

INTRODUCTION:  
  
STATE OF THE FIELD OF  
LATIN AMERICAN CRITICISM & THEORY  
AT THE FIRST QUARTER OF  
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

*José Eduardo González and Stephen Buttes*

In this issue of *FORMA*, we publish a group of six “position papers” by established scholars in the field of Latin American Criticism and Theory. Each of them responds to the following question:

How has scholarship in the field of Latin American criticism and theory developed over the past two decades, and what questions or concerns should shape its trajectory over the next 25 years?

To this end, we ask contributors to identify at least one scholarly book published over the past 20 years in the field of Latin American criticism and theory (as defined by the author of the position paper), and to explain how the arguments raised in the identified book(s) raise(s) questions for further inquiry, and how the findings and conclusions in the book(s) set an agenda for what scholars should be examining over the next quarter century.

The result is a collection of position papers that do not aim to provide a comprehensive intellectual history of the field but rather offer critical interventions that articulate diverse perspectives on its development and the pressing research questions that remain. To attempt to summarize the various viewpoints and contributions of these essays in a brief introduction would diminish what makes this issue so vital: the diversity of responses. Taken together, they suggest that—crisis or no crisis—the future of Latin American studies remains open and full of possibilities, with no single paradigm emerging as definitively dominant. This is not a sign of fragmentation but rather evidence that the field has continued to grow and evolve, becoming ever more expansive and complex.

The authors of position papers in this issue include: Ignacio López-Calvo, Mark Anderson, Vinodh Venkatesh, Juan De Castro, Patrick Dove, and Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra. While authors were given editorial feedback after submitting their papers, the positions they argue are the expression of their

own view of the field's major interests over the past two decades, what the trajectory of the field should be over the next quarter century, and the book (or books) that best make that view available. In addition to the six position papers, we will publish one peer-reviewed article by José Eduardo González utilizing digital humanities techniques to bring the nascent subfield of "conference studies" to bear on the field of Latin American Criticism and Theory.

This issue of *FORMA* will initially appear in the "Debates" section of our journal. We will publish the papers in groups of two over the course of three weeks. We hope that doing so will enable readers to engage the arguments more easily than if they were presented with the six papers all at once. Additionally, posting the papers first in the "Debates" section allows us to leave the issue "open" for a period of time, with the hope that other scholars in the field will be moved to write a response engaging with one or more of the published papers.

In other words, one of the key goals of this issue is to create a space "for argument-driven debate and disagreement," as we note in the journal's mission statement. As readers will see over the course of publication, the authors develop arguments that, at various points, are in disagreement with each other, even as there are commonalities that emerge from across the six papers. Building on the previous issues *FORMA* has published thus far, we hope that this issue helps to "clarify the stakes of Latin Americanist discussions of literature, art, and politics" and also helps to "make those discussions matter to scholarship throughout the humanities today," which is at the core of the journal's mission.

In lieu of summarizing the arguments of the position papers, which should be read in full in the words of the authors and their arguments, it may be helpful to provide an explanation of the paired sets of views to be published over the next several weeks.

In the first set of papers, Ignacio López-Calvo and Mark Anderson approach the state of the field by focusing on the blossoming sets of subdisciplines dotting the surface of the broader field in which they are rooted. Both examine (from contrasting angles and through a focus on different scholarly works) the notion that the field should pursue approaches marked by converging methods, questions, and approaches.

In the second set of papers, Vinodh Venkatesh and Juan De Castro examine the state of the field when considered in light of the legacy of two scholars who have produced significant scholarly works with notable impact on the field: David William Foster and John Beverley.

In the third set of papers, Patrick Dove and Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra explore what is at stake in an insistence on the framework of a "field," which is to say, what is at stake in delineating too narrowly, too expansively, or too insistently the ultimate contours and limits of shared endeavors.

In the final installment, we will publish José Eduardo González's article

that takes up the “literature research conference” (that is, the “research meetings for scholars” that sustain the field) as an object of study in its own right. Utilizing digital humanities techniques, the article examines the field as it has developed in the first decades of the twenty-first century and asks important questions regarding how its trajectory may develop in the decades to come.

We are keenly aware that the essays in this issue represent the perspectives of a select group of scholars, each offering a vision shaped by their research and personal experience. We also recognize that other viewpoints are inevitably absent. Our aim is not to exclude these perspectives but rather to use this issue as an invitation—an opportunity for readers to help expand and refine the picture we are drawing. We encourage our audience to reflect on what might be missing, what has been overlooked, and what remains outside our current field of vision.

In this spirit, we invite other experts in Latin American criticism and theory to contribute their perspectives, by writing a response (roughly 1,000 - 2,000 words) to engage with the essays. Scholars in the field are invited to add what was overlooked or even challenge the ideas put forth. Our goal is not to provide a single, definitive assessment of the field but to foster an open and dynamic dialogue. By welcoming diverse voices into this conversation, we hope to deepen our understanding of the present moment—what we see, what remains to be seen, and what directions work in the future may take.<sup>1</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For the full image of Consuelo Gotay's collograph, *Agua* (2001), part of which appears in the Table of Contents, see the entry on the University of Connecticut Benton Museum of Art: [https://bentonart.uconn.edu/objects-1/info/5050?records=60&sort=0&-objectName=Aqua%20\(water\)](https://bentonart.uconn.edu/objects-1/info/5050?records=60&sort=0&-objectName=Aqua%20(water)).