

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Conclusion of Service: Reflecting on Seven Years of Collaborative Work in Chicana/Latina Feminist Editorial Practice

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I have been on the editorial board of *Chicana/Latina Studies* since 2003 and joined as co-editor in 2006. During this time, I have collaborated as editor of six volumes (biannually produced, fall and spring), comprised of eleven issues, totaling nearly 2,000 pages. That equates to nearly every working day of my life, for the past seven years, editing a page for the journal. It is very hard to imagine not being involved in directing and producing *Chicana/Latina Studies*. While I am leaving the role of editor, I am transitioning into new roles in which the knowledge and wisdom gained from editorship will inform my contributions to the journal in new ways, participating in its leadership as a member of MALCS. My goal with this final commentary, then, is not to say goodbye but rather to document some of the contributions I have made as editor, describe my journey of doing the work for such a long period, and share what I have learned from the incredible opportunity to engage in an ongoing collaborative project driven by feminist editorial practice.

The term of editorship is restricted to five years, and for important reasons. The journal needs fresh leadership and renewed minds, and the organization does not want to exhaust its visionaries. With this issue, I am concluding seven years of editorial service to the journal. I extended my service by two

additional years to provide editorial continuity as the journal transitioned from Loyola Marymount University under the editorship of Karen Mary Davalos to its present home at the University of Texas, San Antonio, with editor Josie Méndez-Negrete leading the journal and continuing its excellence. During this time I have had the opportunity to work intensively and collaboratively with two feminist scholars who share an exceptionally deep commitment to the leadership and operations of the journal. What brought us together as editors and collaborators is our fierce belief that *Chicana/Latina Studies* represents the benchmark of excellence in our field. We take most seriously our mission to safeguard the journal and understand that fostering work into print is a transformative force on multiple levels: We are building an archive, circulating knowledge, flagging future developments, mentoring contributors—those involved in production as well as authors and artists—and playing a role in the advancement of careers and life paths. Working with the journal has had a regenerative force in my life because it provided such a singular space to engage with others also invested in focusing on the field and upholding its importance. It is empowering to acquire vocabularies that allow for speaking about how parts relate to a whole, how each essay, creative writing, and artistic work represents the epistemology and methodology of the field.

MALCS entrusts and charges the editors of *Chicana/Latina Studies* to build from the current archive into the future. The work of journal editor therefore entails much more than wordsmithing. It involves soliciting and fielding submissions, working closely with contributors to address the challenge points of their work, and fostering all involved through the various phases of the publication process while also orchestrating and cohering the separate contributions into a finished issue that represents a significant conversation currently at play within the field and provides commentary on the collective work as it represents the evolution and development of the field. Such

editorship requires a combination of skills in leadership, scholarship, and creative activity. As practiced at *Chicana/Latina Studies*, it is a combination of publication work, creative activity, and academic leadership. As I wrote in my first journal commentary (6:2), there is a paradox to the role of the editor of which most people remain unaware: The more effectively she does her job, the less visible her hand appears. While the editor must be a leader and visionary, her principle role is to use her talents to spotlight the work of the field.

With this final commentary, I want to share some highlights of coming into this editorial work: From 2003–2005, I actively served as a manuscript reviewer and created a column to explore the struggles faced by Chicanas and Latinas in academia, authoring the inaugural essay, “Speaking Frankly, Documenting Struggle: Chicanas/Latinas in Academia” (6:1). In 2005, I was elected to the position of co-editor to bring expertise in working with creative submissions and testimonio essays. Additionally, as the journal’s co-editor, I solicited, reviewed, and edited essays in the areas of literary, performance, visual art, and cultural studies. I have been privileged to usher into print work by an impressive range of voices, from highly established and notable figures—Josefina López, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Antonia Castañeda, Carla Trujillo, Barbara Carrasco, Rusty Barceló—to those making their publication debut, such as María Olivia Stanton Davalos. My editorship has also included authoring and co-authoring commentary essays to frame each issue of the journal. Other significant contributions I have brought to the journal: annually publishing an overview of the organization’s summer institute and conference; expanding the review section beyond books to include performance, exhibition, and conference reviews; interweaving creative writing and visual art with scholarly essays to show how academics, artists, and creative writers stand in conversation with one another—together, albeit differently, exploring issues central to the field. Prior to my editorship, creative writing and visual art

were relegated to separate sections and, subsequently, not clearly positioned as part of a shared scholarly conversation. My contribution to thinking about the organization of each journal was to resist disciplinary divides by articulating how all of the contributor pieces, from critical essays to creative writing, address a shared theme and/or question central to the field rather than represent the particular disciplines that comprise the field. Too often, when we speak of interdisciplinarity, we are looking at how separate fields approach a shared question. *Chicana/Latina Studies* represents transdisciplinarity, which is born from shared questions that require culling together methodologies from different fields, in the process, creating the critical agility presupposed by interdisciplinarity. This is the framework I have worked to articulate for the journal, beginning with the staging of the contributions as existing in conversation with one another. I have introduced key vocabulary, such as “citational footprints” and “staged conversations,” to help further identify and articulate the methodology of our field.

Notably, as a flagship journal, *Chicana/Latina Studies* both reflects and shapes avenues of inquiry and provides the standard for scholarly excellence. As Karen Mary Davalos has emphasized in her lectures and reports about the journal, our rejection rate is 70 percent with a rigorous vetting process. As part of our commitment to excellence, we also create opportunities to foster new work through publication workshops for pre-tenure scholars who receive intensive feedback from a member of the editorial board with the most promising authors assigned to senior mentors who help them expand and revise the work over the course of a year. The journal regularly receives permissions and reprint requests. Several of the short stories I fostered into publication have won awards: Yovani Flores’s “El Llorón” (10: 1) received 2nd place in the Curbside 2010 Winter Award Opportunity for Short Stories, and Thelma Reyna’s “The Heavens Weep for Us” (8:1), the signature story for her

published story collection of the same title, was a finalist in the short story category for the 2010 National Best Books Awards. Many of the pre-tenure scholars who published with the journal during my time as co-editor are now successfully tenured. Because professional development is a key concern of the organization, journal editors work to bring their insight and experiences to the larger MALCS membership. For example, at the Summer Institute and Conference, in addition to regular offering of writing workshops and individual consultations, editors participate in panels and roundtables. The Colectiva established at each editor's institution is also an important source of support and development. I want to publicly recognize and thank the UCR Colectiva for their support to the journal and to the field: Jennifer Avila, Alicia Contreras, Shelly Garcia, Joelle Guzman, Lisette Ordorica Lasater, Sonia Alejandra Rodriguez, Sonia Valencia, and Tracy Zuniga.

An editor's vision, of course, is shaped by her own scholarship and creative activity. My research focuses on issues of violence and trauma and includes reflection about my own personal experiences with violence. My work explores how artists and writers thematically focus on violence as a means to introduce new vocabulary to audiences—to give name to the unsayable—and therefore allow for the staging of a conversation that might resonate toward the enactment of personal and social change. As part of my theorizations, I have coined the term “critical witnessing” to describe the process of being so profoundly provoked and/or moved by the experience of reading a text or viewing a performance that one feels compelled to engage in a specific course of action avowedly intended to forge a path toward change. In so doing, the critical witness enacts a refusal to participate in a problem or perpetuate injustice. I explore some of the many forms of critical witnessing (writing, performing, viewing, teaching), beginning with how authors and artists (myself included) signal the personal as a highly productive springboard for

critical engagement. These interests and investments are most evident in the editor's commentaries I have authored and co-authored for the journal, and they are also reflected in much of the work I have fostered into publication, perhaps most especially in the works of testimonio, a genre devoted to coming into voice through an enacted grappling with the unsayable.

As I clarify in "Slippage—An Introduction," it is especially meaningful for me to conclude my editorship by fostering into print *Slip of the Tongue—A Latina Performance Project About Personal and Cultural Healing*. I am currently a professor of Theatre Studies at the University of California, Riverside, where I have been on faculty since 1995. During my tenure with the journal, I moved from the Department of English to the Theatre Department; my work with the journal directly informed my clarity about the importance of such a career shift and change in disciplinary framework. The difference: I realized I needed to be working alongside practitioners as well as scholars, and training students to be scholars, critics, practitioners, creative artists, and cultural workers. As an editor, I have been able to draw on my work as a dramaturge and foster to publication in the pages of the journal several key playwrights and performance artists, among them Josefina López, Monica Palacios, Adelina Anthony, Raquel Gutierrez, Cristina Nava, Sara Guerrero, and Elizabeth Isela Szekeresh. I have also contributed a review essay about the world premiere of Cherríe Moraga's *Digging Up the Dirt* (10:1). As a scholar of theatre studies, this work has been incredibly important to me since plays and performance texts are not widely published and theaters continue to struggle to fill their seats. Having the work in print allows it to circulate and gain attention that, ideally, will lead to further productions. It is also important, since theatre and performance are genres central to both Chicana/o and Latina/o studies and feminist discourses and the contact zone for the work of so many of our key theorists, public intellectuals, and cultural workers.

The publication of Josefina López's *Detained in the Desert* was particularly important because of the immediate and discernable impact it had. I shared the volume of the journal with the artistic director of the theatre season at my university, Eric Barr, who read the work, became excited about the play, and included it in the 2011–2012 season as the opening production (which he directed). *Detained in the Desert* played for seven performances to four sold out shows with the other three shows to nearly full houses. It marked a landmark production on my campus, which is a Hispanic Serving Institution, for it was the first Chicana/o play on the main stage in such a long time, no one could immediately offer the exact date of the last featured Chicana/o plays (two works, by Carlos Morton and Milcha Sanchez Scott). Chicana/o students auditioned in record numbers, and the play received a lengthy and detailed review in the campus paper. By organizing a post play discussion for each of the performances, including an opening night talk-back with Josefina López, I was able to help further harness the energy of the play and the conversation it launches about matters of immigration and cultural citizenship in the wake of Arizona's SB 1070. The play is now being widely taught on my campus in several departments, including composition courses. Colleagues who were invited to facilitate talkbacks want to return to do others, and students who had not been patrons of their university theater are now eagerly anticipating the next plays of the season. In my present class on theatre and social change, students refer to the play as a reference point, and the numbers of Chicana/o students in my theatre classes have clearly grown. All of this is to offer an example of what published work in the journal can facilitate.

To turn to sharing a bit about my background training and how it informs my work as an editor: I hold a doctorate in English in which my work emphasized Chicana/o literary and cultural studies, theatre studies, and women's studies. Prior to obtaining the doctorate, I was interested in pursuing an MFA and forged relationships with many of the writers whose work I later anthologized

in my edited collection *Growing Up Chicano* (1993). In hindsight, my work as an editor was in formation during my undergraduate years at California State University Sacramento, where I launched a creative writing journal, working under the direction of poet and visionary Olivia Castellano, whose mentorship provided the model for my own. Later, as a doctoral student, I was heavily involved in composition pedagogy and curriculum development for first generation college students and often compiled my students' writing into zine-style collections. Throughout my career I have remained connected to the arts community and worked as a dramaturge, a position that entails serving as a literary midwife of sorts, helping to deliver the play into the world. I remain keenly attuned to the role of narrative (literary and visual) and publication in promoting dialogue and fostering community.

In particular, it is my work as a dramaturge that has informed the kinds of conversations I have helped to stage within the pages of the journal, as well as the platforms I have helped to build for the staging of those conversations. The concept of staging a conversation is important because it requires that one think about the impact, as well as the content, of the work. Significantly, the work of the journal is directed by its flagship organization. *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* (MALCS) is a feminist Chicana/Latina academic organization dedicated to forging material change by building bridges between community and university settings, transforming higher education, and promoting new paradigms and methods. The organization seeks coalition and structural support for social movements. This includes forging pedagogical spaces for mentoring and publication that lead to participation in direct action. MALCS works to dismantle heteropatriarchy through a feminist editorial practice including the production, creation, circulation, and distribution of knowledge. Both the organization and the journal actively refuse to participate in professionalization activities that do not include programs for material social change.

Scholarship and leadership form the twin poles of an editor's work with the journal. As editors, we understand scholarship and leadership as mutually informative: In higher education, leaders must be good scholars and scholars must situate themselves as leaders, guiding readers through intellectual and/or institutional trouble spots, namely oppressive modes of thought and behavior. The role of the editor is to position work to make the greatest possible impact for both the reader and the writer. We want readers who are inspired by an article to think about the field in new ways; and we want readers to read an entire volume and gain a heightened sense of the specific debates taking place within the field and across disciplines. With *Chicana/Latina Studies*, our goal is to empower writers not just by having them see the work in print, but more so throughout the process of working with editors. The material change we seek is for the author to achieve circulation, recognition, and cultural capital—including the merits and promotions that academic institutions often determine by publication activity. But we also seek an institutional impact as the writer then passes forward to colleagues and students the knowledge they acquired from working with editors at *Chicana/Latina Studies*. There are three key areas that have been the focus of our editorial outreach to cultivate scholarship and leadership: (1) writing workshops, (2) a mentoring program, and (3) the insistence on citational footprints.

Our writing workshops are held annually at MALCS Summer Institute and led by the editors. Our goal is to target several essays from the workshop to then foster toward publication in the journal. Those given priority for selected participation are usually, but not exclusively, pre-tenure scholars. Some particular problem areas that we consistently see: scholars have not received adequate mentoring by faculty at their Ph.D. granting institutions. (This can be for a variety of reasons; see the editors' commentary, 11:1.) We observe writing problems in the very crafting of the scholarship; but also and more

disconcerting, we observe a lack of clearly expressed understanding about what it means to fully engage with the archive of Chicana/Latina studies. Things that follow from this: The writer evidences a struggle to come into voice and she appears not to feel authorized as a scholarly voice entering into an existing conversation. To emphasize that submitted work to the journal is by its very definition entering a conversation, as part of the workshop, participants must sign a contract in which they agree to cite the Workshop Program as central to their development of the final paper in the future publication of the work, whether their paper is published in *Chicana/Latina Studies* or elsewhere. The partnership Writing Mentoring Program is designed to develop works with strong potential for publication but that need work which exceeds the purview of revise and resubmit. Scholars are paired with a mentor who agrees to read three drafts of the work over a nine-month period. Other programming efforts to train future leadership within the organization: Each editor has created a colectiva comprised of doctoral students and undergraduates en route to graduate programs; this provides the opportunity for colectiva members to read cutting edge work in the field and to network with the co-editor's colectiva as well as the larger editorial board.

'Citational footprints' is a phrase that I coined to describe the full range of acknowledgement of sources that the editors of *Chicana/Latina Studies* understand as defining both intellectual rigor and critical politics of the journal and MALCS as an organization. Citational footprints are important because they have a ripple effect. Practicing citational footprints is about engaging with an archive and making that archive clearly stated so that others may then further the conversation as we have entered or launched it; it is also about acknowledging and documenting intellectual labor, particularly that of our students. I give deep thanks to the UCR Colectiva for their incredible support to the project of this journal and building the field. Our work does

not exist without the path forged for us by others—and that path is not built solely from or through in-print publication materials; there are other ways of imparting and sharing information, such as through conference presentations and roundtables, seminar reading lists and discussions, as well as informal *platicas* over meals, during office hours, and in the various other meeting grounds where we exchange knowledge. Citational footprints demand that we acknowledge our thinking does not happen in a vacuum and that we have arrived at our ideas and expressed them in writing as a direct result of someone else's generous sharing of ideas, which may or may not already be in print.

Here I would like to offer comment on my concept of the citational footprint. Citational footprints, both a methodology and a critical feminist practice, provide a way to delineate generational influences and signal, not only the fruition of a field, but also its structure. It creates the historiography, the canon of thinkers in addition to the ways and methods of thinking. It creates and affirms meaningful networks through acknowledging both the work and the workers who have effected intellectual artistic cultural change. This framework for documentation carries great critical and political force because it asserts what counts as scholarly work, that it is not just the references to work in print that inform and define engagement, but that scholarly work is also born from the invisible labor of mentoring and teaching as well as the undocumented intellectual labor that circulates outside of print culture. Citational footprints are key because they have a ripple effect that can send forth a shock wave, for good and bad. The rigor of the field demands them, especially as our field is often misunderstood, disrespected, and otherwise put under erasure. Professional survival requires them. No relationships have ever been lost by a scholar being overly generous in acknowledgements. However, many relationships have been fractured or severed completely as the direct result of a scholar's failure to chart the full range of citational footprints that inform a

project. Very simply stated, citational footprints are where theory and practice most strongly and visibly meet. As editors, it is the first thing we look at when we read a submission or publication, and it is what our carefully attuned ears listen for when we attend conference panels, our source ground for learning about new directions in the field.

My vocabulary has worked to create ways to talk about our feminist editorial practice at the journal. For me, the journal exemplifies a critical mass of scholars. Over the course of seven years and nearly 2,000 pages, I have hopefully left a significant path of citational footprints. Rather than retrace them here, I invite you to investigate and read them as a map charting a journey. I want to conclude by expressing my gratitude to MALCS for supporting the journal and my role as co-editor. I also want to thank the readership for so actively engaging with the journal, for regularly reading and circulating the journal, making us the prioritized destination for publishing your scholarship and creative work, and thereby affirming *Chicana/Latina Studies* as the leading journal of record in our field. I give my greatest heartfelt thanks to Josie Méndez-Negrete and Karen Mary Davalos. My writing and other editorial contributions to the journal were inspired by the depth, passion, and richness of our conversations, and with each exchange, I have grown stronger as a writer and a person. For the past ten years, I have been in the process of healing from trauma. Editorship of the journal helped me recover a sense of self that I thought had been lost in the aftermath. It is a cherished gift, one that I work to share. I look forward to building from this experience and to our future collective projects as a critical mass of scholars and creative artists.