

CONFERENCE REVIEW

2014 Roundtable on Latina Feminism

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Roundtable on Latina Feminism. *April 25–26, 2014. John Carroll University, Cleveland, OH. Sponsors: The Shula Chair in Philosophy at John Carroll University and The John Carroll University Center for Applied Ethics. Conference Organizer: Mariana Ortega.*

The Roundtable on Latina Feminism has become a fecund space to theorize and analyze Latina feminism. The conference organizer, Mariana Ortega, has secured financing for this Roundtable for seven years, thus providing a stimulating and productive venue for academics, artists, and activists alike. Its focus on Latina feminism makes this conference distinctive among others, but its support of Latina participants and interdisciplinary research within Latina/o Studies puts this conference in the tradition of the MALCS Summer Institute. The conference's philosophical basis allows for a range of texts and issues to be addressed, analyzed, and discussed.

One of the conference's structural choices, which makes it unique among feminist conferences today, is to highlight roundtable discussions, thus exposing participants to stimulating exchanges between six or seven presenters on themes that vary from the construction of self to the crafting of social justice initiatives. At the end of each presentation and each day, organizers allotted time for questions, reflections, and interconnections. Each day also included a keynote address. The program maximized the opportunities for synthesis among participants—both those presenting and those listening,

discussing, and carrying on conversations late into the day. This year, Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones were the touchstone theorists for the Roundtable, and participants were reminded that narratives of self, literature, theory, media, and their intersections were and are grounds for philosophy.

The first day of the conference opened up new possibilities for the application of Anzaldúa's work in university settings and beyond. All seven papers drew attention to the expansive potential of Chicana/Latina feminist work, yet also called attention to the dangers of romanticizing struggle and tools of resistance. On the point of potentiality, Edwina Barvosa delivered a keynote address mapping Anzaldúa's theory of mestiza consciousness as a method of critical self-transformation necessary for political identity formation and social change. In the lively discussion that followed, conference participants stressed the many Latina/o texts that lend themselves to self-transformative practices in the interests of social justice. Consequently, the reading, analyzing, and teaching of these texts proves to be even more necessary in our classrooms and communities. Caveats regarding our work were also addressed. Lizeth Gutiérrez asserted that *chisme* can function as a gendered and raced form of communication with potentiality to empower Latinas, but participants complicated this discussion by raising questions about the limits of *chisme* and the danger of reproducing idealized immigrant rhetoric. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza also emphasized how the intersection, or lack thereof, between Anzaldúa's borderland subject and Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subject leaves the reader with the realistic prospects of a post-human subject. At the end of day one, it was clear that work in Latina feminism continues to be critical to educating ethical and productive citizens in this age of transnational travel and global communication.

The second day of papers at the Roundtable brought attention to the individual and the community. According to Erika Soto, movements should

encounter “impossible subjects” and “intermeshed oppression” in order to benefit the individual and guard against the cooptation of social justice rhetoric. Stressing the centrality of an individual’s subjectivity, she argued that if the singular person is not allowed to be whole and free, then both the individual and the community suffer. Julie Avril Minich also addressed the topic of the community, calling attention to the political convergence of disability, Chicano/a, Feminist Studies, and environmental justice within mural art. When Karen Mary Davalos, the plenary speaker, opened her address, community was established as a strong theme weaving through conference presentations and discussions. Davalos built on this idea, discussing how an aesthetics of disruption and continuity can be found in the fusion of indigenous communal spirituality and sensibility in Linda Vallejo’s artwork. Conference presenters were reminded of the significant and intricate relationship between community and art. The take-away point of day two was not to replicate the injustice against which we struggle, but instead to simultaneously and equally value the individual as well as the community.

Before departing the conference, yet another question was raised and that was a pragmatic one. For seven years, the Roundtable has brought together Latina feminists so that, for two days, we can share work, identify key emerging themes in our fields and interdisciplines, address praxis, community, and pedagogy, and more. And yet this year the conference concluded with the knowledge that it might be the last due to funds running out. Participants noted how the Roundtable was distinctive in the non-hierarchical, intergenerational community that it gathered; indeed, the speakers at this Roundtable ranged from a first-year master’s student to full professors in the academy and internationally recognized scholars. Several attendees also noted how the Roundtable is known for including artists and activists in its sessions, thereby permitting communication and synergies between academic, artistic,

and activist communities. Over the years, the conference has energized Latina feminists, broken down the isolation that can often come with working in academe, and provided feminist scholars with critical support networks. It has enriched the scholarship and teaching of both presenters and attendees. I was astounded by the depth and breadth of the conference participants' analytic synthesis and the ability of the conference to serve so many needs over the years. I was also impressed by the participants' generous spirit in offers of help. In short, the Roundtable participants put into praxis the theory they analyzed. This review is my attempt to do the same. Over the years, the Roundtable has become a critical space for theory and praxis. It is my hope that it will continue to be so for many years to come.

General Information and programs for all *Roundtables on Latina Feminism*:
<http://sites.jcu.edu/lfr/>