of reading? To embrace and promote

the field as a space of academic rigor, as well as a location of mentoring and support, demands consistent, engaged, and strategically directed citation.

In a session for new MALCS members at this summer's Institute, legendary mentor and administrator Nancy "Rusty" Barcelo warned of the seductive force of institutions. She affirmed that we all need our ambitions recognized and our work validated and promoted but she also asked by whom and to what effect? Barcelo cautioned her audience against the siren song of institutions which value and privilege the individual over the collective and, in the process, risk our forgetting the history of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education, especially the collaborations that bring us to our work. The institution cultivates the performance of Academic Sexy (being ultra trendy, cutting edge, exemplary, better than the rest, above reproach, etc.). This often entails an excessive number of panel presentations per year, extensive travel to conduct work without thought to personal and financial costs, and the demonstratively compulsive reading and responding to e-mail. For many, this signals a problem beyond pressured excellence or the publish-or-perish syndrome, a malady more akin to the imposter syndrome, the need to prove oneself to the institution on their terms, which value personal gain over collective achievement. But what is the cost to us personally and as a field? Without doubt, our work on the page informs our work on the public stages we inhabit together.

Notably, the high rejection rate of *Chicana/Latina Studies* has much to do with the shunning of citational ambivalences. Work accepted for publication assertively engages with the discourse on its own established terms and does so in ways that push readers on to higher ground. While we work to illustrate how our field is central to American studies and other trans- and interdisciplinary locations, we must also ask how do we cite one another and how is our work cited. Our overview here positions the journal as we see it and, more

importantly, as it should be seen first and foremost by its own readership. As editors, we believe it paramount that the journal exemplifies the vanguard of all that is possible in Chicana/Latina studies. Historically, Chicana and Latina feminists have insisted on a scholarship that is accountable to social problems and aims to root out injustice and expose artificial hierarchies and methods of exclusion. Indeed, Davalos crafted the title of her MALCS presentation from Eden Torres's recent book, *Chicana Without Apology*,<sup>5</sup> precisely because it so eloquently exemplifies a necessary refusal of ambivalence. Social transformation is the foundation of our field, and such a foundation cannot sustain any hesitancy or silence. Chicana/Latina studies will continue to cause interference and speak without apology for authentic liberation. Our editors' commentary for this volume seeks to offer more than just an overview of the contents or an assessment of the state of the field. It is a response to the invitation of the contributing essays and part of an ongoing proposal for the future of the field and all its possibilities.

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As this issue went into the final stages of production, we learned of the death of Yolanda Retter Vargas, the archivist of MALCS for the past four years. Her position as head Librarian/Archivist for the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA was the major reason MALCS decided to deposit its papers at the center's library. Yolanda was a fierce advocate for lesbians of color and caused interference in many academic and activist circles. At the memorial service on 29 September 2007, tatiana de la tierra read her poem that describes the forms and force of Yolanda's interference; it is published in this issue to commemorate a life of involvement sin vergüenza. We dedicate this issue to Yolanda Retter Vargas (December 4, 1947 – August 8, 2007).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The paper draws from her forthcoming publication in *Feminist Studies* in spring 2008, and it details the trends briefly outlined here. Davalos joined *Chicana/Latina Studies* first as managing editor for volume 3 and became coeditor in 2003. In this time, she has reviewed over 125 submissions to MALCS. Additionally, in her position as editorial board member of *Aztlán: The Journal of Chicano Studies*, she holds the distinction of being the second most prolific reviewer in the field between 1994 and 2004. Laura Pulido holds the position as top reviewer. Davalos is formally identified as a Star Peer Reviewer in “Thirty-fifth Anniversary Appreciations,” *Aztlán* 30, no. 1 (2005): xi.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriela F. Arrendondo, Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, and Patricia Zavella, eds. 2003. *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press; The Latina Feminist Group. 2001. *Telling to Live*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Carla Trujillo, ed. 1998. *Living Chicana Theory*. Berkeley: Third Woman Press.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase “a long line of vendidas” comes from Cherríe Moraga (1983), *Loving in the War Years*, Boston: South End Press. Norma Alarcón, Rafaela Castro, Deena González, Margarita Melville, Emma Pérez, Beatriz Pesquera, Tey Diana Rebolledo, Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell, Christine Sierra, and Patricia Zavella, eds. 1993. *Chicana Critical Issues, Series in Chicana/Latina Studies*. Berkeley: Third Woman Press; Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera, eds. 1993. *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*. Berkeley: University of California.

<sup>5</sup> Eden Torres. 2003. *Chicana Without Apology: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*. New York and London: Routledge.