MUSINGS

In the Flesh and Word

LATINA FEMINIST PHILOSOPHERS' COLLECTIVE LABOR

A Collective Vision, A Political Act: φιλοσοφια in the Roundtable on Latina Feminism

Cynthia M. Paccacerqua

To gather is a political act. Whether a gathering is capable of eliciting the participation of those present is a sign of the underlying vision organizing a collectivity. The marginalization of persons and modes of thought within gatherings that stand in for the field of philosophy in the United States speaks to the politics of these acts. Their underlying vision delimits the fate of alterity in our discipline: the silencing of persons whose lives may necessitate or invite thinking ignored realities, inhabiting unrecognized traditions, and/or working with alternative methodologies, conceptual tools, and symbolic forms. The Roundtable on Latina Feminism, however, presents us with the potential for a robust vision. It critically fosters affective relations capable of withstanding the challenges of alterity and oriented toward building a collective vision for philosophical thinking.

In philosophy (φιλοσοφία), an essentially collective form of labor, the political is immanent to its unique critical and creative power. Western academic philosophy, however, confronts a particularly insidious obstacle to the collectivity it presumes: its practitioners' difficulty in grasping the fact that there is no shared vision making sense of its disciplinary unity. Despite the growing literature and clarity of voices helping us comprehend the historical and material conditions that contribute to the cognitive-epistemological difficulties in noticing the lack of a philosophical vision, there is little political and ethical force to these epistemic resources. Instead, we gather within the same university and classroom walls; under the same descriptive institutional categories and units; bounded by selective journals and presses; and together in national and regional conference centers and Internet sites. In other words, we habitually codify our functions and partake in normalized practices that serve to perpetuate the idea of a project that succeeds at accomplishing its epistemic goals. As practitioners in the field of philosophy we imagine ourselves "philosophers."

The reproduction of failed rituals in endeavors that sustain a mythical identity and cultural ties highlights the degree of social alienation within the discipline.

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When no caring response is elicited by arguments that speak of one's roles as teacher, researcher, and intellectual, it is hard to locate the most basic of philosophy's vision: the φιλοσοφία that we are so fond of identifying when we introduce students to our field. Plato's significance in delineating the most basic trait and vision of the discipline notwithstanding, ours is a version devoid of the desire for the Just and the Good to infuse our relations with those persons who in one way or another stand beside us. Without this desire, the courage to be political dissipates into indifference.

The above is a snapshot of what I witness in the profession, the perspective of a member who gathers with colleagues but whose participation is unlikely elicited in those gatherings. I long for the collectivity immanent to φιλοσοφία and have longed for it even before I realized its absence. The myth of a shared vision infusing our institutional practices had kept alive the illusion that the promise of participation would be fulfilled at the end of the path. Even though the transition from the desire for collectivity to its enactment is indeed supposed to be a struggle, I imagined it would lessen as I advanced in my formal education and labored in the academy. The discipline was philosophy, after all, I thought. Likewise, I had expected the continuous vulnerability inherent to the critical and public character of philosophical practice. I would later realize that what I was actually undergoing was not the vulnerability inherent to philosophical growth but a lingering trepidation to partake in the practices of the disciplinary community.

Despite the dominant nonsensical quality of our disciplinary gatherings, there were other sites that served as catalysts for neutralizing the hold of trepidation. I experienced the momentary suspension of trepidation at the Roundtable, which helped bring into relief the larger discipline's lack of a shared vision and thus expose the politics of the normalized academic gatherings in the field. Unstated goals, esoteric bonds, and historically developed practices that protect an already established community stood in contrast to the sustained collective labor of constructing a philosophical vision. A site that was inclusive of diverse intuitions, at the Roundtable I trusted the sense I had of a shared commitment to the critique necessary for continuous intellectual growth. The affective relations of these catalytic moments neither exclude nor direct the participants' engagement; there is a call to think differentially with others and an invitation to enact my longstanding desire for a public voice. Within that new sense of collective participation the older path that had appeared to hold a promised end disappeared, if only momentarily. These gatherings were philosophical.

In the academy, moments of collective labor in philosophy take place unsuspectingly; their conditions seem contingent and the possibility for reproduction difficult. As a result of the absence of enduring sites that foster this form of labor, those whose philosophical selves are nourished and supported by it stand on precarious grounds. Yet, however rare, the fact is that these moments do repeat themselves. This repetition highlights the institutional limits of the Western academy as well as the essential role that cultural sensibility plays in calling people to gather at all. Before the weakness in the ethical and political will be witnessed in the larger discipline, to encourage the collectivity inherent to φιλοσοφία is partly a matter of *knowing to act*

in the presence of one another so as build mutually significant, affective connections. In its enigmatic repetition, The Roundtable on Latina Feminism holds keys to achieving this collective possibility.

Tactical Strategies in Academic Philosophy
Andrea J. Pitts

To analyze how philosophy can exist as a collective form of labor, we can inquire into the conceptions of agency that we might use to describe its methods, practices, and practitioners. It is to this question that I turn my attention in this section. Namely, by examining the work of Latina feminist theorist María Lugones, I seek to inquire how her writings may shed light on a new theoretical framing for collective agency within academic US philosophy. In particular, I contend that her work provides a novel way to understand how practices enacted by participants of the Roundtable on Latina Feminism engage in what she describes as tactical strategies of resistance against institutional forms of exclusion and marginalization within academic philosophy.

Put briefly, Lugones argues that Michel de Certeau's distinction between top-down forms of strategic action and highly particularized forms of tactical action is a false dichotomy. Certeau proposes that "tactics" arise from the concretely specific circumstances of individual actors. These actions lack organizational and long-term foresight, and thus lack subversive efficacy. Tacticians are "making do" with the materials that have been structured by another's efforts. "Strategies," on the other hand, depend on comprehensive attempts to diagnose how a set of actions will affect a given problem space. Although tacticians merely negotiate harmful or detrimental problem-spaces, such forms of agency do not change the underlying sources of harm within a given problem-space, as strategies aim to do (Lugones 2003, 213). Important for both Lugones and Certeau is the spatial orchestration of a city, a trope that both employ in their writings. Strategists, in Lugones's words, see "from a point of view characterized by the distance of height and abstraction . . . The immutable city is both presupposed and reasserted as a project of control" (212). Tactics, on the other hand, are enacted without such distance and abstraction. Within the spatial metaphor of the city, tacticians, in Lugones's words, "must always turn alien forces to their own ends, in devious, hidden makings" (212). In this vein, the strategist participates in a fantasy of acquiring visual mastery, while the tactician operates out of sight, but ultimately, unsuccessfully.

Lugones challenges this dichotomy and proposes instead a mediating logic of agency called "tactical strategies." On her account, the tactical strategist is epistemically situated to understand both the "illusory city" that is the abstraction of the strategist, as well as the "infinitesimal mechanisms" of the tactician (Lugones 2003, 214). She states that the tactical strategist "acquires a practiced, long sense of the social spatiality of particular resistances and resistant meanings. The tactical strategist participates in intending as a long-lived social act" (218). Thus, resistant actions, for Lugones, need not derive from top-down understandings of a given

problem-space, nor from the ineffectual operations of infinitesimal particularity. The tactical strategist functions instead from within what Lugones calls a "hang-out." Hangouts are, in her words, "highly fluid, worldly, nonsanctioned, communicative, occupations of space, contestatory retreats for the passing on of knowledge" (221). Under this view, a hangout emerges through the connected actions of tactical strategists. They are configurations of agents' space and time that reject the masterful planning of strategists, but that occur in the open and visibly take up space.

To clarify the resistant sense of the tactical strategist, consider institutional orchestrations of academic philosophy in the US. First, consider the tactical strategist as a figuration of agency operating within such an institutional setting. As such, a tactical strategist can be interpreted as both institutionally singular from a top-down strategic view, or from the level of the street and with others, as Lugones states. For example, an enactment of such forms of agency might include the following: a graduate student writing a paper for a course that purposively draws from the work of women authors who have been ignored throughout the semester; a faculty member advising a student of color about how to navigate their department's program requirements that are otherwise inhospitable and discouraging to nonwhite students; or a professor holding an annual conference that creates a space for intergenerational dialogue about Latina feminism.

Each case might appear unexceptional as a long-term strategy for changing how philosophy is collectively practiced. However, what remains unobserved from a strategic positioning are the hangouts of these tactical strategists, that is, the myriad conversations, consolations, and forms of sharing among friends, families, colleagues, and other supportive persons through which the agents of these actions convey their frustrations, methods, and goals. In this sense, the results—the grade on a paper, a student's enrollment in a course, a series of presentations—appear to arise from disjointed and singular efforts. However, to view these from the level of the street allows us to reinterpret the meanings of the spatiotemporal materials of these hangouts: that is, the books in the hands of a junior scholar; the office of the trusted professor who recognizes the difficult conditions for students of color in the discipline; an annual meeting space in which Latina scholars are able to earnestly discuss their research and collaborate. These are productions of coalitional movement. They are the enactments of long-resistant senses to the tendencies of academic philosophy to exclude, marginalize, appropriate, and exploit the work of people of color and women.

Lastly, it is important to note that these tactical strategies are not housed within universities or colleges alone. Although many people may materially "make do" with the resources of their institutions, such operations are also "extra-institutional," to borrow Lugones's phrase (Lugones 2003, 218). Such tactical strategies often seek to critically challenge the corporatization of universities and the intellectual elitism of higher education. These yet-unfulfilled long-term goals are the future potentialities of coalitional tactical strategies. Moreover, this means that the significance of tactical strategies of resistance cannot be exhausted by merely one institution's theoretical framing of a set of actions. There can be no hermeneutical umbrella that totalizes

the potential sources for change and futurity that these tactical strategies may enact. Such actions work against interlocking forms of oppression by taking advantage of the presumed singularities of meaning that are entailed by top-down, hegemonic frames of reference. Tactical strategies are new ways to conceive our spatiotemporal movements and ways of being, and thereby allow us to cultivate "an ear and a tongue for multiple lines of meaning" (224). With these critical tools, we can approach anew discussions of agency and collective action—in concert, with others, and this time in plain view. Thus, as we illustrate in this collective piece, the Roundtable on Latina Feminism has become a productive site for coalitional resistance among many Latina scholars in the discipline of philosophy, including myself and the many colleagues and friends I have met there.

The Spell of Home-Space

Elena Flores Ruíz

I have never heard philosophers speak of needing to attend the Eastern APA to feel healthy again, to regain their strength or recoup the tendril force their thoughts once had when they first fell for the spell of words bespangled on a page: That, that is what I want to do above all else … remember? Because sometimes, when we've become estranged from the belly of our knowledge claims—when the gap from that first existential yes, "I cannot unlearn what I now know about myself" to the everyday struggle to affirm one's choice to be a professional philosopher is too wide to comprehend—our lives begin to hunger for a place to rest as if it were a home-space. A place to heal and recover from the multitude of micro-aggressions against us; a place where one is not forced to become resilient in the face of pain, but where pain can become creative through inhabiting a curative space. Perhaps a new paper is started, another one finished, revised, and resubmitted, or there emerges a renewed strength to teach with clarity of heart and finally tend to self-care: a yoga class attended, a poem read, a warming meal prepared. The Roundtable has been that existential space for so many of us working on Latina feminisms, not just in philosophy, but across disciplines. It is the place we willingly pilgrimage to without worrying about reimbursement from our universities. And yet, just as the architect of this space is perceptively aware of the way a home-space is not always a safe place, I think it is important to talk about differences and contested terrains within this space.

It has been almost a decade since my doctoral advisor sat me down in her office, tempering her coffee under the watchful gaze of a stately Frida Kahlo portrait, and said the words I would forget to remember until I needed to experience them firsthand: There is this place you need to know about, and it is very important. … She went on to describe the work Mariana Ortega—whom she knew I had long admired as a scholar—was doing on behalf of Latina feminisms at John Carroll University, and how I needed to go. It wasn't a suggestion. So the next year I went, accepted paper in hand, with all the unrealistic expectations a graduate student can have when heading headlong into the lauded yet unknown. After all, here I was, in my

first year of a doctoral program sitting beside María Lugones, Chela Sandoval, Laura Perez, and Mariana Ortega, among other luminaries; if I simply managed not to faint, for me the event would be a resounding success. In retrospect, I should have fainted. It would have, at the very least, disburdened me of the deflationary experience of seeing methodological divisions and internal collisions among us over approaches to coalitions in women of color feminisms. In particular, I recall the force with which one participant railed against my use of methodological perspectives and sources drawn from the Continental philosophical tradition to discuss testimonial narratives because it did nothing for Latina feminist coalitions at the theoretical level. Later that day, noticing the psychic strain, Mariana pulled me aside and emphatically encouraged me to continue developing my voice irrespective of what others wanted that development to look like, how the smallest piece of world is infinite to the being who lives it, and we must cling to it because it is ours, and only we know the place and value it has in our lives. She did not forgo criticism of my work but strove to understand my project to best help me succeed. And she made it a point to interrogate our practices of inclusion and cautioned us about the ways policing boundaries can produce exclusions that are not just theoretical, but lived and painful. I look back on this experience because I can now recognize the fierce pluralism and spirit of inclusion being cultivated in the early years that made it possible for the Roundtable to occupy such a unique transformative space for so many of us today. It has served as a coalitional home where forming internal coalitions is seen as equally critical and difficult as working across differences. So no matter how mythical this notion of a home-space is, how much it can cover over internal strains and divisions, I see the Roundtable as a powerful tactic in spatial politics of the home, a contested ground (especially of coalitional homes) that can become productive through its ability to accommodate paraconsistent logics and trouble the waters of sameness and aperspectivity.

Some years after I had entered the professoriate, I found myself uttering the same words to one of my students: there is this place, and it is very important. I watched thereafter as she gave her first presentation at the Roundtable, recalling the times I myself presented, watched my doctoral mentor Ofelia give the keynote address, co-presented with my dear friend and colleague Andrea, and I began to think not only of the key role the Roundtable has had on Latina feminisms but of the often unsung praises owed to Mariana's efforts to create a sense of home for all of us, however tactical. In a few weeks I will once again board a flight back home, and watch my sister present for the first time, as word had come to her at Berkeley that there is this space, this Roundtable . . .

Speaking through Difference

Stephanie Rivera Berruz

The world of academic philosophy has been a very alienating place. As a Latina in philosophy whose research focuses on Latina feminism and Latin American

philosophy, it was very clear to me from early on that my existence in academic space was going to involve navigating the situation of alterity in very distinct ways. Philosophy, I understood more clearly, involved finding myself in lonely seas and silenced waters. My marginalization was most deeply felt as an embodied experience of deep sadness and distance from the aspects of myself that I truly loved. I came across a call for abstracts for the Roundtable on Latina Feminism and I remember imagining what it would be like to attend a conference where the focal point was Latina feminism. I had to make use of imaginative energy to conceptually dream up the possibilities of a place where I (and my work) could exist without being alienated. It seemed at the time a figment of mere imagination, a conjuring at best. Upon arriving at the Roundtable on Latina Feminism I quickly learned that there was a place where I could not only share my work, but also one in which my identity could exist in a nonalienating manner. I quickly learned that I was not alone in the philosophical seas I had so turbulently been navigating.

The first time I attended the Roundtable on Latina Feminism was in April of 2012. I presented a paper titled: "Lost and Found in Translation? What Latin American Feminism(s) Can Teach Latin American Philosophy." This essay was a work in progress that I had formulated out of a Latin American philosophy seminar. I argued that Latina feminist theory could greatly contribute to how we understand what it means for something to be philosophical as part of a Latin American tradition. It had been made very clear to me after I wrote the paper that the arguments I was advancing were going to be difficult to critically disseminate given the nature of academic philosophy. Ofelia Schutte has argued that like many cultural spaces, philosophy has normative speaking positions that code and frame what has uptake and what is considered meaningful (Schutte 2000, 55). Latina feminism within the normative spaces of academic philosophy simply does not share in uptake and meaningfulness because it is situated in alterity, much like Latina identity.

Alterity, as Schutte describes the concept, refers to a person or experience that makes possible the recognition of one's limited horizons in light of asymmetrical power relations that are marked by difference (46). The "other" in this scenario occupies the position of the subaltern in culturally asymmetrical relations (46). Latina feminism and Latina identity contemporarily are situated in alterity with respect to dominant philosophical norms. The outcome of this situation of alterity entails that both Latina feminism and Latina identity be erased in order to gain visibility within the dominant framework of philosophy. In my experience, this has meant avoiding research projects on Latina feminism because they are not "marketable," or only making mention of my research projects in Latina feminism to the extent that they fit within a dominant paradigm of white feminist theory. Moreover, my Latina identity within this context was to be mentioned only if it was a marketable or profitable strategy for my career. In other words, if it was considered "exotic" enough to note, then do so. Under conditions of asymmetrical power relations the communication of difference gets subsumed under dominant normative parameters that entail the erasure of cultural difference.

Attending the Roundtable on Latina Feminism in many ways saved my career in philosophy. At that time I was a graduate student trying to navigate research interests that as noted were presenting their own challenges. My experience at the conference was nurturing, critically engaging, and reminded me that I had a voice. I found a place where my identity and the research I was doing was not only welcomed, but was welcomed with a critical eye toward developing my research in the best manner possible. My identity as a Latina in philosophy was not a questionable facet of my capabilities as a philosopher. Moreover, I was reminded that I am not alone in my academic pursuits and that my voice is not a lone cry for philosophical change. This space nurtured me in a way that I did not think could ever exist.

Yet, beyond the personal impact that the Roundtable on Latina Feminism had on me, what is most important about this space is the way in which it can and continues to negotiate cultural differences in very productive manners. Latina identity is not a homogeneous category and neither is Latina feminism. However, one thing that the Roundtable does so well is navigate those differences without flattening them out into one category. Thus, the Roundtable appreciates that part of what it means to be Latina or what it means to do Latina feminism is itself layered with multiplicity and difference that needs to be appreciated and explored. It is certainly the case that there are cross-cultural differences that are incommensurable, as Schutte has argued, but the notable work that the Roundtable does is to appreciate and respect the differences between, among, and within Latinas. In other words, the Roundtable for Latina Feminism aims and in my opinion succeeds at cross-cultural communication in the face of incommensurability.

The support, appreciation, and respect I received from this space allowed me to vision myself in my multiplicity of identity in a nonalienating fashion. I could be both Latina and a philosopher after all. Coming to understand myself as more than always in a state of alienation was profound, impactful, but most important, relational. It would not have been possible without the loving, caring, touching, and critically engaging conversations with the participants. I extend the deepest gratitude to all of the people who have shared their work, their lives, and their stories in this space. Notably, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to Andrea Pitts, Natalie Cisneros, Carmen Lugo-Lugo, and Mariana Ortega for your conversations, support, and care. I am not sure I would have survived philosophy without you. At this point in my career I simply cannot imagine philosophy without the Roundtable and that is owed to the visionary work of Mariana Ortega. Thank you, Mariana, for bringing this place to life and for giving it textual space through your editorial work on this cluster.

In-depth and Loving Engagement

Natalie Cisneros

In a 2013 interview conducted by Cynthia M. Paccacerqua in the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, Mariana Ortega said of the Roundtable's purpose,

"It is my hope that young Latina and other philosophers will start to discover the fertile field of Latina feminism and engage with it in-depthly and lovingly" (Ortega 2013, 14). Indeed, through the Roundtable, in addition to all of the other work she does as a mentor to Latinas in philosophy, including her editorial work on this cluster, Mariana has played a central role in cultivating engagement with Latina feminism—and dialogue among Latina feminists—inside and outside of the discipline of philosophy. Not only is the Roundtable a unique space where particular thinkers, questions, and modes of intellectual practice are taken seriously, but it is also a space where community is nurtured. The existence of such a space is ever more important because to do such work, as Mariana put it, "in-depthly and lovingly" is to dwell in a seeming paradox, maintaining a critical seriousness, while at the same time nurturing engagement and community (14).

In addition to being an utterly unique place for Latina feminisms within the landscape of philosophy and academia more broadly, the Roundtable has also been for me a marker of my own intellectual and personal development. In fact, I can in many ways trace my professional development through my experiences at the Roundtable on Latina Feminism. I attended the Roundtable for the first time during my first year in a PhD program in philosophy at Vanderbilt, the second year of the Roundtable's existence. This was also my first experience presenting a paper as a graduate student at an academic conference. After José Medina, a mentor who later directed my dissertation, encouraged me to submit my work, at this first Roundtable I experienced my first illuminative and challenging (and energizing and terrifying) question and answer session about my work. The Roundtable has been a near-annual presence in my life ever since then. And as I know is the case for many of those who have participated, this annual meeting has been one of the few academic spaces where the thinkers and questions at the center of my work are engaged with lovingly while also being seriously critiqued—and are considered unquestionably philosophically relevant.

The Roundtable has served for me as an annual space for personal reflection and taking stock: of where I am, where I've been, and the work I have left to do as a student, scholar, and member of philosophical, intellectual, and other communities. In my first few years of graduate school, the conversations I participated in at the Roundtable supplemented and enriched my coursework. I presented and received vital feedback on a paper that I later revised to become part of my prospectus. Two years later, I finished the final chapter of my dissertation early in the morning in a Cleveland coffee shop before a Roundtable meeting, and the next year I returned to present a paper as an assistant professor. I know that my experiences in this vein are neither unique nor accidental. The philosophical dialogues and personal friendships that have been enabled by this annual meeting—including my own with Mariana, Cynthia M. Paccacerqua, Andrea Pitts, Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Elena Flores Ruíz, as well as many other Latina feminist scholars and scholars of Latina feminisms—have not only enriched my scholarship, and life, immeasurably, but have also produced new dialogues, conversations, and critiques that have become journal issues, book projects, conference panels, and, in fact, this very reflection.

This is not to say that the work of in-depth and loving engagement and community-building done at the Roundtable has been easy—or that it is, or could be, finished. In addition to being immensely generative and sustaining, this work of engaging and coalition-building—and, indeed, transforming disciplinary norms—is also profoundly challenging. In the same 2013 *Newsletter* interview, Mariana says her hope in realizing the Roundtable "is that Latina feminism is taken seriously within philosophy and not simply as a way to satisfy diversity or inclusiveness requirements," and emphasizes the importance of spaces like it in the work of transforming the discipline to make this a reality (14). This work, it is clear, is woefully incomplete: Latina feminisms—and Latina feminists—are not yet taken seriously, and, indeed, are still largely marginalized within the discipline of philosophy. Nevertheless, as I prepare to return to the Roundtable again this year, I find myself once again both inspired and challenged by the existence of this space, and by its paradox of difficulty and promise. I remain grateful for the relationships and dialogues it has founded, at the same time that I realize that the work it demands—of engaging seriously, "in-depthly and lovingly," not only with Latina feminisms, but with one another—is far from done.

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