EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Testimoniando and Unearthing Voices: Chicanas/Latinas Painting and Speaking Our Stories

Tiffany Ana López and Josie Méndez-Negrete

Latina and feminist avant-garde dramatist, Maria Irene Fornes, is famous for using the phrase, "painting with words" to describe the craft of playwrighting. Her goal as a writing teacher has been to empower students to speak their stories through all senses and to embrace the aesthetic as integral to storytelling. Craft is the substance and vehicle of art and any message it might deliver. Information partially informs action; message alone is never enough. Ultimately, we must be moved. The work of the artist is to inspire and provoke audiences. Fornes dedicated herself to passing on the important message that Latinas/os are not just sociological subjects but human beings, and all human beings have the right to express themselves artistically. Artists and writers feel not just a right but also a responsibility to do so.

This issue of *Chicana/Latina Studies* is grounded by the vital question: What does it mean to unearth voices and how do we do this? Whether we are scholars, administrators, literary or visual artists, working across the genres of critical analysis and creative thought, we both, individually and collectively, grapple with the process of coming into voice and speaking our stories. Artistic self-expression and critical analysis are highly politicized acts for they are constituted within a historical framework where our painting on canvas or with words has been forcibly controlled and denigrated on multiple levels. It is not surprising that we strongly embrace certain icons and phrases as talismans and amulets. Frida's image appears on the walls of so many of our homes for

a reason: She powerfully moves us. "Si se puede" and "We are all Arizona" are not slogans. They are political science and philosophy portably encapsulated as memory and mantra, the substance of movement.

In her community study of Litchfield Park, Arizona, Gloria Holguín Cuádraz engages knowledge using her sociological and creative imaginary. There she found the power to create and reconstruct the memory of a town as she reclaims the identity of a young girl whose image had been captured by an unidentified photographer, while Cuádraz documented the history of this company town she began painting. She writes,

> I painted Petra Gem to recover her from the anonymity of that *typical* stereotype and to mark her humanity…to create a space of belonging—to place her on a wall so as to encourage and inspire conversations about her life and times…. When we honor the history of an individual, of a people, whether through the art of painting or the art of research, we rewrite the narrative and the history of its past…she unearthed, not only my creativity, but also the possibilities of creating knowledge.

The works in this volume illustrate variant ways of excavating and creating knowledge, practicing testimoniando and illustrating the nuances of culture through its practices, performative qualities, and representations.

Ella Diaz, in an analysis of Chicana/o-Latina/o aesthetic, "considers several works of art as forms of testimonio." She begins with an examination of performance, unpacking selected works by Regina José Galindo and Claudia Bernardi who "visualize and actualize testimonios in response to genocide and crimes against humanity." Weaving into her argument the artistic creations of

Chicanas/os who produced works between the 1960s and 1970s, Diaz amplifies her argument by engaging us in a discussion of "testimonial-like traditions inherent [in] Chicana/o visual art, as well 1980s and 1990s performance art by Native Americans and U.S. Latinas/os." She illustrates her point with the works of José Montoya, Juana Alicia, and James Luna, who along with Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, she identifies as the "antecedents to twenty-first century visual and performance testimonios." Clearly making her point, Diaz states, "Each of these artists integrates elements of the literary testimonio" into their work. For her, "Chicana/o-Latina/o art originates in, and continues to evolve through, transnational mixtures, internal migrations, and cultural convergences," and as such these expressions become integral to art history.

Marci R. McMahon analyzes Alma López's piece, *California Fashions Slaves*, arguing that the artist "challenges essentialized views of motherhood by deconstructing and making visible the very ideologies and policies that have sought to conflate women of Mexican descent to domesticity." Further engaging with the image, her essay explores how "the print decolonizes motherhood by incorporating the Aztec moon warrior goddess Coyolxauhqui, a characteristic of many of López's images." The incorporation of this pre-Columbian signifier of womanhood can be understood as "decolonial motherhood," as her image reads as a predecessor of "the labor of Mexicana and Chicana garment workers and activists" to mark their fragmentation. In her final reading of "*California Fashions Slaves*, McMahon looks at how López also honors women's creative resistance and agency," arguing that the piece provides "a visual representation of Chicanas outside of the colonial binary of virgin/whore and xenophobic frameworks of domestic/foreign and legal/illegal."

An evocation of memory and embodied performance takes us into the spiritual practices that are central in Susan C. Méndez's examination of Cristina García's,

Dreaming in Cuban (1992) and *Monkey Hunting* (2003). Méndez draws on religious, literary, and performance studies to analyze "how ancestral African spiritual practices connect to issues of nation and racial identity," focusing "on the processes of religious, racial, and gender identification for the Afro-Cuban." She argues, "Participation in Santería bestows upon [Latina/o Caribbeans] capabilities greater than they have ever known and permit incisive evaluations of the nation-state." Furthermore, "Santería comprises a large part of the racial identity and history of certain characters," as Santería serves to enact "agency, national critique, and a way to maintain a sense of racial identity."

Such practices of articulating and recalling cultural memories are also engaged by Annette Portillo, who coins the term *photomemories* to examine the genre of autobiography through a reading of Norma E. Cantú's "autobioethnography," *Canícula*. In her essay, Portillo argues that Cantú's narrative engages a cross-cultural and mestiza consciousness to challenge "dominant ideologies of Chicana identity." It is her conclusion that Cantú's work "strategically incorporates family photos and a passport that problematizes further identity-subject formation, citizenship, historical objectivity, authenticity, truth-telling, and representation." Rather then serving as the sole means of coming to memory, Cantú's photographs "act as characters that participate in a type of storytelling where memories are triggered as a result of randomly picked images." Portillo argues that it is with this strategy for engaging in testimonio that the author "does not simply tell a singular life story, but rather Cantú utilizes multiple narrative voices that reflect communal storytelling."

Memory and agency—in variant emotional spaces and lived experiences—are central in the poetic expressions of Lorna Dee Cervantes and Iuri Morales Lara. In her just released book, *Ciento: 100 100-Word Love Poems* (Wings Press 2011), Cervantes unpacks love and desire, denuding it to the bones as she

builds one hundred poems of one hundred words to identify our sentient selves and bring them to life so that we may both fully embrace and fully engage the totality of experience that sustains us. Cervantes shapes her words into images that inspire us to love again, as she imparts the subtleties and nuances of love's dance through *100 Words to a Noisy You*. She writes,

> I want to toll you
> as I roll you, sound
> test you and check your
> mic. Baby, I want to
> crank it up to 100.

Iuri Morales Lara, in her poetry and prose, aims to "recapture that which has been lost to me: family, history, identity—a complete narrative often reading as incomplete." As she examines her life, Morales Lara guides us through her life-path as she voices experiences that have shaped her to become the person that she is—"I cannot afford more massacres," she writes recalling the losses she has survived. "My mother's death should be the last in our family caused by emotional and mental suffocation. Palabra is a space holding many broken places. A place I have decided to decipher with memory," thus coming to words about her ancestral past. Morales Lara reclaims her Self:

> "What nationality is Lara?" My dentist asks,
> after I have told him I am a college senior
> attending UC Berkeley.
> "Mexican," I say, under the hard edge paper I'm biting.
> "Wow, you're doing well for a Mexican," he mumbles.

Within the scope of this issue, in the spectrum of their variant forms, the images cast by each and every contributor provides us a canvas on which to

imagine and amplify the knowledge we carry. Testimoniando we come to self- and community-knowledge, as we enrich the brushstrokes of our canvases with lived experiences and self-reflections of Chicananisma/Latinidades.

As the contributors in this journal create a space for dialogue so as to make visible our knowledge production, we as editors write the commentary for the fall issue in response to the conversation staged at the MALCS Summer Institute. Through the collective testimoniando that characterizes our meeting space, we are reminded of the rights, privileges, duties, and challenges inherent to our being Chicana/Latina academics and the work we must accomplish. There is a unique type of professional/cultural accountability that comes with our responsibilities in each of our fields of study because we still represent the minority of presence and leadership in higher education, and during this cultural moment in which Latina/o students are growing at record numbers and represent up to 30% of the student body at Hispanic serving colleges and universities (HSIs). This necessarily informs the ways we perceive our location within the profession as well as our arts and activist communities. It also informs how we are viewed within the field and its various sitios. Inside the context of MALCS, this includes the charges we take and the duties we discharge because of our compromiso to the organization and our commitment to the membership and all for which MALCS stands.

We begin with the recognition that MALCS relies on the investment of its citizens/ members. Not uncommon for a voluntary professional organization, the membership has ebbed and flowed. There have been times, as were the cases in 2002 and 2010, when Institutes were not held because of constrained commitment or the politics of everyday life forced onto a national stage, as was the case with Arizona, compromising the conference in Summer 2010. MALCS has stayed the course because of the energies of invested women such

as Ada Sosa Riddell and Lupe Gallegos Díaz, who were the most consistent and uninterrupted presence in the organization as it evolved from the early years into the present. At this year's Institute, Gallegos Diaz was formally recognized with the Tortuga Award. The keynote speaker, Dr. Gloria Romero, former California state senator, specifically mentioned Sosa Riddell as one of the founding figures that forged the path for her own life's work. Romero articulated that there is not a pipeline preparing the next cadre of scholars; rather, given the state of education, what we have is a sieve that filters out those who do not possess the resources and cultural capital to realize their potential and achieve success in the form of obtaining degrees, advancing in rank, or securing key positions of power and influence.

Created as an alternative structure to dominant notions of academic citizenship and to deal with the racism, classism, and sexism that pervaded, MALCS and its journals—*VOCES* and *Chicana/Latina Studies*—emerged as venues where Chicana/Latina academics enacted their voices, documenting their work to migrate from the margin to the center, creating knowledge that went against the grain or practices of the institution, and developing a women-centered space for the creation of knowledge, which deviated from male, Chicano, and white female cultural practices. Chicanas and Latinas had to forge an academic life as marginalized and overburdened citizens forced to take on the responsibility of creating a counter-culture de la nada, finding support and comfort among those who reflected their personal and political selves and could speak to the experience of being an academic citizen in a profession where objectivity, detachment, and traditional notions of research pervaded and kept them outside.

The legacy of our presence—those who entered academia because of the social policies that democratized the academy, specifically the Educational

Opportunity Act of 1965 and affirmative action—thus not only began with limited cultural capital to succeed. Chicanas/Latinas had to carve out a way to become equal citizens in the context of an environment still clothed in feudal practices that upheld exclusive ways for creating knowledge. Who were some of these early women who forged the way, and how did their journey begin and evolve into the present? While history documents the presence of Mexican Americans in academia, as previously stated, it was not until passage of progressive social policies that people of color, as a group, were afforded access—with men groomed for entry well before women.

To assess this change—counting thirteen years as the average time for completing the journey of combined undergraduate and graduate degrees—we can conclude it was those whose educations span 1965–1978 that represent the first generation of scholars who entered the academy, represented by such figures as Hector Garcia, Ernesto Galarza, Jovita Gonzalez, Americo Paredes, and Julian Zamora. However, the first generation primarily produced men of color academics who were sought out to complete their education, with a handful of women, including Ada Sosa Riddell, Blandina Cardenas and Bertha Perez from Texas, and Maxine Baca Zinn among them.

The second cohort, 1979–1992, represents a Chicana Renaissance during which greater numbers of women came into the professoriate and established themselves as foundational voices in Chicana/Latina feminist studies: Norma Alarcón, Yolanda Broyles, Antonia Castañeda, Norma E. Cantú, Juanita Díaz-Cotto, Elisa Linda Facio, Yvette Flores, Alma Garcia, Deena Gonzales, Aída Hurtado, Sylvia Hurtado, Martha C. López-Garza, Margarita Melville, Mary Pardo, Beatriz Pesquera, Mary Romero, Vicki L. Ruiz, Denise Segura, Norma Williams, Migdalia Reyes, Sonia Saldívar Hull, Yvonne Yarbro Bejerano, and Patricia Zavella are but a few who represent this group. These are the scholars

whose work comprises a substantial portion of the archive that informs the work published in *C/LS*.

The authors who often appear in the pages of this journal as contributing authors represent the third cohort. As illustrated by the citational footprints of their essays, this third generation of scholars is characterized by a distinct sense of responsibility to positioning their scholarship in conversation with work produced by the previous generation of scholars from the earlier cohorts and carrying forward the types of programming that made their education possible.

The fourth and most recent cohort began their educational trajectory in 2006 with projected graduation in 2019. The questions that must be asked of this generation are: Who are they and what are they learning and conveying about cultural life and citizenship in the academy? Will they be inculcated into reproducing oppressive practices? How will they build on the foundation forged by those who came before them and create alternative routes to success?

What does an analysis of the generational shifts reveal? In particular, what have we learned regarding professional life, scholarship, mentorship, and leadership as citizens inside a culture that keeps reproducing inequalities in its de/forming of expectations about what it means to be a member of the professoriate? Frankly stated: Are we continuing to play the boys' game in the shadows of select women from privileged classes, or are we deepening the foundation left by those Chicanas/Latinas who built the legacy upon which we stand?

Many of the answers are displayed in the citizenship practices we enact. The examination of these practices demands that we further ask some very important questions: Are we envisioning and creating paths that do not merely position us as the sole exemplars for success measured by degrees obtained at

elite institutions of higher education and solely authored book publications? Are we acting as brokers, giving access to some, while excluding others because they will not make us look good or expand our own reputation as scholars? How do we articulate, measure, and acknowledge success? Do we create places of inclusion to ensure the success of our colleagues, freely and frankly sharing our lessons with them so that they may carve out a path for success in their own professional advancement? Have we discussed the trajectory of our daily interactions throughout the pipeline, so that when our colleagues opt to take an alternative route, they may have a bird's eye view of their possibilities? The status quo implies that if we follow the traditional path, there will be no complications with our promotions and advancement. However, there are many different ways to have a successful, meaningful, and influential career. In this era of constrained resources and curtailed avenues for advancement, are we consistently, honestly, and strategically talking about the variety of possibilities?

These questions need to be placed at the forefront of our conversations about the profession because of the reality that women of color are still a highly under-represented and over-tapped service resource—carrying multiple burdens as women, people of color, members of the poor or working class, and, as such, often called upon to represent the public face of inclusion and diversity. Our lives too easily spin into a consuming state of multitasking to the point of sacrifice to both personal wellbeing and career advancement. To what effect do we intend our service? When we are overburdened, how do we clearly articulate that we are willfully absorbing a certain level of cost? There are some identifiable historically enduring problems that have undermined our ability to fully thrive and succeed in higher education. For example, often we are assigned responsibilities of providing administrative and student support services that are not valued at the same rate as research or even teaching, despite the fact that in theory—and to the public—all three are defined

as equally important. The reality for most of us is that, formally stated or not, we are charged with the responsibility of advising and mentoring first generation students who often have not been adequately prepared emotionally or academically; and we take on this work to establish a bridge between the academy and the community because we keenly understand that a college education changes not only the individual but the future possibilities of one's family and community. Our work is highly synergistic with teaching, research, and service mutually informing one another. While we often feel we are struggling against the tide, we are actually at the forefront of transforming higher education. The MALCS Summer Institute is powerful precisely because it so clearly evidences and affirms this.

One of the areas that requires deliberately engaged transformative thinking and doing is publication, the sharing of our knowledge. When it comes to publication, more often than not, we lack mentoring and seek to present work in the ways historically valued by the profession and in the most traditional venues of our disciplines. Significantly, interdisciplinarity, precisely the work of Chicana/Latina studies, is also the work of the future. Higher education must teach students to become the creative and agile thinkers demanded by the economic infrastructure and creative contact zones of a global world. Oftentimes, taking the special issue route or answering a specialized call for papers marks us as outsiders to higher education. Rather than choosing the flagship interdisciplinary journal of MALCS, *Chicana/Latina Studies*, as the venue for spreading our knowledge and ideas, we select journals that may on the surface appear more prestigious; ironically, these are also the journals that marginalize our work (see Karen Mary Davalos's, "The State of Academic Journals in U.S. Latino Studies," conference presentation, Inter-University Program for Latino Research, Chicago, IL, 2009). For MALCS members, the organization's flagship journal should be the first site of submission. As citizens of the research culture

the organization represents, it is our responsibility to contribute to the journal. Doing so ensures that MALCS may continue to grow and contribute to the creation of knowledge about and for Chicanas/Latinas. Additionally, it affirms the journal as a scholarly publication that does not tokenize or patronize our work and acknowledges it providing the space where we may dive into the very heart of things we know and want to document without having to rationalize our existence or the importance of our work.

Like our teaching and service, our scholarship is a form of leadership. Our work has performative impact in its possibility to be transformative in ways that are both rich and complex. In its feminist editorial practices, the editors of *C/LS* work to bring Chicana/Latina scholarship to fruition by working in partnership with the author, often engaging in a deep level of mentorship on the page. Authors are strategically directed through the process of peer-review publication, from the initial in-house review, to copyediting, proofreading, and publication. This process often begins with participation in the rigorous and intensive MALCS Summer Institute Writing Workshop, re-inaugurated and led for *Chicana/Latina Studies* by Karen Mary Davalos. When the editors commit to publishing work, we consider ourselves partners in the process. We are especially committed to pre-tenure scholars as they represent a vital link in the pipeline. We have also created a mentoring structure with our editorial colectiva model comprised of undergraduate and graduate students merging their energies and commitment to carry out all the processes of the journal. The editors' goal is to ensure the highest quality of scholarship in the journal while also participating in the training of foundational scholars and mentors in our field.

Many of us have been fortunate enough to have mentors who believe in our work and have opened up spaces for us to circulate research. For a variety of complicated reasons, others have not prepared us. On occasion, editors of

Chicana/Latina Studies have received submissions conceptually bereft of a sense of standing in dialogue with larger conversations staged within the field and lacking engagement with the citational footprints of the journal. Sometimes, the work makes it appear that we are not the initial venue of consideration. Our editorial practice includes making an effort to honor the work that is attempted and give it our best in-house eye, completing an in-house review of every entry, and, rather than immediately route lackluster or under-developed work into the circular file, we engage in mentoring on the page and do our best to return the work with productive feedback.

The journal is a fundamental sitio when it comes to fostering its members and their participation in invested citizenship within the culture of the academy. It is important for all of us to become aware of how we are asking for guidance and support. When we ask for it, do we receive it and is it helpful? Do we receive—and give—guidance in ways that do not injure or continue to stunt the process of writing and creating? Sharing our work in-and-of-itself can risk becoming a source of injury or means for re-stimulating past injuries, especially when we have not had the cultural capital to feel the confidence in what we understand or generate as knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is socially constructed. When we partner in the process of creating, our work is that much better, particularly when our investment clarifies our own thinking in ways that allow us to advance our own work in concert with others.

Clearly, to become part of higher education, those Chicana/Latina scholars who came before us had to contend with a racist, classist, and masculinist academic culture. The walking wounded, having to protectively fortify themselves, did not always dare to speak the injuries they experienced and, subsequently, might not have clearly articulated an alternative path for us to draw on to conceptualize contributing to the profession in a different way.

Understanding the evolution of our generations provides a powerful way to understand the past, present, and future. As María Olivia Davalos Stanton states in her review, "Thresholds of Personal and Communal Violence," *C/LS* can be a "doorway, the space that forms the bottom of an entrance or passage from one room to another. We pass through a threshold each time we enter or exit a house or room." Voicing, performing, and making visible what we know, we can continue to paint with words as we come into voice on the threshold of knowledge.