THE LIFE AND WORK OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

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THE LIFE AND WORK OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

DISSESSATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Elizabeth Anne Dahms
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Susan Carvalho, Professor of Hispanic Studies
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE LIFE AND WORK OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

The writings and life of Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942-2004) have had an immense impact in a variety of disciplines. Her oft-cited text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is included in many university courses’ reading lists for its contributions to discourses of hybridity, linguistics, intersectionality and women of color feminism, among others. Unfortunately, most scholars content themselves with the intricacies of *Borderlands* to the neglect of her corpus of work, which includes essays, books, edited volumes, children’s literature and fiction/autohistorias. This analysis presented here wishes to expand our understandings of Anzaldúa’s work by engaging with her pre- and post-*Borderlands* writings in an attempt to highlight the unrecognized contributions Anzaldúa offers to feminist theory, spirituality, spiritual activism, queer theory, expansive ideas of queerness and an articulation of alternative, non-Western epistemology. This project offers close readings of published and archival Anzaldúan text and draws parallels between her life and her writing.

KEYWORDS: Gloria Anzaldúa, Spiritual Activism, Queerness, Queer Theory, Epistemology

__________________________________________________________________________________________

Elizabeth Dahms

Student’s Signature

May 3, 2012

Date
THE LIFE AND WORK OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

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May 3, 2012
Date
For Joyce Metz, who showed compassion and changed my educational track

For my girls
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Chapter One

Introduction

Gloria Anzaldúa: Always on the Other Side

As a paradigmatic figure, Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004) is often cited, yet remains largely misunderstood and, in Linda Martin Alcoff’s words, “undertheorized” (256). A survey of literature and criticism of Chicana literature from the 1980s to the present will reveal a consistent nod to Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking work: both her 1981 co-edited anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and her 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. *Borderlands*, largely considered a canonical text, appears on countless university course syllabi and has contributed to defining the then-new field of Border Studies. Anzaldúa’s work is under theorized not only in the scope of her writing projects, as most scholars content themselves focusing solely on *Borderlands*, but also within the *Borderlands* text itself. Scant scholarly attention is paid to her numerous pre-and post-*Borderlands* writings, and when *Borderlands* is addressed, it is often to rehash previously articulated arguments.

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1 Anzaldúa’s first publication was a co-edited collection that she shared with Cherrie Moraga. While much controversy surrounds the creation of this anthology, its impact on feminism is undeniable. The initial collaboration of Anzaldúa and Moraga, both masculine Chicana lesbians, seemed ideal as their shared discontent with white feminism brought them together at the Women’s Writer’s Guild. After the publication of *This Bridge* and Anzaldúa’s subsequent accusation that Moraga had plagiarized her work, the literary trajectory of each took different paths. Anzaldúa remained an independent writer, while Moraga earned a Master’s Degree from San Francisco State University and currently serves as Artist in Residence in the Department of Drama at Stanford University. Moraga’s latest work, *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings 2000-2010* (2011) can be interpreted as somewhat of a return to her earlier relationship with Anzaldúa and spirituality. Discussion of this return and interpretation of Moraga’s writings on Anzaldúa while noteworthy, unfortunately fall out of the purview of the current project.
about the new mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa’s discussion of the new mestiza consciousness is fertile ground for inquiry, but it is not Anzaldúa’s last word on her vision. The new mestiza consciousness, like many other Anzaldúaan theories took root before the publication of *Borderlands*, and continued to develop afterwards. The goal of the present analysis is to look to her pre- and post-Borderlands writings in an effort to trace the trajectory of Anzaldúaan thought. By focusing on areas of Anzaldúa’s work that have been overlooked or underappreciated, specifically her shaman-like approach to writing where she intends her writing to assist in the healing of her readers, the queer aspects of her work and the development of new mestiza consciousness into the path of conocimiento, this project adds to the diversification of perspectives and approaches from which to read Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and her work. This approach, I believe, adds to the richness of her life’s work. In this regard, I have organized the following chapters according to under-studied aspects of Anzaldúa’s life and work in an effort to better understand her larger project of understanding herself, the world, and her place in it via her writing. I believe Anzaldúa’s life and writings are intentionally inseparable from each other, thus I intend my work to be an intellectual biography as well as a textual analysis by incorporating biographical readings alongside close readings of her texts. This project follows Anzaldúa’s life experience and recognizes the influences of these events to the author’s writing. Frequently employing her childhood nickname of Prieta, Anzaldúa blurs the lines of fiction/non-fiction as she often fictionalizes events from her life in her writing. Collapsing this binary between fiction and non-fiction is but one

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2 I follow Anzaldúa’s practice of not italicizing Spanish, Náhuatl, or other non-English words as to not draw a distinction between the English “norm” and the multiple other languages Anzaldúa employs.
example of Anzaldúa’s deconstructive project. Approaching Anzaldúa’s life and work from this perspective sheds new light on Anzaldúa and her writings, but also offers a theoretical framework from which to read other hybrid subjects.

As one of the first openly queer Chicanas, Anzaldúa was a pioneer in the field of women of colors feminism and Chicana lesbian feminism. In addition to her solo work, Anzaldúa also contributed to two major Chicana/Latina lesbian anthologies:


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3 I intentionally use the plural form of colors to respect the diversity of contributions from many different backgrounds.

4 Anzaldúa’s contribution is a poem entitled “Del otro lado” and depicts the pain of living along the U.S. and Mexican border. This pain is augmented by her family calling her “una de las otras,” queer. The homophobia is intense: “Don’t bring your queer friends into my house, / my land, the planet. Get away./Don’t contaminate us, get away” (ll. 43-45). But as a queer Chicana, the poetic voice is pushed to the other side on many fronts: “But every place she went/they pushed her to the other side/and that other side pushed her to the other side/of the other side of the other side” (ll. 47-50).

5 Anzaldúa’s two poetic contributions to this anthology are listed under the heading “The Desire.” Fittingly, Anzaldúa’s poem “Nightvoice” (64-6) recounts the first time the poetic I was physically involved with a (unnamed) woman. The nostalgia of the encounter is bittersweet, for the woman caused the poetic I to “lose myself/and for that I never/forgave her” (70-73). This scene of same-sex excitement is juxtaposed with the suggestion of childhood sexual abuse “blunting out everything how my cousins/took turns at night when I was five eight ten” (ll. 4-5). While this is the only suggestion of sexual abuse I’ve read in Anzaldúa’s work, the remainder of the poem could speak to her inability to climax with a male partner (see “Her First Fuck” in the Anzaldúa Collection) and her discovery of sexual pleasure with a female partner as described in “Nightvoice.” Her other contribution is a poem entitled “Old Loyalties” (74-5) which deals with desire, not in terms of physical desire for a lover, but in terms of her desire to remain important in a friend’s life even after she has taken a lover. There is also a desire to see her friends remain individuals, even after they have paired up. She concludes the poem with a critique of the precarious position of queers as a community: “An insecure folk, we queers, afraid/a strong breath will snatch the sweetness/out of our clutches” (ll. 31-33).
critically of and about Chicana lesbians that does the rest of the book. In 1991, at the
time of publication of this anthology, Anzaldúa’s writing had moved beyond exposing
and validating same-sex desire into areas of critique (See “She Ate Horses” 1990) and
coalition building with other women of colors (See Making Face/Making Soul 1990).
Anzaldúa’s contributions set her apart, at least thematically, from the other contributors.
Even within a group where affinity might be assumed to be “natural,” Anzaldúa distanced
herself from Latina and Chicana lesbian writers.

In her 2006 excavation of Chicana lesbian authors, Catriona Rueda Esquibel cites
prominent Chicana literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo in saying that “discussions of
Gloria Anzaldúa separate her writings from her lesbianism” (15). Rueda Esquibel
suggests Chicana historian Deena J. González’s “Speaking Secrets” as evidence to her
claim that others have noted the erasure of Anzaldúa’s lesbianism. While González’s
observation of methodical misogyny and rampant homophobia within Chicano academic
circles is well noted, as is the political importance of the growing Chicana lesbian voice

6 Esquibel does the important recovery work of excavation of many Chicana lesbian
texts. Her thoughtful plot summaries offer insight into the form and various topics
visited by Chicana lesbian writings. Her analysis of Anzaldúa’s text “La historia de un
marimacho” is limited. Instead of reading la marimacho’s (here I maintain Anzaldúa’s
spelling, contrary to Esquibel’s and her decision to feminize the noun) act of violence
toward a homophobic and abusive father-in-law as a valorization of the “‘masculinist’
exploits of taming the father and shaming the macho” (181), I read the text as a granting
of agency to the female character, allowing her to express anger and violence toward the
patriarch (not as in the tales of La Llorona where the only vengeance to an abusive and/or
absent male lover, is to drown his progeny). Violence enacted by a masculine female
character is not the same as violence enacted by a male character. Here la marimacho is
supplanting the law of the father and is forging a new positionality for masculine female
Chicanas.

7 González correctly observes the sexism and hypocrisy at work when Anzaldúa was not
accepted to the University of California-Santa Cruz’s History of Consciousness graduate
program because she “was not theoretically sophisticated” (“Speaking Secrets” 61), even
the while the program employed Borderlands as a primary text. She points to Ramón A.
in Chicano Studies, I would argue that Anzaldúa’s refusal to limit her self-identity to the single issue of her sexuality in *Borderlands* alienates her both from mainstream Chicano circles and from the Chicana lesbian contingent during the 1980s. Including, but not foregrounding her dissident sexuality, Anzaldúa achieves two theoretical moves. She refuses to privilege one aspect of her identity over others, (privilege the lesbian over the Chicana, or working-class, for example), while she also refuses to check her sexuality and her woman-identification at the door. This inclusion of sexuality is more subtle and perhaps more subversive because of its omnipresence in/to Anzaldúa’s work. This move, moreover, positions Anzaldúa into a double-bind and further isolates her voice—she is accused of betraying her Chicano culture because she talked about (lesbian) sexuality and she is accused by the Chicana lesbians of not talking enough about (lesbian) sexuality enough. In this regard, Anzaldúa is simultaneously contributing to and challenging theoretical discussions of sexuality and ethnicity. She is a pioneer within Chicano literature and theory for including discussions of non-heterosexuality, while she cultivates a precarious relationship within Chicana lesbian literary and theoretical circles. All this as she concomitantly challenges common assumptions of what constitutes theory and theoretical contributions with her disruptive style and refusal to limit her identity or

Gutiérrez ("Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality") as one of the Chicano critics who fault Anzaldúa for her “lack of academic rigor.” Commenting on *Borderlands*, Gutiérrez writes, “It is a combination of history (much of it wrong), poetry, essays, and philosophical gems, in which Anzaldúa describes her fractured identity” (63). It is interesting that Gutiérrez recognizes the philosophical contributions of *Borderlands* (while he simultaneously faults its historical accuracy) while many Chicana and lesbian critics fail to note the philosophic offerings. It seems as though each reader sees what s/he is looking for in Anzaldúa’s writing.

Let us not forget Anzaldúa’s entangled relationship with her physical body—see the following chapters for more on Anzaldúa’s often painful relationship with her body (chapter two) and her feelings of sexuality (especially chapter one).
intellectual pursuits. Indeed, Anzaldúa’s critical approach proves isolating. González’s claims that *Borderlands* was read in a “desexualized state” (60) would only be true of readers who actively sought not to see how integral Anzaldúa’s sexuality was to her conceptual framework.

While I discuss Anzaldúa’s complex sexuality and complicated relationship to terms such as “lesbian” in chapter two, it should be noted that this rift with Chicana lesbians mirrors Anzaldúa’s “unpopular” decision not to walk out of the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) conference on June 22, 1990. It was at this conference, where women of colors effectively called the mostly white-raced organizing body of the National Women’s Association on their inherent racism, evident from the multiple consciousness raising group options for diverse white-raced women (“white/immigrant,” “white/upper-class,” “white/educated,” etc.) and the single consciousness raising group intended to satisfy the needs of all women of colors; the only and obligatory choice being the “Third World” consciousness raising group (Sandoval 60). In protest of the inequality underlying the consciousness raising group options, many women of colors walked out of the NWSA conference, arguing that the white-raced members did not really want to confront racism, although the theme of the conference was “Women Respond To Racism.” Anzaldúa, for her part, chose not to walk out of the conference.

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9 Anzaldúa states: “for me…the term lesbian es problemón…’lesbian’ is a cerebral word, white and middle-class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the Greek word Lesbos. I think of lesbians as predominantly white and middle-class women and a segment of women of color who acquired the term through osmosis, much the same as Chicanas and Latinas assimilated the word ‘Hispanic’” (“To(o) Queer” 263).

10 Chela Sandoval reports on this event in “Feminism and Racism: A Report on the 1981 National Women’s Studies Association Conference” published in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990) and Anzaldúa discusses her role in this event in her essay “now let us shift” (2002).
conference, but rather to listen to both sides and offer her body as a bridge between the
two opposing viewpoints in an effort to foster dialogue. In both the NWSA instance and
in Anzaldúa’s inclusion in Latina and Chicana lesbian anthologies, Anzaldúa enacted a
third-space positionality by distancing herself from the immediate controversy at hand
and by occupying a (isolated) third space. This third space is a liminal position, one that
finds its home between the two oppositional sides. And perhaps this third-space
positioning accounts for the critical orphaning of her work: Not fully in any one camp,
she has been acknowledged by most but left under-engaged by all camps. The various
academic fields that have acknowledged Anzaldúa’s contributions include, but are not
limited to, Chican@ Studies, Latin@ Studies, Border Studies, Composition and Rhetoric
Studies, Feminist Studies, Linguistics, Queer Studies, Spirituality Studies and American
Studies. The present study places Anzaldúa front and center and demonstrates that an in-
depth investigation of her life and work offers critical tools for understanding Anzaldúa’s
actions and writing in more nuanced terms. By participating in and simultaneously being
critical of many identity groups and academic disciplines, Anzaldúa offers a new form of
subjectivity that informs her theoretical contributions to the many fields in which she
worked.

In addition to her work in lesbian anthologies, Anzaldúa is also a contributor to
and sole author of various noteworthy publications. She was also the co-editor of the
aforementioned This Bridge Called My Back,11 which explodes the “universal” concept

11 I agree with AnaLouise Keating in her approximation of This Bridge Called My Back. Instead of seeing This Bridge as a women-of colors intervention into the feminist movement, I like to think of This Bridge as “a crucial reminder that feminism was not and never had been a ‘white’-raced women’s movement with a single-issue, middle-class agenda” (Keating, “Introduction” Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 8). This reconceptualization
of woman propagated by white middle-class heterosexual women for its inherent racism, classism, and heterosexism. Anzaldúa considered the work and publication of anthologies to be a political act, and followed with *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990) which addresses problems within women of color’s movements and stresses the need for coalitions. Later, she and AnaLouise Keating co-edited *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (2002) to celebrate and reflect on the work of *This Bridge Called My Back* twenty-five years later. *this bridge we call home*, which includes submissions from white as well as women of color, women as well as men and trans-identifying people, models the type of inclusionary tactics Anzaldúa advocated for in her writing. Anzaldúa also contributed to various anthologies, republishing excerpts from *Borderlands* as well as offering new pieces. In addition to her prose and poetry, she also published two books for children, *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993) and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona* (1995). A collection of Anzaldúa’s interviews, *Interviews/Entrevistas* (edited by AnaLouise Keating) were collected and published in 2000 and a book of criticism on her work, *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa* (also edited by Keating) was published in 2005 to expand critical engagement of Anzaldúa’s work.

With such noteworthy publications, one would think that Anzaldúa would be thoroughly read and understood in the variety of academic fields listed above, to which she contributed. Yet she maintained an uneasy relationship with the academy: indeed, of feminist genealogy parallels the argument offered in Chapter Two in regard to queer theory.
Anzaldúa remained a largely independent scholar throughout her life, accepting only temporary teaching appoints to sustain her writing. Perhaps it is because her scholarly work contributed to many fields, just as her identity spanned many groups, that no one area of study or group has seemed able to fully comprehend her many valuable insights. Each of the academic fields listed above singles out specific excerpts of Anzaldúa’s work and relates Anzaldúa’s perspective to that particular field. Sociologists Elisa Facio and Denise Segura, for example, find Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism useful in her community work in the ENLACE and SISTERS community projects of enacting a Chicana feminist praxis to empower local communities (Bridging 175-181). Rhetoricians Catherine Helen Palczewski (“Bodies, Borders and Letters” 1-16) and Andrea Lunsford (Interviews/Entrevistas 251-280, Bridging 182-190) find useful rhetorical and compositional insights in Anzaldúa’s writing while queer theorist Michael Hames-García (“Queer Theory Revisited” 19-45) locates Anzaldúa as a precursor to queer theorizing.

In no way do I intend to lessen these scholars’ engagement with Anzaldúa and her writing. I mention them only to show Anzaldúa’s contribution to a variety of academic fields and to argue that, because of her many contributions, Anzaldúa constitutes a field of study in and of herself. Anzaldúaan Studies, as a growing discipline, takes Anzaldúa’s life and writings as central to understanding her multiple contributions, and puts these contributions in dialogue with Anzaldúa’s larger projects.

Anzaldúa’s work is found in many feminist readers for her groundbreaking work exposing the underlying universalism or woman as non-representative of non-white, non-
heterosexual, non-middle class women. She is revered by many Chicana (lesbian) scholars and artists, many of include Anzaldúa’s voice in their own work and build off of her work, while she is simultaneously viewed by non-feminist Chicanos as betraying her Chicano culture. She is likewise mentioned in footnotes to queer of colors criticism, yet excluded from the limelight of contemporary mainstream theorizing. In

12 Readings in Feminist Rhetorical Theory (2004) edited by Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin go beyond the usual reprint of “La conciencia de la mestiza” to include “Speaking in Tongues,” “Del Otro Lado” and an excerpt of “now let us shift…” entitled “Beyond Traditional Notions of Identity” as well. In Benita Roth’s Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave (2004), she interesting only mentions Anzaldúa’s co-edited anthology This Bridge Called My Back as significant in the multiple feminist movements of Second Wave American feminisms.


14 Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (1999) by José Esteban Muñoz acknowledges Anzaldúa as a Chicana theorist (along with Cherrie Moraga, Chela Sandoval, and Norma Alarcón), yet he falls victim to the same error he himself cites: “The powerful queer feminist theorist/activists that are most cited—Lorde, Barbara Smith, Anzaldúa, and Moraga, among others—are barely ever critically engaged and instead are…merely adored from a distance” (11). When it appears as though he is going to critically engage in This Bride Called My Back (Muñoz 21-22), Muñoz instead picks up Norma Alarcón’s argument in an essay she wrote after her contribution to This Bridge “The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism” which, published in Anzaldúa’s Making Face, Making Soul, is another often cited and scarcely engaged Chicana text. The one passage cited from Borderlands is the passage concerning the rather essentialist formation of queers (Borderlands 84-5). This potential site of essentialism had already been pointed to as a possible weak spot in Anzaldúa’s text before Muñoz printed it in 1999. Had Muñoz engaged in Anzaldúa’s post-Borderlands writing, this narrow reading could have been avoided. Likewise, Juana María Rodríguez invokes Anzaldúa in her Preface to Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces (2003), citing Borderlands to note that she like Anzaldúa “reach [es] for ‘that voice at the edge of things’” (3). But as her analysis shows, she has not reached beyond Borderlands in her understanding of Anzaldúa’s work (Rodríguez 23, where she discusses mestiza consciousness, she nods to This Bridge Called My Back as foundational [30]). And while Rodriguez uses Anzaldúa (She does credit Anzaldúa for connecting
addition, Anzaldúa is increasingly being included in Chicana/o/Latina/o pedagogical materials.16 Amongst all of these publications, however, references to Anzaldúa’s life and work are unfortunately still limited to discussion of Borderlands. In her life and her writings, Anzaldúa refused to limit her identity or her area of inquiry to any one pre-established discipline or group. In doing so, she endeared herself to many, but was not fully engaged until recently. While AnaLouise Keating has consistently engaged with aliens and third sexed beings) to discredit Nancy Hartsock’s erasure of silenced voices, Rodríguez curiously cites Alarcón’s “Theoretical Subject(s)” (like Muñoz, perhaps because of its high-theory rhetoric), as the seminal piece that “directly critiques the limits and implications of standpoint epistemologies in relation to the work of Anglo-American feminism” (170 n8), where Alarcón points precisely to This Bridge Called My Back as the text that called Anglo-American feminism on its racism. See endnote 4 for a discussion of Catriona Rueda Esquibel’s With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians (2006). Another recent publication at the crossroads of queer theorizing and Chicana Studies, Marivel T. Danielson’s Homecoming Queers (2011) is dedicated to Gloria Anzaldúa and relies heavily on Borderlands. She does expand her scope of Anzaldúan theory somewhat and provides a thorough study on Chicana/Latina queers and the varying concepts of “home.”
15 A noteworthy, but ultimately deceiving exception is Michael Hames-Garcia and Ernesto Martínez’s Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader (2011) where Anzaldúa figures more prominently as a queer Chicana precursor. Anzaldúa’s insistence on not forgetting the male Chicano homosexuals, los jotos, acts as a starting point for the intellectual inquiry in the introduction of the Reader. Hames-García lists Anzaldúa’s 1981 and 1987 work as part of his counter-genealogy of queer theory. It is however, in the commentary following Hames-García’s rewriting of the history of queer theory, where María Lugones engages with Anzaldúa’s writings to show (not list) the importance of her theoretical contributions. Likewise, it is the commentary provided by Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel (reacting to Antonio Viego’s cautioning of lifting up “representational” authors [Moraga and Anzaldúa] to speak to a specific identity position and to be able to tell the “whole truth” [104]) that exposes Anzaldúa’s (and by extension other Chicana lesbians’) paradoxically fragile standing in the academy and in the publishing world. Calvo and Esquibel caution: “Reader take note: the Chicana lesbian library is not to be found in an ivory tower in heavy bookcases of cherry wood and glass…we’re talking about paperback books and obscure journals disintegrating in cardboard boxes” (107). While Anzaldúa is given nominal acknowledgement in the growing field of Latin@ queer studies, it seems that even in the rewriting of gay Latin@ history, engagement with Anzaldúa’s writings is still limited to Borderlands.
Anzaldúa and her work as a friend, co-editor, and later Trustee to the Anzaldúan estate, it has only been since Anzaldúa’s death in 2004 that resurgence in Anzaldúan studies has gained momentum.

Because her work spans so many disciplines, it has been neglected. I contend that most who read Anzaldúa only read *Borderlands* to the neglect of her broader corpus, and thus have only a superficial understanding of the complexities of her work.¹⁷ Moreover, I argue that in order to understand Anzaldúa and her larger conceptual projects, knowledge of her life and her other writing is essential. Anzaldúa is unlike other writers because of the amount of her personal experience that serves as fodder for her writing. Anzaldúa’s sustained optimism throughout her life-long relationship to pain, is crucial to understanding her theoretical positioning.

**Brief Biography**

As chronicled in *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa was born in the lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. The geographical proximity the U.S.-Mexican border figures prominently throughout in her work, as does her first-hand experience as a field worker. The author’s physical ailments also find their way into Anzaldúa’s writing: Anzaldúa reveals that she suffered from a hormonal imbalance that caused her to menstruate as a three-month-old infant and undergo puberty as a seven year old, this condition that led to

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¹⁷ Employing *Borderlands* as theory is prevalent and important in terms of maintaining Anzaldúa’s legacy. *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* edited by Arredondo, et. al. (2003) present ample opportunities for utilizing *Borderlands* theory, yet few approach Anzaldúa as an author.
a hysterectomy in 1980 at the age of thirty-eight. Anzaldúa discusses these events in her writing because her physical relationship with her body emerges as essential to the development of her perspective on writing, spirituality, self-perception and thoughts on knowledge.

Her relationship with her family and her journey for higher education is also found throughout Anzaldúa’s writings. Her father’s death in 1957 is semi-fictionalized in the short story, “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas” (1985). After working to fund her college education, Anzaldúa graduates with a B.A. in English and education from Pan American University. She completes her M.A. in English and education from the University of Texas, Austin while working as a teacher in the Pharr, San Juan at the Alamo Independent School District (San Juan, Texas). Anzaldúa then takes a job working as a liaison between the State of Indiana public school system and the migrant farm workers children. Unable to idly witness social injustice, Anzaldúa’s experience working with migrant-farm workers on an administrative level propels her into community activism. In 1974 Anzaldúa enrolls in the doctoral program in comparative literature at the University of Texas, Austin only to drop out to focus on her writing. Anzaldúa is mugged on November 6, 1974, an experience which jars Anzaldúa to prioritize her life. In September of 1977 she decides to dedicate her life to her writing. She relocated to the San Francisco Bay area and participates in the Feminist Writer’s Guild. After a workshop led by Merlin Stone, Anzaldúa decides to edit the anthology that would become *This Bridge Called My Back*. With the success of *This Bridge*,

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18 See chapter two for further commentary on the importance of this event in Anzaldúa’s life and writing.
19 See her poem “El sonavabitche” in *Borderlands* (124-129) for an example of her activism on behalf of migrant farm working families.
Anzaldúa is then invited to speak and present at a variety of venues. She develops her writing workshop series, El Mundo Surdo, with Cherríe Moraga. After many workshops and speaking engagements that take her all of the United States, Anzaldúa moves to Santa Cruz in 1986, where she would live until her death in 2004. In 1988 Anzaldúa applies to the history of consciousness doctoral program at the University of California, Santa Cruz but is not accepted. She is however, accepted into the literature program at UCSC and dedicates herself to finishing her dissertation in 2003, shortly before her death. The degree was awarded posthumously. Over the course of her writing career, Anzaldúa received many awards including the Before Columbus American Book Award (1986), The Library Journal Selection of *Borderlands* as one of the best thirty-eight books of 1987, a national Endowment for the Arts Award in fiction (1991), the Southern California Women for Understanding Lesbian Rights Award (1991), and the Sappho Award of Distinction (1992).

In terms of her personal life, it appears as though writing was the primary focus for the last thirty years of her life (born in 1942, Anzaldúa dedicates herself entirely to writing in 1977 until her death in 2004). She referred to her writing muse as her “musa-bruja,” who demanded total attention and who would not tolerate other suitors. She did, however, have a rich circle of “comadres” with whom she would meet and discuss her writing. While there is no evidence of a long-term romantic relationship in Anzaldúa’s archives, AnaLouise Keating assures me in personal correspondence that while Anzaldúa was sexually very autoerotic, she did have physical relationships with other people. These physical relationships were often strained as Anzaldúa devoted herself primarily to her imagination and to her writing.
**Anzaldúa’s Contributions in *Borderlands/La Frontera***

Anzaldúa is heralded for the hybrid construction of *Borderlands*, including a mixture of several languages and dialects, poetry, autobiography, and anthropological references. This formal hybridity is theorized in content in the creation of the new mestiza subjectivity and the new mestiza consciousness that speculates a theorizing of liminal space in order to dismantle dualistic thinking. This, in turn, proposes a relational and more fluid identity negotiation. New Mestiza Consciousness as proposed by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*, is a radical call for revolution that threatens the status quo. This revolution is partially enacted by the writing of cultural myths (La Llorona, Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui) from a feminist perspective to validate Anzaldúa’s lived experience as a queer Chicana in an Anglo-dominant patriarchal culture. Importantly, in her exploration of subjectivity, Anzaldúa does not celebrate postmodern hybridity; rather, she details the pain of the very real condition of living as a hybrid subject. She does this at the same time that she affords unique perspective to the hybrid subject. One of Anzaldúa’s theoretical contributions is her insistence that the hybrid subject harness that which makes her/him different and to use that differentiation to empower the subject. Ultimately, Anzaldúa is proposing that the hybrid subject find strength in his/her
difference. Far from advocating a position of assimilation, Anzaldúa challenges the status quo to include a new, empowered hybrid subject.

The New Mestiza, as emblematic of this new subject construction, was not the exclusive domain of Chicana females, although many interpreted it as such. Indeed, critics accused Anzaldúa of essentialism and utopianism, and of appropriating indigenous spirituality and iconic figures. Still others disregarded Borderlands as non-theoretical due to the highly autobiographical nature of the writing.

Anzaldúa’s Legacy

Anzaldúa’s 2004 passing brought a resurgence of interest in her work. The 2005 Acquisition of the Gloria Anzaldúa Collection at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American

20 Richard Rodriguez, is perhaps the most well-known proponent of cultural and linguistic assimilation. While there are many similarities in Rodriguez’s and Anzaldúa’s approaches, their conclusions are vastly different.

21 Audre Lorde and Paula Gunn Allen are two hybrid subjects who also find strength in their difference. See Keating’s Women Writing, Women Reading (1996) for a discussion of the similarity of strategies used by these authors and Anzaldúa.

22 For a survey of critics who limited Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness to biological mestizas, see Marcus Embry’s “Cholo Angels in Guadalajara: The Politics and Poetics of Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera” (1996), and Tace Hedrick’s “Queering the Cosmic Race: Esotericism, Mestizaje, and Sexuality in the work of Gabriela Mistral and Gloria Anzaldúa” (2009). Jagose curiously limits the new mestiza to “lesbian” in her “Slash and Suture: The Border’s Figuration of Colonialism, Homophobia, and Phallocentrism in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza” (1994).

23 The following critics accused Anzaldúa of essentialism and utopianism: Carol Thomas Neely (utopian in a more positive connotation) in “Women/Utopia/Fetish: Disavowal and Satisfied Desire in Margaret Cavendish’s New Blazing World and Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera” (1994) and Judith Raiskin in “Inverts and Hybrids: Lesbian Rewritings of Sexual and Racial Identities” (1994).

24 Benjamin Alire Sáenz in the most often cited critic who finds fault in Anzaldúa’s use of indigenous spirituality and icons. See his essay “In the Borderlands of Chicano Identity, There are Only Fragments” (1997).
Library at the University of Texas, Austin was quickly followed by the formation of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa (SSGA) in 2006. Founded by Norma E. Cantú, the SSGA is housed in the Women’s Studies Institute at the University of Texas at San Antonio, and has hosted three international conferences on the life and work of Gloria Anzaldúa. The 2007 symposium “Güeras y Prietas: Celebrating 20 Years of Borderlands/La Frontera” took place in San Antonio and resulted in the publishing of selected proceedings. 2009 was the first year that the conference went global in scope and adopted the name “El Mundo Zurdo: An International Conference on the Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa.” Selected 2009 conference proceedings were combined with the 2007 conference proceedings in a collection entitled El Mundo Zurdo (2010). The 2010 SSGA introduced the theme of “Art and Performance” in relation to Anzaldúan thought, while the 2012 SSGA conference is advertised as focusing on the idea of “transformation.” In response to these international conferences on the life and work of Anzaldúa, there has been a growing body of work in the forms of books, articles, and conference papers exploring Anzaldúa’s life and work. Chief among these is AnaLouise Keating’s edited collection The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader (2009), which consists of never-before-published Anzaldúaan texts selected from Anzaldúa’s archives, along with Keating’s editorial comments.

25 I presented a paper entitled, “Queer Performativity in Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera” at the 2009 SSGA Conference, moderated a panel at the 2010 conference and will be presenting “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Inefficacy of the Closet as Construct in Gloria Anzaldúa’s ‘El Paisano is a Bird of Good Omen’” at the 2012 SSGA.
With the current onslaught of Anzaldúa criticism, I offer the following as the contributions I make to the field of Anzaldúaan studies. My analysis looks beyond *Borderlands/La Frontera* to show how Anzaldúa’s commonly accepted theories outlined there both originated out of her other work and continued to develop after *Borderlands*. Indeed, many of the palatable *Borderlands* theories -- the new mestiza, mestiza consciousness, and the bridge metaphor -- stem from her more radical ideas of planetary connectedness and fluidity. In looking for Anzaldúaan insights outside of *Borderlands*, I look beyond her canonical text, to show how fringe influences are critical in the formation of her theoretical contributions.

And while I do address recently published as well as archival Anzaldúaan texts, many of the published texts I include in my analysis have been underappreciated and undertheorized, perhaps because they dwell in the shadow of Anzaldúa’s 1987 feminist classic *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. While it would be impossible and unadvisable to disregard the importance of *Borderlands* in Anzaldúa’s theoretic and literal development, to focus solely on this text would likewise provide a myopic view of the author. *Borderlands* appears consistently throughout my analysis, but it does not serve as the primary text of analysis. Chapters one and two, instead, primarily address Anzaldúa’s early writings while chapter three investigates her latest writings, published just before her death in 2004. To be sure, while the present analysis focuses it attention on pre- and post- *Borderlands* Anzaldúaan texts, this is only a representational sampling of the numerous Anzaldúaan texts found in her archival collection. While I have made an effort to include a wide range of genres in which Anzaldúa expressed herself (including essay [“Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman”], poetry [“Letting Go”], short-
story[“Puddles”], autohistoria [“People Should Not Die in June is South Texas”], literature for children [Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado and Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona], cyber-manifestos [“Let us be the healing of the wound”], guided meditation [“now let us shift…”], the Anzaldúa Estate includes more genres that are currently closed to researchers. The texts included in this analysis were selected based on their thematic content. Unavailable texts that are possibly being prepared for publication and could serve to expand Anzaldúa’s repertoire include a variety of essays, several collections of short stories and books of poetry; a novel-in-stories; a writing manual; a book of daily meditations; a young-adult novel; a play in poetic verse; a book-length exploration of imagination, creative writing, and social change; and a co-edited multi-genre collection. (*Glória Anzaldúa Reader* 4)

The decision to look at various points in Anzaldúa’s thirty-year writing career is intentional, as I hope to show development in Anzaldúa’s many theories while at the same time highlighting her early vision of subject formation and her contributions to a new epistemology. As Anzaldúa herself reported, Borderlands “is just one project of this overall umbrella project that is my life’s work, my life’s writing. *Borderlands* is just on hit on it…all of my books are parts of this project“ (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 268). I believe that Anzaldúa had a large vision of what her life’s work, her life’s writing was to address and each piece she wrote was another approximation to that central vision. With each new approach, Anzaldúa built on the foundation she had already established and continued to stretch her inclusionary theories throughout her writing career. I have also purposely focused on Anzaldúa’s more inclusionary texts. Keating notes that Anzaldúa’s writing follows a spiral trajectory with her early and later writings being more inclusive while her middle writings contracted to focus on rigid identity categories (Keating,
“Introduction” The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 11). I do this because I believe that Anzaldúa was as Chela Sandoval described her, as a “resolute theorist of hope” (Entre Mundos/ Among Worlds, xiii) and that her middle, more exclusionary writings, while necessary and perhaps fruitful for her later theorizing, were not representative of her all-encompassing vision that she began with and ultimately returned to before her death.

Why Anzaldúa?

Honest, raw self-exposure initially attracted me to Chicana lesbian literature. My entry into this field of literature was through Cherríe Moraga’s Loving in the War Years (1980). I identified with the need she expresses for a more precise sexual vocabulary and more honest exploration of cultural influences on sexual practices (“What we’re rolling around in bed with”). While I found there many reflections of my own particular position of being an Anglo, working class queer person, I felt excluded from Moraga’s nationalistic program of reimagining a queer Aztlán, and was further alienated by her narrow opinions on non-biological parental rights.28

I was then introduced to Anzaldúa by a colleague, and was captivated by the accessibility and depth of theoretical insights contained within the mixed-genre writing. The packaging of theory in accessible language and visual metaphors was a welcome reprieve from the “high theory” of graduate school. While more accessible, Anzaldúaan theory was no less rigorous and proved to be very complex. Anzaldúa’s insistence on personal experience as the basis of theory was very appealing to me. I was also

28 See Moraga’s Loving in the War Years (1983) footnote 6 in her essay “The Dying Road to a Nation” for Moraga’s articulation of this narrow viewpoint.
immediately intrigued by Anzaldúa’s message of radical inclusion, and her exploration of the many different forms a mestiza can take. Her understanding of mestiza subjectivity -- of not just biological, but cultural and intellectual as well -- seemed to me a more inclusive, and indeed broader, articulation of liminal identity. Anzaldúa’s fluid conceptualization of the new mestiza explodes nationalistic discourses prevalent in other Chicana writing. Her work offered rawness and exploration of phenomenology similar to Moraga’s but without the biological restrictions. Upon further investigation into Anzaldúa’s work, I developed an appreciation for her simultaneity in dealing with issues.\textsuperscript{29} She takes everything on at once and refuses to leave part of her identity or her intellect outside of discussion when addressing any particular topic. As I came to an academic understanding of social constructionism, I was fascinated by Anzaldúa’s treatment of identity categories and appreciated how she disrupts traditional identity categories by pointing to the spiritual connection among all living things. Anzaldúa effectively enacts her holistic philosophy vis-à-vis her writing, showing how all the threads of her lived experience braid together in her work.

I also identified with the new mestiza on various personal levels, which encouraged my reading of her texts. The reader can imagine my excitement tackling Anzaldúa’s poem “Compañera, cuando amábamos” (\textit{Borderlands} 146-7) as a literary task highlighting many facets of lesbian feminist thought, only to experience a reception

\textsuperscript{29} This is a parallel of Anzaldúa’s work to the Combahee River Collective, who published their “Combahee River Collective Statement” in 1977. While Anzaldúa refused to be limited to single identity marker, the Combahee River Collective insisted on intersectional analysis of the issues plaguing black women. Anzaldúa includes intersectional analysis and goes a step further to argue for relational identity negotiation. See also my discussion of Mohammad Tamdgidji’s article on the parallels of quantum physics and Anzaldúa’s writing in chapter three.
similar to that received by Anzaldúa when she proposed a plan of doctoral study on Chicana Feminism—she was denied and discouraged because her advisors did not deem this a valid area of study. Likewise, my professor was less than enthusiastic about my choice of text and theory to pursue as a fledgling graduate student. This initial detour led me to look at Chicana literature more broadly, this time with a focus on sexuality and gender. This exploration in guided reading ultimately led me back to Anzaldúa, but provided me the contextual background to use gender and sexuality not as the end goal of analysis, but as vehicles for exploring other issues in the texts.

The analysis I present here attempts to offer new lenses through which to view Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and work. Chapter one looks at the spiritual dimensions of Anzaldúa’s life and work to show parallels with global shamanism that may shed new light on the author’s intention to heal her readers. I discuss shamanic initiation/vocation, the shamanic quest, and shamanic healing in regard to Anzaldúa’s life and writing. The process of initiation is very much rooted in the physical body and Anzaldúa’s cultural upbringing. I argue that Anzaldúa undertakes the shamanic quest in the form of writing, and that her life and texts are intended to transform her readers into healing through the path of El Mundo Zurdo. Chapter two looks at Anzaldúa’s expansive view of queerness and shows how her work predates and transcends contemporary queer theory. In arguing for the recognition of Anzaldúa as precursor to queer theory, I hope to highlight explorations of alternative gender expression and non-conformist sexuality in Anzaldúa’s work, while simultaneously challenging traditional queer theory to look at its women of colors roots to extend its realm of scholarship so as to include syncretic spirituality as a queer practice. Chapter three delineates Anzaldúa’s project of a queer epistemology.
Building on her early writings, Anzaldúa’s later writings turn more philosophical in nature and explore the process by which we know what we know. Questioning the power structure of knowledge and the creation of new knowledge, Anzaldúa develops a unique epistemology that I argue is queer in nature. I use Anzaldúa’s theory to address published and archival Anzaldúa writing, to show how she envisioned her search for knowledge and how she fictionalized different aspects of her epistemology throughout her writing career.

Throughout my engagement with Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and work, I have been personally transformed by her words and actions and at the same time, I have attempted to maintain a critical distance from the texts in order to analyze them. While this may seem contradictory -- indeed Anzaldúa reminds us that there “is no separation between life and writing” -- I have attempted this dual reading for various reasons. In no way do I claim an objective stance to the analysis here presented. I understand that my readings of the following texts are necessarily influenced by my subject position,30 and at times I have felt very much like an “insider” reading the text: like Anzaldúa was addressing me personally through her carefully crafted words. My life and my worldview have been enriched and indeed transformed by reading Anzaldúa’s texts. I find resonance with many of the personal accounts of transformation in Bridging: How The Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa Transformed Our Own, yet I recognize that I can best contribute to Anzaldúa’s legacy and to broaden legitimatization efforts within the academy by offering what my academic training has prepared me to do: a structural analysis of her literary texts.

30 Likewise, any errors noted in this work are the work of my ongoing subject formation and growth as a scholar and a human.
Offering close readings of Anzaldúa’s texts as literature will hopefully encourage a wider readership of her texts.\(^{31}\) That is, more academics will read her work, and this will hopefully result in the inclusion of her texts, beyond just *Borderlands*, in a wider sampling of course offerings – or more than just the token nod to her work in a survey feminist course or a Chicana/o literature course. I believe that her writing is extremely theoretical and that a serious theoretical approach to her work will bring this to light. The autobiographical nature of her theory also challenges what we consider to be theory.

Anzaldúa’s authored more than theory and needs to be recognized as an author and as a theorist.\(^{32}\) In the following analysis, I attempt to use Anzaldúa’s theory to read Anzaldúa texts, and thus queer traditional structural analysis.\(^{33}\) In this regard, I believe Anzaldúa’s model of infusing her creative and theoretical writings with autobiographical information, can help transform academia.

Contemporary Anzaldúa studies are taking divergent courses. The tracks for submission to the 2012 SSGA attest to interests in Anzaldúa studies and the fields of Borders, Gender and Sexuality, Education, International and Transfrontera, Spirituality, and Art and Performance.\(^{34}\) I offer the present analysis to the growing trend of looking at

\(^{31}\) I intend this wider readership to include academics from a variety of disciplines and ethnicities. Making Anzaldúa more available to white feminist, while possibly valuable, is the not the end goal of this analysis.

\(^{32}\) Anzaldúa is employed (only) theoretically in *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga* by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano. In the introduction, Yarbro-Bejarano notes that she was working on “an earlier book project comparing Gloria Anzaldúa and Moraga” but that it turned into the book that she published on Moraga’s work. It should be noted that no companion book presently exists focusing exclusively on the work of Anzaldúa. This is, perhaps, another instance of the exclusion of Anzaldúa that I discuss in note 6.

\(^{33}\) See chapter three especially for the technique of using Anzaldúa’s theories to read Anzaldúa texts.

\(^{34}\) This is in contrast to the 2010 SSGA which called for papers/presentations dealing with “Borderlands, Queer Identity, Sexuality, Education, International and Transfrontera
Anzaldúa’s work differently, from different positions and employing different theoretical lenses, in an act of solidarity to better understand Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and her work.
Chapter Two

Shamanic Urgency and Two-Way Movement as Writing Style in the Works of
Gloria Anzaldúa

Recent trends in Anzaldúaan scholarship have focused on the exploration of the spiritual dimensions in the oeuvre of Chicana writer Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, coupled with the impetus to go beyond discussion of her popular 1987 work *Borderlands/La Frontera*. To be sure, Anzaldúa was a prolific writer whose many theories evolved over the course of her life. To hold 1987 as the pinnacle of her theoretical contribution would be a disservice to her lifelong commitment to writing. This chapter both parallels and deepens these trends, in expanding on what preeminent Anzaldúaan scholar AnaLouise Keating has called “poet-shaman aesthetics” in the author’s work; in the discussion to follow, I will postulate a theory of a full-blown, well-developed shamanic praxis.35 The shift from “aesthetics” to “praxis” is not trivial. By describing Anzaldúa’s style, her aesthetic, as a practice, I acknowledge the transformative agency of the words she writes while simultaneously recognizing her craft as a writer. From a literary studies perspective, Anzaldúa’s effectiveness as a writer lies in her way of combining her life and writing to underscore the mutual influence of the writing on the life and vice versa. For Anzaldúa, “there is no separation between life and writing” (italics in original, “Speaking in Tongues” 170). By exploring elements of shamanism

35 Keating, who is very familiar with Anzaldúa’s life, delivered a 2010 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa plenary speech in which she explored the idea of “poet-shaman aesthetics.” She explores this idea in writing in her forthcoming article, “From the ‘Linguistic Turn’ to the (Meta) Physical?: Speculative Realism, Visionary Pragmatism, and Poet-Shaman Aesthetics” (2012).
alongside biographical accounts of Anzaldúa’s life, I show the interconnected possibilities of shamanism in both her life and her writing.

In his 1997 *Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth*, Randy Conner, who was a life-long friend of Anzaldúa’s, explicitly states that one of Anzaldúa’s grandmothers was a known healer (63) and, in his 2009 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa plenary speech, he states that Anzaldúa was “destined to receive her wisdom” but that she “decided to practice Curanderismo through her writing” (Conner, *El Mundo Zurdo* 190). Anzaldúa herself employed the explicit metaphor of the shaman as healer, as seer, in much of *Borderlands*, especially in chapter six “Tilli, Tlapalli: The path of the red and black ink” and the book’s second half of poems, her essay “Metaphors in the tradition of the shaman” (1990) and her foreword to *Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth* (1997). Beyond these references, the idea of the shaman, of the wounded healer, of shape shifting is palpable throughout her work. One critic, David Carrasco, describes *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a “shamanic space where a different quality of knowledge is achieved through ecstatic trance states” (224). The shaman as curandera is also prevalent in Anzaldúa’s writing for children, *Friends From the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado*

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36 It is interesting to note that David Carrasco was a student of Mircea Eliade, who wrote the foundational book on shamanism on which this chapter relies heavily (*The Soul of Shamanism* 29).
37 Carrasco centralizes the shamanic space of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, claiming it as “central to her poetic imagery and attempted cultural healing” (224). While my analysis of *Borderlands* is very similar to Carrasco’s, I extend my analysis to Anzaldúa’s entire corpus and I focus on close readings of the text rather than incorporate my interpretation of the text into my personal life. Rather than label Anzaldúa’s artistic style “loca-centric” as Carrasco does, I choose to dwell within the shamanic space and explore the shamanic imagery in the texts. Perhaps “loca-centric” is similar to the “queer imagination” discussed in chapter two. Both of these approximations of Anzaldúa’s contribution may be housed within her larger project of epistemology, discussed in chapter three.
While this chapter does concerns healing, the medicine is manifest in words rather than in herbs, and the metaphor of the shaman as psychic healer and privileged seer is more pertinent than that of the curandera.

For the purposes of this chapter, I limit my analysis to three main tenets of shamanism: that of the shamanic initiation/vocation, the shamanic quest, and shamanic healing. Importantly, I view shamanism as a religious vocation (Eliade xii) whose practitioner is one who “possesses magico-religious powers” (3), who is believed to cure and serve as a psychopomp, a guider of souls (4). The shaman may also be a “priest, mystic, and poet” (4). Following Anzaldúa’s careful non-appropriation of Southwestern or Texan indigenous religious practices, I approach shamanism from a global perspective. It is my contention that Anzaldúa believed herself to be in possession of a heightened consciousness that afforded her visionary knowledge and that she employed writing as the vehicle to spread that knowledge. Whether or not she privately self-identified as a shaman is a matter of speculation. More interesting than private self-identification is the

38 Hames-García notes that Anzaldúa’s writing, especially the texts designed for children, show her contributions to emancipatory culture: “Her work as an editor, bringing women of color’s voices to the fore, and changing consciousness about oppression and resistance (Lunsford 24-25); books for children, new myths directed at children (Prietita and the Ghost Woman), Anzaldúa writes that she hopes to “encourage children to look beneath the surface of what things seem to be in order to discover the truths that may be hidden” (Hames-García, “How to tell a Mestizo” 118-119).

39 Anzaldúa states in Borderlands: “I’ve always been aware that there is a greater power than the conscious I. That power is my inner self, the entity that is the sum total of all my reincarnations, the godwoman in me I call Antigua, mi Diosa, the divine within, Coatlicue-Chihuacatl-Tlazolteotl-Tonatzin-Coatlopeuh-Guadalupe-there are one” (72). In a later piece she addresses herself in the second person, “That…night you were both the animal in you and your animal-companion, yourself and other-nagual. You felt powerful, otherworldly, and privy to secret knowledge. For the first time you felt at home in your body” (“Putting Coyotlahauhqui Together” 249).
exploration of shamanic imagery and metaphor in her writing and what that uncovers about her writing process and style. As I will show in this chapter, Gloria Anzaldúa as a writer is indeed a practitioner of shamanism. Exploration of published and archival Anzaldúan texts via the critical lens of shamanism elucidates dimensions of her writing that have heretofore been unaddressed, and enriches how we read both her and her texts.

As this chapter traces its genesis directly to Keating’s plenary speech, I find it necessary to situate myself in the growing field of Anzaldúan Studies. While Keating has the benefit of knowing Anzaldúa and working with her on two anthologies, I only came to know Anzaldúa’s writings after her death. This is important, perhaps, in the critical distance with which each of us approaches Anzaldúa’s work. Keating argues that Anzaldúa would be hesitant to employ the term “shaman” to describe herself, although she refers to her writing as shamanic, adding that Anzaldúa was criticized early in her career for appropriating or over-simplifying indigenous thought (“From a ‘Linguistic Turn’” 6). Keating makes this claim at the same time that she quotes Anzaldúa as being biologically “three quarters Indian” (“Speaking Across the Divide” 286). While I do not intend to allege any critical limitations in Keating’s Anzaldúan scholarship—quite to the contrary, my own analysis of Anzaldúa’s text is very much indebted to Keating’s attention to Anzaldúa’s legacy—I do hope to contribute to the conversation Keating has initiated through her 2010 SSGA plenary lecture. To be fair, Keating’s project of engaging Anzaldúan texts in a discussion of shamanism is quite different from the present analysis. Keating, as a long-time friend and writing comadre of Anzaldúa’s, is interested in contextualizing Anzaldúa’s theoretical contributions in much broader strokes; arguing that women of color have long been doing work that could be described
as Speculative Realism and engaging in a dialogue about the transformative power of the written word (“From the ‘Linguistic Turn’”). What I, as a literary scholar, can contribute to this discussion is close readings of Anzaldúa’s texts. Indeed, I would argue that literary analysis is scant in Anzaldúa’s criticism. Not only does most criticism focus entirely on *Borderlands/La Frontera*, but also, recent publications in Anzaldúa’s studies have focused on personal reactions to Anzaldúa’s written words instead of the words themselves. I do not want to disregard the individual reactions to Anzaldúa’s work—I have also been moved by their grace and beauty, not to mention their power—but I do think a balance between the literary and the personal is key if we, as Anzaldúa scholars, are going to bolster legitimization efforts on behalf of her contributions. While personal effects are of utmost importance, we must also appreciate the literary artistry that moves the reader. We must, as readers, acknowledge the power of Anzaldúa’s words and also try to understand how she was able to move us in so many directions. Luckily, Anzaldúa was interested in ‘laying bare’ her process; she has left us a blueprint.

In my close reading of Anzaldúa’s texts, I follow a practice that Anzaldúa herself modeled. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa notes “I look for omens everywhere, everywhere catch glimpses of the patterns and cycles of my life” (36). As a reader of Anzaldúa as a person, artist and philosopher, I read her texts searching for patterns in her writing and thought processes. When Keating suggested a poet-shaman aesthetic in Anzaldúa’s texts, I investigated trends in global shamanism, common practices among indigenous religions around the world, to explore general patterns of shamanic initiation, vocation, quest and healing, and I took that knowledge to my rereading of Anzaldúa’s canon with an eye to the shape-shifting, transformative power of her words. The analysis
I present here intends to show parallels between Anzaldúa’s life and writing to the practice of shamanism, although I find it important to clarify that the thread of shamanism I’ve discovered through my readings could very well be an imposition on the texts, or could possibly be an unconsciously interwoven thread. I bring up the unconscious element at the suggestion of Anzaldúa herself. Reflecting on *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa explained to a class at Pomona College in 1991:

> In every piece of writing there’s a subtext—a hidden text, an underbelly—which the author may not even be conscious of, things that I don’t want people to know about me but which the reader may pick up or which the writer as reader may pick up years later. (“On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*” [originally drafted 1991, revised 1996] 197)

By holding Anzaldúa’s life and her writing up to the framework of the life and work of a shaman, I contend that the motif of the shaman, the wounded healer, may be one such unconscious element in Anzaldúan work.

Although it bears a 1962 publication date, Eliade’s text, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* continues to serve as the most comprehensive study of global shamanism and forms the basis of the shamanistic underpinnings of the present analysis. According to Eliade, “the shaman is not only a sick man [sic]; he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself” (27).

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40 Daniel Noel argues that Eliade’s text is comparative in that it searches for general patterns without attending to cultural specificity. Noel also notes that Eliade wrote a nonfiction novel, *The Forbidden Forrest*, at the same time as he wrote this text, insinuating a literary quality to the supposed empirical anthropological study. These claims bolster Noel’s hypothesis that Eliade provided Western Shamanism with a literary basis on which Carlos Castaneda could build. Anzaldúa was an avid reader of Castaneda’s and his influence is evident throughout her writings. Noel’s claim that Eliade’s work and Castaneda’s for that matter (decidedly declared a fiction, and not the actual ethnography Castaneda claimed it be) are based on literary imagination support my stance that Anzaldúa was also a shamanic writer (Noel 10, 25, 42, 45).
Shamans, whether identified on the basis of heredity or instruction, are able to use the experience gained in their personal sickness and recovery to heal their community. In fact, the position of shaman has essentially communal functions including healing, leading sacrifice, storytelling, fortunetelling and in the general guidance of souls. As such, the shaman performs a necessary role in the community. In her role of healer, or wounded healer, the shaman uses her own experience with illness as a means to heal herself and, in turn, her community. In essence, by experiencing illness, one masters the theory of illness and, upon healing oneself, practices the theory of healing. In this regard, the shaman as theorist draws on personal experience in a two-way movement within her person and outward into her community, in her role of producer of new knowledge. In being both a member of the community and part of a larger spiritual community of shamans, the shaman is held in high regard. Shamans are simultaneously of the community and separated from it. The movement towards a deeper spiritual connection separates the shaman psychically and sometime physically from her community, so that she can return transformed to her community and enact change.

The matter of selection of a shaman can be a question of inheritance or instruction. Eliade notes that sometimes the election of a shaman may be physical and apparently accidental, like being bitten by a snake (32). The election of an individual into shamanism can be manifest in childhood tragedy (Spivey 15) or by serious illness (Eliade 28). Shamans can be either feminine and/or masculine, and often privileges a combination of masculine and feminine attributes. Anzaldúa’s initiation into shamanic

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41 Jungian reference. Anzaldúa was very well read in Jungian psychology; see her discussion of the shadow beast in Borderlands and her starting point of thinking in images that is very similar to James Hillman’s imaginal psychology. Hillman is considered a post-Jungian and was one of Anzaldúa’s favorite authors.
praxis is a combination of all of these factors. Both her grandmother, thought to be a curandera, and her father would tell the young Anzaldúa stories about mystical experiences with animals (rabid coyotes and phantom dogs in *Borderlands*, for example). Anzaldúa inherited these stories through the oral tradition of her family (“Memoir—My Calling” [last revised in November 1997] 235). And the experience of being bitten by a snake when working in the fields figures prominently in *Borderlands* as well. The night after she was bitten by a rattlesnake and her mother hoed it to pieces, Anzaldúa “watched the window sill, watched the moon dry the blood on the tail, dreamed rattler fangs filled my mouth, scales covered my body.” She continues, “In the morning I saw through snake eyes, felt snake blood course through my body.” And finally she concludes “The serpent, mi tono, my animal counterpart…Always when they cross my path, fear and elation flood my body. I know things older than Freud, older than gender” (*Borderlands* 26). The snakebite symbolically initiates Anzaldúa into shamanism, and the snake-as-metaphor for hidden knowledge remains a consistent motif throughout the author’s work.

As a result of this initiation, Anzaldúa embraces the imagery of the snake as central to her work. Her investigations into historical renderings of Coatlopeuh, more commonly referred to as Guadalupe, “She who has Dominion Over Serpents” (*Borderlands* 27), are key in her shamanic instruction. Anzaldúa’s excavations and re-appropriations of this and other Aztec deities serve as the traditional form of shamanic

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42 Anzaldúa also mentions her grandmothers and father in “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” as people who mediate between realities: “…tus mamagrandes y tu papá who persevered and persisted and who walked between realities” (247).
43 Eliade notes “The shaman is initiated by animals, who become his guardian spirits” (100). In my reading of Anzaldúa’s initiation, these animals would be the snake that bit her, and the bird that visited her in the form of a presence, later drawn by Randy Conner.
instruction. In addition to experiencing dreams and trances, a practice I will expand upon later when I discuss her writing style, she also learns the names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, and its secret language (Eliade 13).

Anzaldúa’s shamanic initiation is thus both ecstatic and didactic. Further biographical events that instruct Anzaldúa in the practice of shamanism include serious illness, discussed below, and childhood tragedy (Spivey 15).

Anzaldúa’s father’s death when she was twelve years old dramatically affected her world-view. She semi-fictionalizes the event in her short story “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas” (1984) where she concludes that, in one blow, she lost her belief in God and her innocence. The rupture of her young father’s aorta forever marked her life. In considering the shamanic initiation of Anzaldúa, it is significant that, that “shamans do not differ from the other members of the collectivity by their quest for the sacred—which is normal and universal human behavior—but by their capacity for ecstatic experience, which, for the most part, is equivalent to a vocation” (Eliade 107).

This capacity for ecstasy is evident as her semi-autobiographical child narrator in “People Should Not Die,” La Prieta, shows uncharacteristic maturity for a young child and an amazing ability for self-reflection. La Prieta exercises ecstatic faculties the ability to be or stand outside oneself, as she is able to go beyond her personal grief and consider her family’s situation. La Prieta is able to distance herself from her father’s death because she, as the oldest child, must remain practical to counter her mother’s hysteria at the same time that La Prieta fails to grasp the finality of the death. In the space of a few pages, La Prieta shows her mature practicality by reasoning with her mother to buy a less expensive

44 This is a philosophical definition of the word (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59423#eid5972432> 29 Feb 2012).
suit, noting that the one the undertaker has shown her “doesn’t even have a back. And besides, it’s going to rot soon” (“People” 281). This mature rationale is countered by La Prieta’s lack of understanding the finality of her father’s death. For weeks after the funeral, she cannot understand why her father doesn’t return, “aunque no más viniera a vistarlos, even if he came to visit” (“People” 287). Fictionalizing this change in perception, Anzaldúa speaks through her protagonist, noting that without the people, the church becomes a “hollowed-out thing” (“People” 283) and that the year of masses dedicated to her father seems ironic as her father “had never entered a church except for the funeral mass of a friend or relative” (“People” 286). After four years of waiting for her father to return from the dead, La Prieta realizes that “neither the one God nor her father will ever walk through her door again” (“People” 287). The loss of her father shatters her belief in monotheism and in an all-benevolent God; this tragedy creates a crack in La Prieta’s reality and opens space for alternative belief systems. If La Prieta cannot depend on her father, now dead, or on God to decipher her reality, she must summon the power within herself.

As for her fictional counterpart, the tragedy of her beloved father’s death was a pivotal event for the young Anzaldúa. It is this experience that allowed her to see through the church as an institution of power. Her turn from Western monotheism opened up a world of deities that populate her writing and her spiritual practice. The inclusion of these deities signifies a break with organized patriarchal religion and allowed Anzaldúa to look to the body as a source of power rather than rely on external deities. Anzaldúa’s movement toward deity-based spirituality and embodied forms of knowledge, while it does constitute a break with Western religion, is actually a continuation of indigenous
and familial practices that Anzaldúa witnessed as a child from her grandmothers. The
syncretism she witnessed growing up, of her grandmother’s keeping altars and caring for
their contents is evident in her reflection of this cultural difference with Western values.
The Catholic Church, with its male-dominated hierarchy, failed to address the lives and
concerns of Anzaldúa’s grandmothers. Likewise, Anzaldúa found the church lacking and
sought solace in an embodied spirituality. This earth-based and corporeal spirituality is
exercised in Anzaldúa’s writing. Using her body as the source of her knowledge,
Anzaldúa’s writings enact shamanism.

Queer as Shaman

“Cuando vives en la frontera, you’re a …/forerunner of a new race,/ half and half-both
woman and man, neither-/ a new gender/ …/To survive in the Borderlands/ you must
live sin fronteras/ be a crossroads” (Borderlands 194-5).

Sexuality and gender expression are two of the borderlands discussed in
Anzaldúa’s 1987 Borderlands/La Frontera. As a woman-loving woman, or patlache
(discussed below), Anzaldúa confronted the double taboo in Chicana culture of
expressing female sexual desire, and having that desire directed toward other females.
Uneasy with the term lesbian,45 she discusses the cultural concept of a half-and-half, of
someone who lives as a male for half the year and as a female for the other half. The
notion of a half-and-half, or one who is “both woman and man,” resonates with

45 Lesbian, for Anzaldúa, seems to connote white middle class women who have sex with
women stating that etymologically speaking, lesbian is derived from Lesbos, the mythical
island home of Sappho, who geographically and culturally did not resonate with Chicanas
(Reuman, “Coming into Play: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa” 36).
indigenous beliefs of a more fluid gender system that allowed for a third gender, colonially referred to as berdache and more modernly referred to as two-spirit. Randy Conner directly correlates that fluidity to spirituality, noting: “the spiritual power of expressing queerness resides in its potential to liquefy traditional boundaries of sexuality and gender—as well as other boundaries—thereby freeing the psyche or spirit of oppressive roles” (Conner, Cassell’s 63). Anzaldúa opens up the possibility that the half-and-half, the transgendered, the patlache or the two-spirit can in fact be neither man nor woman, but something else, “a new gender.” The synthesis of man and woman into a third entity is coherent with her larger challenge: to deconstruct dualistic thinking. This third entity--this new gender--carried “magic” within its difference: In Borderlands, Anzaldúa notes that “maimed, mad and sexually different people were believed to possess supernatural powers by primal cultures’ mago-religious thinking. For them, abnormality was the price a person had to pay for her or his inborn extraordinary gift” (19). This abnormality of gender expression affords access into both the male and female worlds of a rigidly defined gendered society. Anzaldúa found this crossroads embodied in the half-and-half compelling and, foreseeing discussions of gender dysphoria of transgendered individuals in the 1990s, remarks in Borderlands that “contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we ‘(she included herself in the group of individuals with entry into both male and female worlds),’ what we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other” (Borderlands 19). In a defiant stance against despotic duality, she individually claims, and performatively incites, a collectivity of queer people with similar views toward gender,
an identity that embodies both male and female: “I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the hieros gamos: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (Borderlands 19).

Having entry into the gendered world of both males and females, not to mention the additional threshold positions of being a female in a patriarchal society, a Chicana in an Anglo-dominant society and coming from a working-class family and working within the academy, Anzaldúa viewed herself, and other crossers of borders, to possess a sense which she calls la facultad. Anzaldúa develops her theory of la facultad in Borderlands as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities...it is an instant ‘sensing’...an acute awareness...that communicates in images and symbols” (Borderlands 38). It is my contention Anzaldúa’s gender and sexual expression, along with many other border sites, grants her access to certain knowledge and allows her to act as a mediator. Anzaldúa explored the position of mediator in her discussion of Coatlopeuh, or Guadalupe, as a spiritual mediator between God and his people. She proposed la nueva mestiza as mediator in Borderlands and later extended the role of mestiza-as-mediator to the Náhuatl word nepantlera to combat the restricted

46 Queerness in “La Prieta:” “Awareness began early. It wasn’t just that I grew upon south Texas and was Chicana that me other/alien in the eyes of the world. Being born with a cunt instead of a penis was a more grivious [sic] blemish and was viewed by most of the males and some of the females of both cultures with fear and suspicion. Was it my femaleness that my mother held against me? And today she views me as other/alien for yet another reason—for loving women, for being ‘una de las otras,’ that is queer” (Box 44, folder 19, IMG 7981).
47 Please refer to chapter two for a more detailed discussion of la facultad and to chapter three for a discussion on the evolution of la facultad to what Anzaldúa described as conocimiento.
48 Anzaldúa defined nepantla in her interview with María Henríquez Betancor: “When I give my talks I use an overhead projector with a transparency of a little stick figure con un pie en un mundo y otro pie en otro mundo y todos estos mundos overlap: this is your
interpretations of mestiza as a racial entity. The mediator, the bridge living between two
groups, because she is both-and (as opposed to either-or), is able to see cracks between
dualities. Sensing these cracks, the nepantleras or the shamans, who also mediate
between the spiritual and the physical, can use their experience to change their reality.
This awareness, I believe, manifests itself in the form of shamanic praxis. Anzaldúa’s
formulation of la facultad resonates with Eliade’s statement that “Shamans are the ‘elect,’
and as such they have access to a region of the sacred inaccessible to other members of
the community” (7). Indeed, Anzaldúa states that her calling to be an artist was akin to
shamanic vocation, complete with spirit connection: “I felt a calling to be an artist, but an
artists in the sense of a shaman—of healing through words, using words as a medium for
expressing the flights of the soul, communing with the spirit, having access to these other
realities or worlds” (Interviews/Entrevistas 19). According to Randy Conner,
“Shamanism may be more broadly defined as a cross- or multicultural spiritual pathway
stressing the interrelatedness of all life, the reverence of Nature, and the recognition that
we live in a multiverse wherein we dwell with spirits or divine beings who actively
participate in our lives” (Cassell’s 27). Anzaldúa’s access to these other realities or
worlds were manifest in words and delivered to the world in the form of stories.

A note on terminology

Anzaldúa was very aware of the power of naming. She sexually self-identified as
a patlache, a Náhuatl word she interpreted as meaning “woman-loving woman.” In
Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit, to which Anzaldúa provided the foreword, Randy Conner characterizes Anzaldúa as “patlache (in Náhuatl), women-loving, often transgendered female” (Cassell’s 63) and later defines the term patlache as follows:

The Amazonian, woman-loving woman-to the sign of the Rabbit or Hare (Tochtli) and the deer (Mazatl)...Xochipilli was associated with sexual variance, and along with his sister Xochiquetzal with the sign of the flower (Xochitl); persons born under this sign tended to be poets and artists. (Conner 73)

Conner’s broader definition of patlache incorporates Anzaldúa’s definition of the same, yet extends it to include “sexual variance” and the attribution of creative talents. In terms of gender, Anzaldúa described herself as “two in one body, both male and female” (Borderlands 19). While the terms “transgender” and “two-spirit” were in circulation during Anzaldúa’s lifetime, she never employed either. Here it would seem as though Conner’s definition opens the possibility of transgenderism to the patlache, where Anzaldúa’s definition is perhaps more specific. Susan Stryker provides a background on the term transgender, noting that this word

[s]eems to have been coined in the 1980s, took on its current meaning in 1992 after appearing in the title of a small but influential pamphlet by Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come.” First usage of the term “transgender” is generally attributed to Virginia Prince; a Southern California advocate for freedom of gender expression…. [A] transgender was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation. (4)49

And according to Anguksuar/Richard LaFortune (Yup’ik), the term two-spirit:

49 It is perhaps telling that within Transgender Studies Reader there is no reference to “two-spirit” identity; there are however, citations under the colonial term berdache.
Originated in Northern Algonquin dialect and gained first currency at the third annual spiritual gathering of gay and lesbian Native people that took place near Winnipeg in 1990. What we who chose this designation understood is that niizh manitoag (two-spirits) indicates the presence of both a feminine and a masculine spirit in one person. (221)

Perhaps visionary in Anzaldúa’s use of tribe-specific language to represent her particular mixture of gender and sexual expression, the specificity of the term patlache is exactly what Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee) is calling for in the project of alliance building between Native and Queer Studies in their 50 2010 GLQ article, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies.” It is surprising, given Driskill’s acknowledged familiarity with Anzaldúa’s work, 51 that her contribution of the patlache concept was not mentioned in the article. Also interesting is Anzaldúa’s insistence on claiming a Náhuatl word instead of a tribe or language group more directly associated with her home state of Texas. Careful not to displace the native indigenous peoples of Texas, Anzaldúa maintains that she’s “always claimed indigenous ancestry and connections, but... never claimed a North American Indian Identity...afraid that what I say may unwittingly contribute to the misappropriation of Native cultures” (“Speaking Across the Divide” [written as an email dialogue in 2002 and published in 2003 in the fall-winter issue of Studies in American Indian Literature] 286). It is possibly this sensitivity to the power of naming and the desire to stand in solidarity with native North American Indians (as opposed to assisting in their erasure) that might have

50 Intentional use of third person singular, employed out of respect for unknown preferred pronoun.
51 Driskill presented “Patlache Amoxtli: Anzaldúa, Codices, and Indigenous Queer Identities” at the 2009 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa Conference and oversaw a panel of their students who presented at the 2010 SSGA conference in the panel “Young Scholars and Atravesados Negotiating the Academic Landscape through Practices through the Body and Theories of the Flesh.”
caused Anzaldúa to be reluctant to claim a shamanic label. Fortunately, as a literary scholar, I am not confined to author self-identifications in my close readings of her text. While, I too, am concerned with the erasure and misappropriation of native peoples, I feel that incorporating elements of shamanism in Anzaldúa’s textual analysis serves an educational motive, both for my readers and me. And I hope my use of the motif of shamanism will be closer to a respectful borrowing than an outright theft.

Anzaldúa viewed her particular mixture of male and female qualities as a gift that afforded her new knowledge. Regarding the shaman as one who is singled out, elected to the task of shamanizing, explains why shamans are often sickly as youth or possess some other characteristic that set them apart from their peers. Randy Conner notes that many societies view “transgendered persons as especially capable of performing spiritual functions, as they are believed to hold the knowledge of gender transformation as well as other forms of metamorphosis” (Conner, Cassell’s 27). Metamorphosis from masculine presenting to feminine presenting perhaps by extension also facilitates transformation from human to animal, physical to spiritual.

Marked at Birth

Perceiving shamans as one of the ‘elect of the community,’ Eliade lists suffering, death and resurrection as necessary elements in shamanic initiation and vocation. Eliade explains that, many times, a future-shaman is marked at birth, much as Anzaldúa was marked by early and painful menstruation at three months of age—a throwback to the
Eskimos, Anzaldúa’s doctor reported to her mother. The early onslaught of menstruation was accompanied by severe fevers and illness throughout her childhood that prevented her from joining her farm-working family in the fields but allowed her solitude and ample time to read. In shamanic vocation, according to Eliade, there seems to always occur a crisis that is followed by new insight. The physical crisis of painful menses that set Anzaldúa apart from her family and allowed her time to read resulted in further separation, as reading was not a common activity in her family or her community. So not only was she different because she bled and had fevers, but she was also ‘othered’ by her love for reading and curiosity for knowledge. Growing up, Anzaldúa also combated racist Anglo teachers that perpetuated the stereotype that Chicanos were dumb (Interviews/Entrevistas 90). This multiplicity of otherness gave Anzaldúa an unique perspective of the world.

But this otherness also eventually forced her to leave her family and home in South Texas. In many respects, Anzaldúa had to leave home to explore the “different” aspects of her person: She had to momentarily detribalize herself in order to see through her culture and the restrictions it placed on her. AnaLouise Keating notes that Anzaldúa’s “experiences as a brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking girl in a dominant culture that values light-skinned, English-speaking boys” (Interviews/Entrevistas 2) were yet another influence that made Anzaldúa feel that she was not a part of the dominant culture. The desire to write about these experiences was similar to a vocation. In a self-reflective essay on how Prieta, Anzaldúa’s childhood nickname (and most frequent protagonist), came to write, Anzaldúa recalls:

52 “While still a child, the future shaman... proves to be sickly, withdrawn, contemplative” (Eliade 20)
If she accepted the call (to write) she would have to leave home, but refusing the call would lead to sickness. So it began: her apprenticeship. The first stage was detribalization. She was forced to recognize the illusory and arbitrary nature of social norms...She was forced into this detribalization by a crisis of life-altering proportions. (“Memoir—My Calling; or, Notes for ‘How Prieta Came to Write’” [last revised November 1997] 236)

Anzaldúa describes her rebellion from her culture by expressing lesbian sexual desire and blatantly opposes social norms. When asked when she was planning on marrying, “Se le va a pasar el tren,” the young Anzaldúa replies “Pos si me caso, no va a ser con un hombre” (Borderlands 17). A shaman, too, has to leave her village in order to receive the proper training of seeing through this reality into the realm of the spirits. Furthermore, Eliade and Anzaldúa describe both shamanism and writing respectfully as vocations that must be attended to in order to maintain health. According to Eliade, a shaman apprentice must leave home and undergo “rituals and ordeals...designed to make the candidate forget his past life” (64-65). Anzaldúa does not “forget” her life as a young Chicana in South Texas, but her travels away from home do allow her to see the socially constructed nature of gender roles. In Borderlands, she began the journey of reimagining her culture in writing by re-signifying Aztec deities. And after the publication of Borderlands, Anzaldúa was accused of betraying her people for talking so publicly about personal aspects and about her culture. Her travels had given her the critical distance to analyze her culture but her time away from ‘home’ did not secure impunity from its constraints.

Anzaldúa accounts for the rituals of initiation into the writer’s life (or shaman’s life in my interpretation), by emphasizing the importance of crisis in her instruction:

Whenever she began to slump into complacency, another crisis would snap her eyes open. She had five confrontations with death. She also
had confrontations with spirits, where the mask of reality lifted and she could see behind it to the hidden reality, and several powerful dreams and visions. Her training began. She attempted to strengthen her will, concentration, and memory. ("Memoir—My Calling; or, Notes for 'How Prieta Came to Write'" last revised November 1997] 236).

These crises, of near death-experiences and confrontations with spirits, taught her to see beyond surface reality. Her detribalization from her biological family had begun and she was now training to become an observer of knowledge as well as a producer of knowledge:

Every day she wrote in her journal. She fasted, went through sleep deprivation. She prayed and meditated. She spent periods in solitude and isolation in the wilderness. She let herself starve rather than expend her energies doing shit work. She wanted to know, to become a knower, while she turned away from society and towards herself. Gradually, too, she turned her back to her community. ("Memoir—My Calling; or, Notes for ‘How Prieta Came to Write’" last revised November 1997] 236)

Anzaldúa’s training to become a writer closely resembles the training to become a shaman. Present throughout her writing career is the dual movement that takes her both deeper within the self and outward into the community. Interestingly, Anzaldúa articulated the movement back to community (albeit a different one that she started with) in one of first publications and takes up the theme again in her last publication. The creation of a new community called El Mundo Zurdo was a theory Anzaldúa developed over the course of her life. After she had separated herself physically and psychically by seeing through her home culture and had decided she could no longer abide by the status quo, Anzaldúa attempted to find community in an idea she called “The New Tribalism.”

53 Anzaldúa re-appropriates the term “New Tribalism” from white critic, David Reiff, who argued that Anzaldúa was “romanticizing and idealizing the pre-Hispanic cultures”
New Tribalism is a “disruptive category that redefines previous ethnocentric forms of nationalism” (Interviews/Entrevistas 5). An important intervention in the Chicano Movement of the 1970s, this term signifies one way in which many Chicanas, a lot of whom were also lesbians, began to question the misogyny and homophobia of the Movement and began to look for alternatives. Anzaldúa develops her theory of New Tribalism in response to the shortcomings of the Chicano Movement, transcending nationality and racial identity as a form of personal and collective identity formation. Importantly, Anzaldúa does not discredit these forms of ethnic identification, but rather argues for a deeper connection among all beings as the basis of her New Tribalism. Spiritual connection forms the basis for New Tribalism’s collectivity as an alternative to identity politics: “your identity has roots you share with all people and other beings—spirit, feeling, and body make up a greater identity category…. The roots del árbol de la vida of all planetary beings are nature, soul, body” (“now let us shift” 560). New Tribalism also entails an openness to connecting with others. In an interview with Inés Hernández-Ávila in 1991, Anzaldúa describes New Tribalism as saying “Yes I belong. I come from this particular tribe, but I’m open to interacting with these other people” (Interviews/Entrevistas 185). The idea of New Tribalism is disruptive in that it does not limit membership to one identity category. Throughout Anzaldúa’s life, she continually refused to be limited to any one classification: “Though it might have made critics more comfortable, Anzaldúa’s autobiographic body never assimilated to an identity category (including that of the ‘other’) or ‘developed’ into healthy, static wholeness” (Bost, “From (Interviews/Entrevistas 215) in Borderlands/La Frontera. Reiff also accused Anzaldúa of being a “professional Aztec” and takes Anzaldúa to task for her “naïve and nostalgic return to indigenous roots” (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 283). Reiff published his critique “Professional Aztecs and Popular Culture” in New Perspectives Quarterly (winter 1991).
Race/Sex/Etc.” 350).

Not only would she not pigeonhole herself into any one category, Anzaldúa also refused to separate the “other” from the group. Related to her theory of New Tribalism is the concept of Nos/ostras. Anzaldúa introduces the slash between “nos” (us) and “otras” (feminine them) in a technique similar to the one she uses in the title of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. The slash is meant to show division and wounding, but the slash also sutures the two sides together as they can only superficially be separated.54 Anzaldúa describes Nos/ostras as a move to disrupt identity categories to show the fluid nature of all identity because “all of us find ourselves in the position of being simultaneously insider/outsider” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 254).55 Under this fluidity, she postulates, is a spiritual connection that unites all beings.

While recognizing the spiritual connectedness, Anzaldúa is careful not to underestimate the importance of identity markers. While she felt it necessary that Prieta (either as a character or as a fictionalization of herself—I include both as not to assume Anzaldúa’s intention) detribalize herself in order to see through the harmful elements of her culture in “Memoir—My Calling; or, Notes for ‘How Prieta Came to Write’” (last revised November 1997, published in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*), Anzaldúa is very conscious of not detribalizing others. Speaking about her expansive use of the term “mestizaje” and her theory of New Tribalism, Anzaldúa states, “I’m afraid that Chicanas may unknowingly help the dominant culture remove Indians from their specific tribal

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54 Annamarie Jagose discusses the dual function of the slash in “Slash and Suture: The Border’s Figuration of Colonialism, Phallocentrism, and Homophobia in *Borderlands/La Frontera*” (1994).

55 Anzaldúa might also introduce this concept to discuss the “something Other [that] is in us” referring to the inner world of the psyche (Noel 186).
identities and histories. Tengo miedo que, in pushing for mestizaje and a new tribalism, I will “detrabalize” them... Yet I also feel it’s imperative that we participate in this dialogue no matter how risky” (“Speaking Across the Divide” [written as an email dialogue in 2002 and published in 2003 in the fall-winter issue of Studies in American Indian Literature] 286). There is ample evidence in Anzaldúan texts that Anzaldúa trod this fine line herself and was careful not to over-appropriate or borrow from indigenous traditions: she carefully speaks of shamanism as metaphor or simile; “Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman,” “an artist in the sense of the shaman” (Interviews/Entrevistas 19), “The writer-shaman (a double seven) is la nauala” (“Why I write”56), etc. Yet I maintain that her writing is shamanic and that her shamanic practice might be more closely aligned with imaginal shamanism that any tribal-specific practice. Insisting of the power of the imagination and the very concrete power of fiction, Anzaldúa uses her writing to heal her readers. By tracing the parallels in Anzaldúa’s life and writing to practices of shamanism, her intention to heal herself and her readers via writing becomes more palpable.57 The healing is transformative and comes in the form of balance. This balance lies in the liminal states of identity and perception.

56 This quote is taken from an unpublished manuscript titled “Why I write” referenced in Keating’s “From the ‘Linguistic turn’” (11).

57 In reading Eliade’s description of shamanism, the parallels to Anzaldúa’s life are almost too uncanny not to bring to bear on my analysis. Keating suggested that shamanic parallels in Anzaldúa’s life and works might point to “epistemological/metaphysical dimensions beneath/larger than shamanism” that I explore in the final chapter (Email correspondence November 9, 2011). I should also note that the theme for the 2012 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa conference, “Transformation,” is undoubtedly influenced by Keating’s Anzaldúan scholarship.
Risking the Personal

Due to her early menarche and accelerated hormonal maturity, Anzaldúa underwent a hysterectomy in 1980. This moment is significant, not only because it is one of the four near-death experiences Anzaldúa experienced during her life, but also because it served the didactic purpose of teaching her how to turn her illness into healing; she recalls “[m]y soul in one corner of the hospital ceiling, getting thinner and thinner telling me to clean up my shit, to release the fears and garbage from the past that are hanging me up…. Strip away—all the way to the bone. Make myself utterly vulnerable” (“La Prieta” 203). This near-death experience is similar to shamanistic travels to the underworld that allow the shaman to return to her community, employing this experience to assist in healing her community. Here Anzaldúa learns the lesson of self-exposure, what Keating later describes as “risking the personal,” (Interviews/Entrevistas I-15) a concept useful in discussing Anzaldúa’s writing style. By divulging so much personal information in her writing, Anzaldúa, like many feminist authors who contend that the personal is political, risks the personal:

Anzaldúa transforms herself into a bridge and creates potential identifications with readers from diverse backgrounds. She models a process of self-disclosure that invites (and sometimes compels) us to take new risks as we reflect on our own experiences, penetrate the privacy of our own lives. (Keating, “Risking the Personal” 2)

Anzaldúa risks criticism, slander and downright rejection by infusing her writing with details from her personal life. And she makes herself this vulnerable to learn more about herself. Risking the personal is a technique of self-knowledge, of learning about the world from the starting point of one’s own body.

Symptomatic of her “gift from heaven, received at birth” (Eliade 15) of shamanic
vocation, Anzaldúa endured early menstruation, excruciating periods, a subsequent hysterectomy, and also suffered from insomnia, depression and diabetes throughout her life. This period of initiation, of illness, while physically painful, provided fodder and insight for Anzaldúa’s writing. Here I wish to echo Suzanne Bost’s approximation of the importance of pain in Anzaldúa’s life and work: “This is not a hagiography that elevates the suffering of a lost martyr or valorizes sacrifice. Rather, I want to show how the pain that framed much of Anzaldúa’s experience also framed her ideas” (“Gloria Anzaldúa’s Mestiza Pain” 7). As important it is for Anzaldúan scholars to recognize the pain that formed the bedrock for Anzaldúa’s theories and fiction, it is more important to recognize that pain as raw, debilitating physical pain.

Anzaldúa approached writing as a shaman approaches his craft: a shaman must shamanize to avoid illness in spite of the fact that the art of shamanizing is fatiguing; in Eliade’s words: “But he needed to shamanize; if he went for a long time without doing so, he did not feel well…A shaman’s practice is very, very fatiguing” (28). Without using the term explicitly, Anzaldúa speaks to the need and the fatigue of shamanizing in *Borderlands*:

> When I create stories in my head, that is, allow the voices and scenes to be projected in the inner screen of my mind, I ‘trance.’ I used to think I was going crazy or that I was having hallucinations. But now I realize it is my job, my calling, to traffic in images…When I don’t write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick with I do write…It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy. (Emphasis in original, *Borderlands* 69-70)

In this quote, Anzaldúa also addresses the redemptive powers of practicing her craft.

Ironically, or perhaps fittingly so, it is the traffic in images that brings both suffering and
healing. The cure is brought about by the practice of shamanism: “There is always a
cure, a control, an equilibrium brought about by the actual practice of shamanism”
(Eliade 29). Anzaldúa also noted the potential negative effects of words after
_borderlands_ was published:

Right after _Borderlands/La Frontera_ came out, I focused on what was
weak or lacking in it and everything that was “wrong” with my life. I
repeatedly represented (both with pictures and words in my head and with
internal feelings) how things were in such a negative way that I put myself
in a disempowering state and eventually made myself sick. As it is true
with all humans, the workings of my imagination acted upon my own
body. (“Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman” 121)

Words thus act as pharmakon. In different aspects, words can be the path to healing or the
journey to suffering. The power of words, much like the practice of shamanism, is a two-
way movement. Very aware of the power of words, Anzaldúa turned to words to heal
herself. And true to shamanic praxis, through her writing, armored with the theories of
illness and the practice of trance, Anzaldúa started her writing career “babbling
incoherent words” (Eliade 18); she begins by speaking in tongues.

**The Quest: Writing as Shamanic Pilgrimage**

“Who gave us permission to perform the act of writing? Why does writing seem so
unnatural for me? I’ll do anything to postpone it—empty the trash, answer the telephone.
The voice recurs in me: *Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could
write?*” (“Speaking in Tongues” emphasis in original 166)

“Speaking in Tongues: A letter to 3rd World Women”58 is one of Anzaldúa’s

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58 “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers” was first published in _Words In Our Pockets, The Feminist Writer’s Guild Handbook_, and then in _This Bridge_
earliest and most passionate publications. Referencing religious application, speaking in
 tongues can be interpreted as babbling incoherent nonsense, evidence of spirit possession,
or both, depending on one’s perspective. Speaking in tongues can also refer to an
unknown and/or sacred language. Articulating the invisibility of women of colors or
lesbians of colors writing in the 1980s, Anzaldúa states, “we speak in tongues like the
outcast and the insane” (“Speaking in Tongues”165). Her letter is a call to fellow “third-
world women”59 to take up the task of writing. Anzaldúa employs speaking in tongues as
a central metaphor for the essay as the writing and lived experience of “third-world
women” was not being validated in publishing circles of the time. It was being cast out
as incomprehensible and therefore of little value. Most immediately, I believe Anzaldúa
is speaking to the lack of “third-world women” writers who are able to publish their
writing and is urging other writes like herself to believe that they can and should write.
The salutation “Dear Mujeres de color, companions in writing” (165) immediately
interpolates the reader as also being a writer. Rhetorician Catherine Helen Palczewski
insightfully points out that this letter “enacts community by recognizing, naming, and
paying homage to [Anzaldúa’s] community [of writers] throughout the letter: Cherrie

Called My Back, 1981. She drafts a follow-up letter in her archives. “Dear Women
Writers of Color, Letter Two” (manuscript draft 24 November (Box 60, folder 1) can be
found in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection,
University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin. There is also an 11
August 2000 version of this letter housed in the archives that is currently closed to
researchers until publication plans are finalized (Box 55, folder 12).

59 I choose to locate “third-world woman” in quotes, as it is term Anzaldúa used but that I
would not necessarily select as a descriptor of the audience Anzaldúa is targeting. I do
this, in part, to show my awareness of my whiteness and therefore my exclusion from this
group of women and also out of respect for this group to name itself both individually
and collectively. I also distance myself from the term in response to the contemporary
linguistic shift to referring to the “third world” in terms such as the “global south” or as
“developing nations” so as not to denote a ranking of nations.
Moraga, Naomi Littlebear, Kathy Kendall, Nellie Wong, Genny Lim, Luisah Teish” (4). The letter is divided into three dated sections and speaks to the fragmentary nature of time, writing and identity, especially for “third-world women.” Because many of these women writers have not had access to education and publishing opportunities, very few were being published by mainstream presses. “Third-world women” writer speech is “inaudible” not because they are not speaking; Anzaldúa is prime evidence for Spivak that the subaltern can speak.60 The “third-world woman” writer is inaudible because no one is listening to her: not the white feminist and certainly not white men who run publishing houses in the 1980s.

Comparing the writing of “third-world women” to speaking in tongues nods to the plurality of the phrase and includes the unique and creative syntax, the code-switching, the autobiographical content and perhaps the divine qualities of the contributors included in This Bridge Called My Back. The letter is published in the anthology and speaks to its contributors (all non-white women) as well as to its readers. From the theoretical lens of shamanism, speaking in tongues decenters Anglo Standard English in favor of the language of the “third-woman” writer. By centering “third-women” writers as the focus and recipient of the letter, Anzaldúa privileges their speech as the language of the elect and reminds “first-world” women of their difference. It is only incoherent if the listener does not want to understand it. For those who do understand-- those with similar racial, gender, sexual, socio-economic situations-- Anzaldúa’s speaking in tongues provides a multilayered text that allows for new insight both for the writer and the reader, if they

60 Anzaldúa predates Spivak’s “Can the subaltern speak?” which was originally published in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg’s Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture 1988.
invest the time in multiple readings. The incredible textual technique of focusing on her particular situation to speak to many situations is Anzaldúa’s attempt to reach a large audience: “By writing very concretely about particulars I can reach a large audience” (Interviews/Entrevistas 60). Using herself as example, Anzaldúa discusses the process of writing and the goals of the process. She states:

A poem works for me not when it says what I want it to say and not when it evokes what I want it to. It works when the subject I started out with metamorphoses alchemically into a different one, one that has been discovered, or uncovered, by the poem. It works when it surprises me, when it says something I have repressed or pretended not to know. (“Speaking in Tongues”172)

The shape-shifting of the poetic subject into new insight can be seen as part of the shamanic quest for the self. Anzaldúa continues, “I write…to discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy” (Speaking in Tongues”169). Re-inscribing the role of the writer and of the shaman, not as disease but rather as privilege, Anzaldúa effectively employs writing as shamanic quest toward wholeness. In this regard, Anzaldúa is very much a visionary pragmatist. In the words of Patricia Hill Collins, visionary pragmatism is described as “a creative tension symbolized by an ongoing journey. Arriving at some predetermined destination remains less important that struggling for some ethical end….One never arrives but constantly strives” (Hill Collins 189-90).61 The struggle is more important and perhaps more pedagogically fertile than any destination point for Anzaldúa. The journey is an attempt at balance: balance between internal imagination and external indoctrination, between personal experience and cultural norms. The shamanic quest also centers on journeys, to the under and over worlds, in an attempt to bring knowledge to one’s community. The journey is about the

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61 Many thanks to AnaLouise Keating for bringing this concept to my attention.
The process of obtaining knowledge and using that knowledge to educate one’s community. The shaman does not intend to cure all illness to effectively end illness; there is no final destination point. The shaman experiences and studies illness to assist others in the same process. Likewise, writing does not offer a destination, only the process of creation.

Utilizing an epistolary format to underline the urgency of her message, Anzaldúa opens the letter by encouraging women of color to articulate their own experience in written form. This urgency is also evident in the handwritten note on a manuscript draft dated “13 mayo 80” of “Speaking in Tongues” (located in her archived papers) which instructs the writer to start “paragraphs in mid-sentence to give importance” (Box 44, folder 19 IMG_7960). The urgency of the letter means that the author cannot waste time with introductory sentences; the wounds have already been inflicted, and therefore the sentence must start in medias res to arrive directly to the point, in order to facilitate healing. This also implies that introductions are unnecessary as she, a “third-woman” writer is addressing other “third-women” writers. Assuming familiarity with her readers, Anzaldúa exposes herself, “I sit here naked in the sun” (“Speaking in Tongues”165), with the hope that her readers will respond likewise.

This self-exposure, orchestrated by the alchemical process of writing, which Anzaldúa describes as “the act of making soul…the quest for the self, for the center of the self” (“Speaking in Tongues”169), evokes a shamanic quest for both author and reader. The written text is performative in that it achieves transformation for the author,

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62 It is worth noting that alchemy is the “physical symbol of a spiritual practice…rich in symbolism relating to the mixing or merging of genders or sexes” (Conner, Cassell’s 48).

63 Making soul is, of course, part of the title of Anzaldúa’s second edited anthology, Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color (1990).
and if written in a provocative way, will also transform the reader. In a later piece, Anzaldúa describes the alchemical process of writing as one that “demand[s] dissolution in order that the transmutation of images and emotions into words may occur.” She concludes, “If you’ve done your job, the reader will also undergo an alchemical process” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” [1999] 258-9). This idea of dissolution is mirrored in the idea of dismemberment, a concept Anzaldúa interrogates throughout her writing, especially in her 1999 essay “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together.” The task of writing is to re-member the dismembered, to recompose the identity fragmented by a post-modern society to perform “embodied writing.” In *Borderlands*, she acknowledges post-structural tendencies as important but not exhaustive: the work is not complete with deconstruction, one must consistently engage in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, “deconstruct, construct. She [the new mestiza] becomes a nahual, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person” (*Borderlands* 83). The nahual (or nagual) is the shape-shifter, the shaman (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader Appendix I, 322). The writer as shaman exposes her vulnerability so that her readers can identify with her suffering to begin to heal their own wounds. The letter is an invitation that demands a response; it is a performative text that incites a poiesis of healing. This psychic healing

64 This analysis is echoed in Linda Nelson’s response to *Borderlands*: “For her, writing is shamanistic, transformative” (Nelson, “After Reading *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa” 100).

65 Catherine Helen Palczewski discusses Anzaldúa’s “embodied rhetoric” in “Speaking in Tongues” drawing on the physical tongue, which represents “dialect, nonsense, and sensory organ” (2). I appreciate Palczewski’s dual narrative of highlighting Anzaldúa’s text in the body of her article while relegating Anzaldúa’s parallels to French feminist Helene Cixous to the endnotes. Indeed, the endnote discussion is another article in and of itself. Palczewski’s privileging of the Chicana author speaks to her desire to “do her homework” and not rely on women of color to educate white women.
is indispensable, as the wounds have been long inflicted by institutions such as empire (colonialism), patriarchy, white supremacy and heteronormativity.

Anzaldúa’s preoccupation with writing as a quest for a more whole self is evident from the multiple reversions of this essay. She explicitly states that women of color cannot depend on others to write their experience, but must embark on the journey toward wholeness themselves. Each revision serves as Anzaldúa’s attempt at a more complete essay, a more whole representation of her experience. The idea of self-dependence is echoed in her Borderlands poem “Letting Go” which she partially quotes in “La Prieta:” “Nobody’s going to save you. No one’s going to cut you down/cut the thorns around you/…There is no one who/will feed the yearning./ Face it. You will have/to do, do it yourself” (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 14). Anzaldúa is attempting to empower her readers in “Speaking in tongues” by encouraging them to write. Her readers, similar to Anzaldúa herself, have not received external assistance for their writing or validation of their experience. The letter to “third-women” writers provides a model and extends an invitation to join the author on a quest for a more complete self. Writing is the means by which Anzaldúa, and by extension her readers, can understand the world and their place within it. Focusing on the explication and exploration of personal experience, Anzaldúa reclaims a discursive space where she and other “third-world” women can speak in their own voice.

For Anzaldúa, writing is the platform for self-creation. In an effort to achieve nakedness, ultimate self-exposure, the writer must “come face to face with one’s limitations” and “delve inward…from that deep core” (Speaking in Tongues” 168, 169). This requires honesty and a penchant for masochism, of dwelling within the wounds.
Writing requires exploration of the systems of power that oppress. Facing one’s own limitations is the pivotal first step to understanding that limitation. Anzaldúa is quick to point out the many dangers that “third-world women” face as writers. She is careful not to label them as obstacles with the implication that they can be transcended. No, for Anzaldúa, there is no transcendence in the work of writing, only understanding. This understanding comes from the “working around” and “working through” of the dangers “third-world women” face. Writing does not remove the dangers, it does not, for example, end racism, sexism, homophobia, but rather, writing allows the writer another vantage point from which to assess the dangers, a deeper understanding. Nowhere does Anzaldúa say that writing will be easy. The dangers and the limitations she identifies must be acknowledged and worked on or through, not overcome. It is a daunting task to “shake and often break the white’s comfortable stereotypic images they have” of third world women (“Speaking in Tongues” 167). But the task must be undertaken as it is a both terrifying and a healing one. Terrifying in the sense that the writing must relive the harms done onto her in the hope that she “won’t have to repeat the performance” (Speaking in Tongues” 165). And healing in the hope that writing empowers the oppressed, and that the writer, upon reflection, will be able to turn that trauma toward self-completion. Writing is a way to try to make sense of the world: “by writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so that I can grasp it” (“Speaking in Tongues” 169). Writing provides a foothold from which to view and analyze the world. But the danger in writing to understand the self and the world lies in denying the unique perspective of the individual subject position to form the basis of the writing. Anzaldúa cautions against adopting another’s tongue or jargon to describe the writer’s particular situation, because
it can lead to the pitfall of “third-world women” “selling out” to white publishing houses and feminist groups. Above all, she cautions the writer not to ‘fake’ the vocation of writer: “Do not fake it, try to sell it for a handclap or your name in print” (“Speaking in Tongues” 173).  

In fact, her writing shows how detailed description of the particular does in fact speak to the universal. Her mixture of various languages and dialects results in metaphorical speaking in tongues that is more akin to sacred language than nonsensical babble. Anzaldúa warns that “the danger in writing is not fusing our personal experience and world view with the social reality we live in, with our inner life, our history, our economics, and our vision” (“Speaking in Tongues” 170). Personal experience must be contextualized and must take into account the inner as well as the outer life. This insistence on the spiritual is evidence of Anzaldúa’s wider vision of identity creation and development. Refusing to categorize her many identities, Anzaldúa’s holistic approach to writing challenges the presumed distance or objectivity of academic writing. Her belief that writing “is the most daring thing I have ever done and the most dangerous” supports her idea that good writing has “the ability to move and transform others” (“Speaking in Tongues,” 171, 172). In her efforts to strip herself to the bone, to achieve nakedness with her readers, she encourages other “third-world women” writers to “shock yourself into new ways of perceiving the world, shock your readers into the same” (Speaking in Tongues” 172). This is the performative power of the written word, both for writer and reader. The quest of delving deep into the self to relive and reconstruct

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66 It is interesting to note that Anzaldúa recognized the strength of this line of text. In a manuscript draft, Anzaldúa singles out this line, first written as a poem: “do not fake it/try to sell it for a handclap/or your name in print” (Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7977). The decision to print this line as prose perhaps hints at the poetic nature of her writing.
trauma is painful, yet necessary to transformation. The writer, and hopefully the reader, will be forever changed by the act of writing/reading.

In analyzing Anzaldúa’s many drafts of this letter in her archives, it becomes apparent that she took great pains to make this call to write that she was sending to others writers, immediate and necessary. She specifically chooses the form of a letter to achieve the desired “intimacy and immediacy” (“Speaking in Tongues”165) she wants to have with her readers. The author confesses to her readers that the piece started as a long poem that she tried to turn into an essay, but that “the result was wooden, cold” (“Speaking in Tongues”165). Experimenting with different genres, crossing forms to find the most appropriate vehicle, Anzaldúa settles on the epistolary, but queers the private letter by publically publishing it, explicitly directing the letter to “third-world women” writers while simultaneously widening her readership.67 Ironically, the quest toward completion of the letter and of the self required that Anzaldúa cut out words, phrases, and at times whole paragraphs from her earlier drafts. The marriage68 of life to writing is

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67 Anzaldúa is not the first Chicana to adapt the form of a letter to suit her needs. As Palczewski notes, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who is embraced by many contemporary Chicanas as being the first Chicana to write, employed the epistolary genre to respond to criticism directed at her from a Bishop in her “Respuesta a Sor Filotea” (1691). In the “Respuesta,” Sor Juana argues for the necessity and usefulness of educating women in a time where only men were afforded education, much as Anzaldúa encourages women to take up the pen and write even though publishing houses were mostly controlled by men. Alicia Gaspar de Alba is among the most preeminent Chicana scholars who identify Sor Juana as Chicana. There is, however, some contention on this point in Chicana literary circles. Rosaura Sánchez, for one, does not consider Sor Juana to be a Chicana (personal conversation January 7, 2012).

68 I use the term marriage purposely here, as Anzaldúa often described her relationship to her writing muse, La Musa Bruja, as one of total commitment: equivalent to that of a “divine marriage existing between the shaman and a deity or spirit” (Conner 29). Anzaldúa also states; “You will never be alone, no separate rooms—not even separate beds— in this union... the writing goes with you everywhere... You will never be alone but you will be lonely” (Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7967).
evident in her description of the editing process; looking at fragments of the texts she likens it to her “life strewn on the floor in bits” (Speaking in Tongues” 171). In recompiling the bits of text on the floor, she then reconstructs herself.

This process of construction thus necessitates deconstruction: dismemberment and re-memberment is evident in the dating of the letter as well as in the manuscripts; and the “finished” public letter mirrors the fragmented process. Many of the early drafts consist of scraps of colored paper glued onto a larger piece of paper, often times taped together. The revised product is almost always more eloquent and effective than the many drafts.

Figure 1: “Speaking in Tongues” (Gloria Anzaldúa Collection, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, U of Texas at Austin Box 44, folder 19, image 7960)
This image taken at the Anzaldúa archive shows the traditional “cut and paste” method of the author before she owned or had access to a computer (with the success of Borderlands, and the evolution of word processing programs available on computers, Anzaldúa was able to invest in a computer). She physically cut passages out of typed pieces and re-ordered them with scissor and tape to compose the published piece. In shamanic terms, dismemberment serves as “symbolic initiatory death—for example, the dismemberment of the candidate’s (the sick man’s [sic]) body, the ecstatic experience that can … be brought on by the sufferings of a ‘sickness-vocation’” (Eliade 34). While I’ve discussed the personal sickness Anzaldúa experienced in her life, in “La Prieta” (1981) Anzaldúa turns her attention to social illness in the form of patriarchal institutions. She asks, “Where do we hang the blame for the sickness we see around us—around our own heads or around the throat of ‘capitalism,’ ‘socialism,’ ‘men,’ ‘white culture’?” (“La Prieta” 207). While rhetorical, the question clearly insinuates that these institutions are to blame for societal ills. Anzaldúa also defines illness broadly in

69 The development of word processing programs on computers forever changed the editing process. These programs make editing much more efficient and economical—the writer no longer must invest in typewriter ribbons and paper—but unfortunately much of the actual editing process is lost (unless of course, Anzaldúa “tracked” changes in her later writings). Physical drafts of cut and pasted manuscripts provide priceless information on the evolution of a written piece. While “tracked changes” are not available to researchers, there are numerous drafts of her later writings that allow for some analysis.

70 “La Prieta” was also published in This Bridge Called My Back and originally part of “Speaking in Tongues” see Box 44, folder 20, IMG_7995 for the sections that were deleted from “Speaking in Tongues” to be included in “La Prieta.”

71 In discussing her personal complicitious after the attacks on the World Trade Towers, Anzaldúa wrote: “I yearn to pass on to the next generation the spiritual activism I’ve inherited from my cultures. If I object to my government’s act of war I cannot remain silent. To do so is to be complicitous. But sadly we are all accomplices” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 93). See chapter three for a more detailed discussion of
“Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman” (1990) when she states “To carry the poet-shaman analogy further, through my poet’s eye I see ‘illness,’ lo que daña, whatever is harmful in the culture or individual body. I see that ‘sickness’ unbalances a person or a community” (122). But Anzaldúa does not stop there. She is also careful to indict society as an accomplice in perpetuating these institutions. As we (Anzaldúa’s readers) are all implicated into the causes of illness, we must also be active in the antidote.

Shamanic reconstruction

Some of the revisions to “Speaking in Tongues” include the stripping of organizational headings such as “The Act,” “The What,” “The Myth,” “The Danger,” “The Joys.” In the later drafts, they are no longer explicitly necessary as they are interwoven into the text. This infrastructure that served as the backbone of the text, once enfleshed with words, is no longer visible. Anzaldúa, as writer, concerns herself with both content and form (Borderlands 66), much as a shaman must “contemplate one’s own skeleton” (Eliade 45). Upon initiation, a shaman must see herself naked and name every part of her body to consecrate herself. According to Eliade, “to reduce oneself to the skeleton condition is equivalent to re-entering the womb of this primordial life, that is, to a complete renewal, a mystical rebirth” (62-63). For Anzaldúa, reflection on the writing process provides the vehicle for this mystical rebirth. She is able to exhibit enstasis, an ability state related to ecstasy, in which one is able to stand within oneself, and contemplate the self from the perspective of a spectator. She says, “I cannot separate my writing from any part of my life. It is all one. When I write it feels like I’m carving bone.

Anzaldúa’s reactions to 9/11, her inclusion of herself as accomplice and her path of conocimiento to bring about understanding.
It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept” (Borderlands 73). The Náhuatl concept of carving bone is similar to Eliade’s description of shamanic rebirth: “His [sic] bones are then covered with new flesh, and in some cases he [sic] is also given new blood” (Eliade 37). The shaman must undergo a symbolic dismemberment of the body and the removal of organs to be prepared for the ascension or dissention to talk with spirits (Eliade 34). In the essay entitled “Tlilli, Tlapalli,” in Borderlands, Anzaldúa comments on the etymology of her surname: “Anz-” meaning above and “–dúa” meaning “below,” situating her in the middle, in the perfect location to serve as conduit from the upper spiritual world and the underworld. One of the subtitles of this essay is titled “Ni, cuicani: I, the singer” where Anzaldúa discusses the Aztec belief that “communication with the Divine could be attained” (Borderlands 69) and she positions herself, by right of her surname, to bridge the upper world with the underworld.

Along Eliade’s path of shamanic initiation, he states that a shaman “opens” his belly” (45) and descends “to the underworld” (50) to receive new knowledge. The opening of the belly exposes the shaman-in-training, and allows for the extraction of illness so that the shaman can be healed. This act is the focal point of the previously cited poem “Letting Go,” where Anzaldúa’s poetic narrative instructs the reader to

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72 The Náhuatl idea of creating one’s own face and heart is carried over into the title of Anzaldúa’s edited anthology Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras (1990). The idea of self-creation is also evident in the content of the collection, as women of color struggle to define themselves and their communities. My appreciation goes to Monika Kaup for making this connection.

73 Eliade also notes “if one of his bones is missing, a member of his family must die to replace it” (38). Anzaldúa’s father’s death played a significant role in the developing perspective of the writer. Not that I want to suggest that her father’s death was necessary in order for Anzaldúa to be initiated into shamanic practice, it is worthwhile to note the similarity.
perform a sort of auto-shamanic exorcism of ills. 74 Here I reproduce selected lines of the poem “Letting Go” to emphasize this shamanic act:

   It’s not enough
deciding to open.

   You must plunge your fingers
into your navel, with your two hands
split open,
spill out the lizards and horned toads
the orchids and the sunflowers,
turn the maze inside out.
Shake it.

   …

   It’s not enough
Opening once.
Again you must plunge your fingers
into your navel, with your two hands
rip open,
drop out dead rats and cockroaches
spring rain, young ears of corn.
Turn the maze inside out.
Shake it.

This time you must let go.
Meet the dragon’s open face
and let the terror swallow you.

   …

   You’ve crossed over.
And all around you space.
Alone. With nothingness.

   …

   It’s not enough
letting go twice, three times,
a hundred. Soon everything is
dull, unsatisfactory.
night’s open face
interests you no longer.
And soon, again, you return
to your element and

74 Aída Hurtado interprets this poem as an act of independence from men. She states “Chicana feminist proclaim that redemption does not come through men but, rather, comes from giving up the illusion of security and safety that results from being chosen by a man” (1996, 89, qtd in Klahn 126).
like a fish to the air
you come to the open
only between breathings.
But already gills
grow on your breasts.  (Borderlands/La Frontera 164-166)

In contrast to Monika Kaup’s interpretation of the Anzaldúa poem cited above, I argue that the poetic voice is not necessarily female and that the speaker does not “regress into a primitive creature” in a “scene of inverted evolution” (108), but rather is transformed via the interconnectedness of all things. The process of plunging into the darkness (of trauma, of writing, of the night) is informative and becomes addictive for the artist/shaman, who attempts to get to the dark cenote of images and ideas. Indeed, the poem “Letting Go” in Borderlands is perhaps the most concise example of Anzaldúa’s shamanic praxis writ poetic. As a shaman must extract the disease of her patient, Anzaldúa’s poetic narrator instructs the reader to both delve into the self and simultaneously let go of the hurt to work toward healing. Just as the shaman must symbolically die to be cured of her illness—for Eliade, “death and resurrection of the neophyte, involving a cutting up of the body performed in various ways (dismemberment, gashing, opening the abdomen, etc.)” (56)—the writer must engage in the process of dismemberment toward the goal of re-memberment.

75 I also disagree with Suzanne Bost’s interpretation of the poem as a sexualization of the Coatlicue State. While I admit that sexual imagery is omni-present in Anzaldúa texts, here I interpret the plunging into the navel as a search for entrails rather than a euphemism for sexual activity. Fertility does result from the action of delving inward, but I believe it is a creative fertility, rather than a physical one. (Bost, “Gloria Anzaldúa’s Mestiza Pain” Footnote 25).

76 Anzaldúa describes the cenote as “the archetypal inner stream of consciousness, a dreampool or reservoir of unconscious images and feelings stored as iconic imagery” (“Putting Coyotlahqui Together” 244).
Anzaldúa continues to evoke shamanic recreation in the preface of her 1990 edited anthology *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* when she describes women of color as “‘written’ all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience.” She further instructs the reader and presumably other “third-world women,” (as the subtitle and content of the text is directed to other women of color), urging them to “begin to acquire the agency of making our own caras. You are shaper of your flesh as well as of your soul” (xv-xvi). Again, Anzaldúa empowers her readers, through her words, to enact change. In this instance, the change is both outer and inner; each reader is capable of shaping not only their flesh, their face that they present to the world, but also their soul. Here, Anzaldúa as writer is performing the role of psychopomp, of guider of souls: she is guiding her reader’s souls.

The path toward healing requires a painful passage achieved through writing. Labeling her form of writing “organic writing,” Anzaldúa reminds the reader that “it is not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue (“Speaking in Tongues” [1981] 172). Not only must the writer risk the personal by stripping herself to the bone to expose herself to her readers, but she must also excavate her own intestines to seek fodder for her writing. This is the painful solitary journey a writer must undertake to get to the root of the suffering. Anzaldúa comments, “composing is a process of ossification, the formation of bone, though at times it feels like sweating blood” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” [1999] 249). This quote speaks to the difficulty of writing and alludes to Eliade’s shamanic reconstruction. The shaman must be reborn, complete with new bones and at times new blood. Anzaldúa’s cut-and-
paste approach to writing speaks to writing as quest to the self. For this reason, infrastructural subtitles such as “The Act” (of writing, ritual, ceremony performance, erotic), “The What,” “The Myth,” “The Danger,” (isolation—necessity of community of writers), “The joys of writing,” “the economics of writing,” and “the tools and techniques of writing” (Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7960) were deleted from the published draft of “Speaking in Tongues.” Deletion serves to condense parts of the text but also to create holes that force active participation from the reader. Here I posit that not only Anzaldúa’s language but also her writing style is a form of “speaking in tongues,” a style of writing with multiple entry points and continuous gaps that the reader must fill in to co-construct meaning. Tereza Kynclová notes that, in this mestiza blending, “the border between the creator and the targeted recipient of the message is then dissolved—both sides share a mutual commonality: they are affected by the work and possibly changed” (53). In the published version of “Speaking in Tongues,” Anzaldúa quotes Nellie Wong, who calls writing “the three-eyed demon shrieking the truth” (“Speaking in Tongues” (171). In an earlier manuscript, Anzaldúa affords Wong a longer citation:

> Writing for me is really the touching of hands between sisters, between sisters and brothers in an oh so human world. It is the link between our physical and spiritual realities, the celebration of our past and present lives, and, I believe a working vision for the future./She calls writing ‘the three-eyed demon shrieking the truth.’/She says, ‘Writing is a public act.’”(Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7951)

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77 Anzaldúa on filling in the gaps: Borderlands is “accessible or inaccessible depending on how much work you want to do reading it. There are lots of gaps between passages—its style is elliptical and spiral. I start with a theme, figure or symbol, and then that symbol becomes a motif and gets maybe hinted at in another chapter and then explored further in another chapter; at the final chapter you come around back to the beginning, and the symbol eventually ends up recurring in some of the poems. The reader has to fill in a lot of the gaps” (“On the Process of Writing Borderlands/La Frontera” (originally written 1991, revised 1996) *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 189).
The final version is more concise and demands brevity from its cited sources as well. The active reader must fill in the parts of the quote that did not make it into the published version and thereby participates in the co-creation of meaning in the text.

Anzaldúa writes that a writer creates in her innards, “not through rhetoric but through blood, and pus and sweat” (“Speaking in Tongues” 173). Because of this, the “third-world woman” writer does not need a room of her own, even if her circumstances would allow it, a “third-world woman” is already in possession of everything she needs to begin the writing process. The “third-world woman” writer must delve inward:

“Forget the room of one’s own—write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping and waking” (“Speaking in Tongues” 170). Palczewski notes that Anzaldúa is describing a time when “third-world women” are performing their roles as women “cleaning, cooking, coping with bodily functions, working to support a family” (6). This observation is especially pertinent in Anzaldúa’s linkage between writing and eating, between being a woman and a writer, as I will discuss in the next section.

For Anzaldúa and other (“third-world women”) writers, writing produces anxiety. She likens this anxiety to other aspects of her person:

Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being Chicana, or being queer—a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen. (Borderlands 72)
This anxiety may numb many writers into inaction. In an exercise of intellectual humility,⁷⁸ by naming this anxiety, and other distractions that keep “third-world women” from writing, Anzaldúa hopes to empower her readers to action.

**Feeding the body**

Anzaldúa is deeply concerned with the process of writing and acknowledges that it is difficult one. Eating, she says, is her main distraction: “Getting up to eat an apple Danish. That I’ve been off sugar for three years is not a deterrent nor that I have to put on a coat, find the keys and go out into the San Francisco fog to get it” (“Speaking in Tongues” 170).⁷⁹ This is especially problematic for a person with diabetes. Even when Anzaldúa prioritized her health over all other aspects of her being, she was still unable to control her diabetes. Anzaldúa discussed the physical toll of her diabetes in a 1998-1999 interview with AnaLouise Keating: “I get dizzy and mentally foggy when I’m having a hypo [episode of hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar]. I lose my equilibrium and fall. Gastrointestinal reflex has me throwing up and having diarrhea…Things like these change your image of yourself; your identity…The whole thing with diabetes is having a balance in your blood sugar” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 290). Likewise, Randy Conner notes “In the later 1980s and early 1990s, Anzaldúa became somewhat withdrawn in terms of participation in spiritual groups. This shift resulted from several factors, among which were a much more intense focus on her writing, adapting to living with diabetes, and pressure exerted by political activists and social constructionists theorists to ‘tone down’

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⁷⁸ Thanks again to AnaLouise Keating for this insight.  
⁷⁹ “Speaking in Tongues” draft dated “May 20” stated that she was off sugar for “six” years instead of the three years in the published account (Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7984).
the spiritual aspect of her work...only her use of ‘metaphors’ or ancient traditions, unaware of, or else disapproving of, the altars placed in every room of her house” (Conner, Cassell’s 63). Yet food still factors heavily into the rewards she would offer herself for immersing herself in her writing: “…But I must finish this letter. My bribe: to take myself out to pizza” (Speaking in Tongues”171). It is interesting to note that in an earlier draft of “Speaking in Tongues,” Anzaldúa questions the purpose of the distractions that keep her from writing: “Are these distractions safety valves or power drains/subversions?” (Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7969). It is not until 1999, when Anzaldúa published “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together,” that she acknowledges that the myriad distractions that keep her from writing are part of the writing process. She states: “writing is nothing if not a bodily act” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” 250). The body of writing needs nourishment just as the writer’s body does, and both need rest and sustenance.

The inclusion of food is not incidental in the work of Anzaldúa. Based on the quantity of food-related entries in the Anzaldúa Papers at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, one can surmise that Anzaldúa was careful about what she introduced into her body. Diagnosed with Type I Diabetes in 1992, a time Anzaldúa considered the height of her career (Keating, “Working” 134), Anzaldúa attempted to treat her sugar imbalance homeopathically. Archival research reveals that the information on diabetes Anzaldúa accessed were mostly in the form of (bilingual) Health

80 Anzaldúa discusses writing as safety valve in her lecture/article “On the Process of Writing Borderlands/La Frontera” published in the Gloria Anzaldúa Reader. She writes “While writing and speaking act as a safety valve, they are also political acts that spring from the impulse to subvert, resist, educate and make changes” ([original ms. dated 1991] 187).

81 I thank Enrico Mario Santi for suggesting that I be alert to the possibility of this link.
Department pamphlets, as she could not afford a primary care physician. Her preoccupation with maintaining both her diabetes and her writing schedule surfaced in many of her published texts. Whereas, in “Speaking in Tongues” manuscripts prior to 1981, Anzaldúa wrote that “writing can reveal naked insights that can strike the writer blind” (Box 44, folder 20, IMG_8021), she later wrote about her fears of physically going blind because of the diabetes-related complications that eventually took her life in 2004. In “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” (1999) Anzaldúa writes “This morning when you looked in the mirror, you saw two bloodspots like red cactus tunas in your eyes. When capillaries bleed you see floaters and pulsating lights—everything gets blurry. Hijole, your worst nightmare: if you can’t see to write and read, there goes your life” (245). AnaLouise Keating notes Anzaldúa’s preoccupation with self-care in her article “Working Toward Wholeness,” where she states that diabetes effected Anzaldúa’s life at every level. Conventional medical treatment coupled with alternative healing techniques required much of the writer’s time and energy. Keating adds, “monitoring her health consumed her life and greatly interfered with her writing projects and her relationships with family and friends; however, despite these strenuous efforts, her blood sugar levels often careened out of control” (“Working Toward Wholeness” 135). Perhaps because Anzaldúa was an independent scholar and could not afford health insurance, she suffered from many diabetes-related illnesses, including “severe gastrointestinal reflux, Charcot foot (softening of the foot bones), neuropathy (nerve degeneration), vision problems (blurred vision and burst capillaries requiring laser surgery), thyroid malfunction, and depression” (“Working Toward Wholeness” 136). It was both the diabetes and the complications of this disease that kept Anzaldúa from her calling as artist.
Keating notes that Anzaldúa’s trials with diabetes were not the first time Anzaldúa turned physical pain and suffering into a distinct worldview that used illness as fodder for better understanding herself and her world. Indeed, Anzaldúa’s complication of and dedication to diabetes surfaced in her last published piece before her death. She writes about how she is able to use the disease to change her attitude. Writing in the second person (while addressing herself), Anzaldúa says “you can’t change the reality, but you can change our attitude toward it,…by seeing your symptoms not as signs of sickness and disintegration but as signals of growth, you’re able to rise from depression’s slow suicide” (“now let us shift” [2002] 552). Drawing strength from her illness, Anzaldúa is able to subvert the distraction from her writing that illness imposes, and use the disease as fertile ground to question her perception of the world. This, at the same time that the illness created physical and psychic havoc in the author’s life.

Ultimately, the task of the writer as active agent in the writing process is to “re-member,” to “to translate into language the images arising from your body, the sea, the theater of dreams; to allow them to surface at will; to capture them in your net of words” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” 247). Thus, the writer must be constantly vigilant, both of her surroundings and of her inner landscape. Anzaldúa was able to turn her very real suffering into very raw observations of herself and her life. Encouraging her readers to identify with her written words, Anzaldúa re-presented to them the knowledge she gained through pain and suffering to her readers.

Just as the writer must contemplate her own personal trauma, expose herself and let down her protective walls, shamanic writers also investigate the trauma of the world. Shamanic writing involves the pulling the entrails of consciousness out of the center of
the world—tapping into the deep core, the cenote of knowledge. Anzaldúa describes writing as a similar process: she states, “Writing is like pulling miles of entrails through your nose” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” [1999] 247). The writer acts as the conduit for information and descends into the subconscious via sensory deprivation to retrieve fragments of knowledge that shift her perception of this reality. The writer is thus a medium: “keying in the words, you’re the scribe, the medium channeling the story, and the conductor orchestrating the process” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” 249). Yet the shaman must position herself to receive and transcribe insights that go unnoticed by others; she must attune herself to the spirits.

Writing in the Night: “wounding is a deeper healing” (Borderlands 140)


“Besides being pleasurable, the work of putting down words engenders its own kind of trance--the physical act of writing is another kind of dreaming” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” 249).

Early in Anzaldúa’s life, she equated storytelling and the trafficking in images with the night. As she recounts in Borderlands, she would hide her insomnia from her mother by reading by flashlight at night. Sharing a bed with her sister, Anzaldúa soon was compelled to tell stories to her sister in exchange for keeping her secret from their mother (Borderlands 65). She realizes that “it must have been then that working with
images and writing became connected to the night” (*Borderlands* 65). As an adult, Anzaldúa would often induce sensory-deprived states so that she could attune herself to the “movie” of images in her head: “I plug up my ears with wax, put on my black cloth eye-shades, lie horizontal and unmoving, in a state between sleeping and waking, mind and body locked into my fantasy” (*Borderlands* 70). The liminal state between sleeping and waking is a desired location which the writer as shaman consciously works to habituate. This is the fertile ground where story ideas are cultivated. Anzaldúa’s insistence on the importance of dreams mirrors Eliade’s similar observation of the importance of dreams to shamanic initiation and practice (Eliade 55). The shaman mediates between the imaginal and the lived reality. As a shamanic writer plagued by diabetes, Anzaldúa worried about her eyesight; “I had blood clots, I had hemorrhaging in my eyes almost two years ago and had to have laser surgery, or I’d have gone blind” (“Working Toward Wholeness” 140). Not only did the diabetic complications pose serious health concerns, they also limited Anzaldúa’s time to read and write.82 Metaphorically speaking, Anzaldúa’s preoccupation with darkness as a writer and her quest to write herself whole, parallel two of the greatest fears of diabetics, of permanent darkness through blindness and amputation. The “second sight” of shamanism serves to guide her through this darkness and to be able to see through cultural norms. This “second sight” also compensates for her real fear of going blind due to diabetes-related complications and as a result, not being able to write. Anzaldúa’s writing process of re-

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82 Anzaldúa states that the “energy I resent having to give to diabetes when I could be using it for my reading and writing—that’s where the anger came from” (“Working Toward Wholeness” 140).
membering the fragmented self also metaphorically offsets her physical apprehension of the possibility of amputation due to diabetes.\textsuperscript{83}

Remarkably, Anzaldúa was able to convert her sickness into didactic instruction about life, just as a shaman is able to learn the theory of healing by studying the theory of illness. Keating notes this enriching survival technique and envisions this practice as a two-way movement:

after living with diabetes for almost ten years, Anzaldúa had developed ways to acknowledge her personal concerns, yet also to move outward, connecting her physical body to the body politic and using her personal struggles with her health to redefine her theory of spiritual activism. ("Working Toward Wholeness" 142)

The darkness of illness, coupled with anger, denial, and resentment, made way for enlightenment. As a consequence of her poor health and eye-related complications, Anzaldúa was able to experience the shamanic practices of “not see[ing] with his [sic] bodily eyes but with these mystical eyes” (Eliade 42). Anzaldúa’s spiritual connection allowed her new insight, and perhaps new sight. This connection allows her to “see in the dark, both literally and metaphorically speaking, for [s]he can now, even with closed eyes, see through darkness and perceive things and coming events that are hidden from others; thus they look into the future and into the secrets of others” (Eliade 60-61).

Anzaldúa, as theorist, is effectively able to see through cultural norms with the ‘mystical eyes’ of a shaman.\textsuperscript{84} This ability to see into the secrets of others was

\textsuperscript{83} While she did not suffer from blindness nor have to undergo amputation, Anzaldúa did eventually succumb to her diabetes in 2004.

\textsuperscript{84} The darkness of illness was accompanied by intense light. Seeing through mystical eyes is also described as a luminous light (Eliade 60-61). Anzaldúa describes this experience:
fictionalized by Anzaldúa in her short fiction/autohistoria “Puddles” (1992), where her protagonist, Prieta, receives the gift of “second sight” from an oddly silent gay man who “along with the pink triangle and earring in his left ear…always wore an olive green parka that covered him to the knees” (“Puddles” 43). This unnamed gay man would frequent the restaurant *Les Amis* where both Prieta and her friend Amy, who were “both dykes,” worked. For two weeks this man chose to seat himself at one of Prieta’s tables, always leaving a quarter tip and a mysterious green puddle in his chair. After curiosity got the best of Prieta, she dipped her finger into the puddle and, deciding it “was not piss” (“Puddles” 43), she tasted the liquid. In addition to turning her tongue and finger green, a condition that would spread to the rest of her body, the strange liquid allowed her to know “what each customer was going to order before they opened their mouths” (“Puddles” 44). The gift of knowing what customers wanted expanded into knowing that one customer was “sticking it to his daughter” (“Puddles” 44). Relieved of her waitressing job because of her appearance, the now-green Prieta decided that her calling was to travel from town to town spreading the queer ‘gift’ she received from the gay man. This ability to see people’s desire and actions is a sensibility that can be categorized in Anzaldúan terminology as la facultad, and later conocimiento. This transformative faculty, transmitted from a gay character to the dyke protagonist Prieta,

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A light is all around me—so intense it could be white or black or at that juncture where extremes turn into their opposites. It passes through my body and comes out the other side. I collapse into myself—a delicious caving into myself-imploding, the walls like matchsticks softly folding inward in slow motion. *(Borderlands, 51)*

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85 *Les Amis* is the name of a café that Anzaldúa would frequent in New York. Archival notes from Randy Conner speak about meeting Anzaldúa at this particular location at different times (Anzaldúa Archives Box 010, folder 003, image 5553).
allowed these two queers special sight into the lives of the people they encountered.\textsuperscript{86} They were afforded shamanic vision.

The darkness becomes such a necessary part of the writing process that Anzaldúa names it. Associated with Coatlicue,\textsuperscript{87} the earth goddess of life and death, creativity and its inevitable writing blocks come to be known in Anzaldúan epistemology as the Coatlicue state.\textsuperscript{88} The Coatlicue state represents “the resistance to new knowledge and other psychic states triggered by intense inner struggle which can entail the juxtaposition and the transmutation of contrary forces as well as paralysis and depression” (Appendix I Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 320). For Anzaldúa, Coatlicue states are very much linked to Coyolxauhqui. Resistance to new knowledge may be a resistance to writing’s requisite dismemberment. The Coatlicue state is a “the cave, the dark—you’re hibernating or hiding, you’re gestating and giving birth to yourself. You’re in a womb state” (Interviews/Entrevistas 226). It is fitting that the Coatlicue state be a womb state, as “Coatlicue is the Mexica earth mother goddess of creation and destruction” (Lara 41).

\textsuperscript{86} It could also be argued that this gift was circulated amongst queer characters to equip them with the survival tools necessary to survive in a homophobic world. The transmission of this gift from a mute gay man to a waitress dyke may also be the author’s acknowledgement that that the lesbian movement was indebted to the gay men’s movement in terms of visibility and vocality.

\textsuperscript{87} According to Suzanne Bost, Coatlicue “for whom creation and destruction are intertwined” is constantly connected to her daughter, the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui “whose waning and waxing continually dismember and reconstitute her body in the heavens” (Bost “From Race/Sex/Etc.” 355). The imagery of the moon goddess perpetually waxing and waning is a poetic allusion to the process Anzaldúa ascribes to Coyolxauhqui. That many consider the moon to be female is also important in Anzaldúa’s employment of the goddess to describe her writing style.

\textsuperscript{88} In speaking of Anzaldúa’s writing style that include the Coatlicue State, Carolyn Woodward states that Anzaldúa “has taken the very material of oppression—the painful splits that oppressed people suffer—and, feeling her way into those splits, into the center of psychic explosions, has remained receptive to the expansion/implosion of consciousness” (“Dare to Write” 357).
And it is fitting that this state be associated with writing. Anzaldúa described the writing process of *Borderlands* as one of delivering a baby; she calls her editor, Joan Pinkvoss a “midwife extraordinaire, whose understanding, caring, and balanced mixture of gentle prodding and pressure not only helped me bring this ‘baby’ to term, but helped to create it” (*Borderlands* acknowledgements n.p.). The gestation and delivery of babies is attributable to the female, often thought of as dark and unknowable. Conceiving of the act of writing as midwifery, and imagines the survival of the writing that remains after the physical body of the writer has perished, is one way to transcend corporeality and continue to influence readers. Since she was physically unable to bear children (having menstruated as an infant and later undergone a full hysterectomy) the idea of writing as a way to extend life in the face of her diabetes—conceiving of the text as offspring— is especially important to Anzaldúa and may help to explain why the labor of writing was one of her thematic obsessions. Indeed, Anzaldúa suggests that birthing a baby might be easier than writing; “how much easier it would be to carry a baby for nine months and then expel it permanently” (*Borderlands* 73). A writer is never relieved of her charge permanently.

And although Anzaldúa admits to favoring the night, “when things whisper” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” 248), perhaps in order to “hear the sickness speak” (Eliade 39), another part of seeing through cultural constructions is Anzaldúa’s project of re-signifying the dark aspects of her being and of her culture. To be able to re-signify the dark aspects, Anzaldúa must acquaint herself with those feared aspects. While the Coatlicue state may house the psychic states of denial and repression, the unconscious is not idle: it is still processing thoughts and events. Anzaldúa notes that this unconscious
movement is dynamic and requires “all her energy./It brooks/ no interference from the conscious mind” (*Borderlands* 47). In addition to being an active state, the Coatlicue state is also necessary for the thought process:

> We need Coatlicue to slow us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes. If we don’t take the time, she’ll lay us low with an illness, forcing us to ‘rest.’ … Those activities or Coatlicue states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The Coatlicue state can be a way station or it can be a way of life. (*Borderlands* 46)

The Coatlicue state is the trudging through the darkness that must occur before the writer/shaman can understand her position in life and emerge from the darkness to take flight.

**Flying**

The life of the shaman, or that of a writer, isn’t all anguish, of course. As recompense for descending into the bowels of the world, some shamans are also gifted with the ability to transcend their human body and fly. The experiences of flight are often stimulated by sensory deprivation or trance “during which his [sic] soul is believed to leave his [sic] body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (Eliade 5). Anzaldúa curiously included this ability in her biography statement in *This Bridge Called My Back*. She self-identifies:

> I’m a Tejana Chicana poet, hija de Amalia, Hecate y Yemaya. I am a Libra (Virgo cusp) with VI—The Lovers destiny. One day I will walk through walls, grow wings and fly, but for now I want to play Hermit and write my novel Andrea. In my spare time I teach, read the Tarot, and doodle in my journal. (246)
Given her interest in alternatives modes of perception (she lists horoscope, and Tarot here) and the experiences of some of her autobiographical characters (for example, LP in “Reading LP” begun in the 1970s and published in 2009 in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* [see chapter two for analysis of this auto-historia]) Anzaldúa’s proclamation of walking through walls and flying should be considered as more than a playful bio statement. Even if meant metaphorically, as I can only speculate as to the author’s intentions in crafting this statement, the desire to walk through walls foreshadows the author’s tendency to deconstruct physical borders and question the stability of said borders. This desire to collapse borders may also be applied to her later statement about growing wings and flying. Anzaldúa references the feeling of flying while on horseback in the short stories “El Paisano” (1982, discussed in chapter two) and in “She ate horses” (1990). Both of these examples equate the elation of flying on horseback to sexual ecstasy. Combining the spiritual and the sexual with the flight of horses parallels Eliade’s commentary on shamanic flight: “All these beliefs, images, and symbols in relation to the ‘flight,’ the ‘riding,’ or the ‘speed’ of shamans are figurative expressions for ecstasy, that is, for mystical journeys undertaken by superhuman means and in regions inaccessible to mankind” (Eliade 174). The horse makes possible the coming out of oneself, which in turn facilitates the mystical journey. While the feeling may be superhuman, according to Eliade, the individual performing the action is very human--human but with a sensitivity to the supernatural.

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89 Anzaldúa’s has commented on the importance of the horse as a symbol for writing (“On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*” [1991] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 195).
That is not to say that all ecstasy is explicitly sexual; sometimes it is linked to artistic creation. Anzaldúa refers to the writer as capable of flight in her short prose poem, “When I write I hover.” The elation and perhaps the difficulty of the writing process create a consciousness in the writer where she is able to levitate above her writing self: “When I write I hover above myself and sometimes I zoom in and out” (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 238). As Anzaldúa’s writing is a form of embodied writing destined to assist the author to survive her physical body instead of transcend it, she notes in her “writing notas”90 that “When I write I escape my condition but the writing always takes me back to confront my condition because to write is to live in made up worlds” (“When I write” n.d 238). She does not dismiss the act of living in made-up worlds; rather she knows that that is perhaps the only way to change the world: “I write not just to escape my reality but to create a new reality” (“When I write” 238).

Writing as praxis that leads to shamanic understanding and abilities, such as flying, allows the writer and the reader to heal themselves through the process of writing. Anzaldúa also employs the metaphor of the horse in relation to writing. In “Poets Have Strange Eating Habits,” the poetic narrator equates writing with coaxing a “balking mare/to the edge” (Borderlands 140) and forcing it (and the writer) to jump to the abyss below/within. She continues in that same poem to state that this act of approaching the edge of nothingness has become “as/routine as cleaning my teeth” (“Poets” 141). Anzaldúa included a similar passage in a manuscript draft of “Speaking in Tongues,” Where she stated that writing is an “Act of faith—you will not/fall off the precipice/you

90 Anzaldúa’s writing notas, or her personal notebooks and journals, are closed in keeping with Anzaldúa’s wishes to researchers at the Anzaldúa archival collection until 2040Gloria Anzaldúa Reader editor, AnaLouise Keating is also a Trustee to the estate and has graciously selected parts of these journals for earlier publication.
will not crash into the abyss below/Should you falter, lose your footing/learn to fly on the way down” (“Speaking in Tongues” Box 44, folder 20, IMG_8015). This beautiful invitation to the would-be writer to fly instead of crashing in the abyss below was deleted from the published version of the text. In my discussion of the writer as shaman, the idea that a writer, mining the inner trauma of lived experience for her writing, would take flight as a result of her work is very encouraging. This is one of the gems that didn’t make it past the cutting-room floor. Fortunately, it has been preserved in the Anzaldúa archive.

The shamanic idea of flight in regard to the writing process can take the form of a swiftly running horse, or it can be the flight of the soul, as it communes with the spirits. According to Eliade, the shaman is a healer and a psychopomp, because she “commands the techniques of ecstasy—that is, because his [sic] soul can safely abandon his [sic] body and roam at vast distances, can penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky” (Eliade 182). The ability for one’s soul to travel independently of the body is perhaps unique to shamans and other spiritually inclined individuals. (I shall take up the example of Andrea from “El Paisano” in chapter two.) Flight is a rather queer gift, and for Anzaldúa, it is tied to her tono, her animal guide.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Anzaldúa depicts one of her animal guides as a serpent with feathers. Her other animal guide more closely resembles a bird. According to Eliade, an animal guide usually accompanies the initiatory ecstasy into shamanic ritual (42). Because shamans need to be able to speak with spirits both in the underworld and in the upper world, it is not uncommon that one of the animal guides be a bird. As Eliade states, “This mythical bird shows itself only twice: at the shaman’s spiritual birth and at
its death” (36). According to Anzaldúa, Randy Conner was the only other human to have seen this animal spirit of hers, and he drew her a picture of it one year for Halloween, to wear as a mask. She apparently framed the sketch and had it hanging on the wall near her workspace. She later wrote: “it looked like some were-animal with fur-like feathers—exactly how you’d seen yourself in the mirror whenever you dropped angel dust” (“Putting Coyolxauhqui Together” 249). (Using mind-altering substances, like angel dust, is also common among shamans to induce trance.) In referring to her almost-finished manuscript of Borderlands, Anzaldúa notes that the product is “rough, unyielding, with pieces of feather sticking out here and there, fur, twigs, clay” (66-67). This ‘creature,’ her written manuscript, thus comes to resemble her tono.

El Mundo Zurdo: The Path to Healing

*The pull between what is and what should be.* (“La Prieta” 207, italics in original)

The healing from past and present trauma comes about through Anzaldúa’s theory of El Mundo Zurdo, first articulated in published print in “Speaking in Tongues.” El Mundo Zurdo is a metaphysical path that focuses on two-way movement: “a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (“La Prieta” 208). Changes in the world come after

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91 In the 1970s, Anzaldúa organized reading series and writing workshops under this name, originally spelled with the South Texas articulation of “s” for the “z” sound. See AnaLouise Keating’s *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* and the Anzaldúa archives for more on this spelling change. Keating argues that El Mundo Zurdo “represents relational difference” which when “applied to alliances, …indicates communities based on commonalities, visionary locations where people from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and concerns coexist and work together to bring about revolutionary change” (Appendix I *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 322).
changes in the self. This is the visionary aspect of Anzaldúa’s visionary pragmatism. El Mundo Zurdo “has opened up the possibility that I may live in the world of my vision, a sort of mundo surdo, a left-handed world where creativity, intuition, the feminine will manifest and transform the planet” (“Speaking in Tongues” Box 44, folder 19, IMG_7982). But Anzaldúa admits that she is “confused as to how to accomplish this” vision of El Mundo Zurdo (“La Prieta” 207-8).

As a writer, Anzaldúa has diagnosed the illness, both within her own body and within society; “The disease of powerlessness thrives in my body, not just out there in society….Sharing the pie is not going to work…the whole organism is poisoned” (“La Prieta” 207-8). She labels the three poisons as “the rational, the patriarchal, and the heterosexual” and notes that these institutions “have held sway and legal tender for too long” (“La Prieta” 209). In a radical call for revolution, Anzaldúa calls for the creation of a new system, as working within the poisoned framework will yield no productive results. She calls upon “ThirdWorld women, lesbians, feminists, and feminist-oriented men of all colors” to “band and bond together to right that balance” (“La Prieta” 209).

Modeling an intellectual humility that foregrounds self-exposure, Anzaldúa creates community among her readers who are invited to excavate their own personal trauma. The ability to unite distinct social groups is also an asset of a shaman, as Spivey has observed:

The shaman, as Eliade, Jung and others have shown, plunges into the midst of his own physic and physical dissolution and discovers the transcendent power in the form of center of creativity. By the continuing invocation of this center, the shaman-to-be gradually achieves a unification of his various faculties, and from this achievement flows the power of love that makes possible the creative unity of social groups. (9)
Anzaldúan critic Suzanne Bost has noted that Anzaldúa possesses this ability, both in her life and after her death.\(^\text{92}\) When news of Anzaldúa’s untimely death due to diabetes complications in 2004 quickly spread on the Internet, an online altar was established for Anzaldúa’s mourners. Bost figures the virtual space of “Rest in Peace Gloria” <http://gloria.chicanas.com> as a manifestation of Chicana feminist politics beyond identity, due to the diversity of the individuals\(^\text{93}\) posting about the ways in which Gloria Anzaldúa had touched their lives. Her life and writings had reached so many while she was alive that Anzaldúa formed community even after her physical presence on Earth was no more.

Anzaldúa’s ideas of radical racial interconnectedness and the necessity to reach out and (importantly) touch a wide readership was a consistent focus of her writing career. The connection of writing to the body, the necessity of embodied writing where her written words touch her readers, was first alluded to in “Speaking in Tongues.” The touch of the typewriter to knee and the pen to (brown) hand were emphasized alongside advice given to other “third-world women” writers. Anzaldúa cautions, “your skin must be sensitive enough for the lightest kiss and thick enough to ward off the sneers” (“Speaking in Tongues” 172). Anzaldúa’s vision of writing as a physical and sensuous act, intent on making connection and making contact, insists on including the personal in the writing. Touching people also entails reaching out to them as a friend. Anzaldúa

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\(^\text{92}\) AnaLouise Keating describes this event as Anzaldúa’s “transition” (“From the Linguistic Turn to the (Meta) Physical” 12).

\(^\text{93}\) Bost lists self-identified “Chicana, Cuban, Mexican, Guatemalan, Native American, white, Hawaiian, Chinese, Jewish/Southern Baptist, Sri Lankan/Eastern European, and racially unidentified” among the racial identities that posted online. She also lists “academics, students, activists, writers, editors, bookstore owners, farmworkers [sic], travelers, and diabetics…spanning the globe” (“From Race/Sex/Etc.” 363).
closes “Speaking in Tongues” with the salutation “Love, Gloria” ([1981] 173) and closes her final published piece “now let us shift…” with “contigo, Gloria” ([2002] 576). This is the salutation of a real flesh-and-blood person, a friend. The writer does not position herself as the giver of knowledge; she is a co-traveler on the journey.

Walking the path of the shaman, Gloria Anzaldúa as writer is able to see spirits and, perhaps more importantly, see the divine within herself and everyone. Recognizing a spiritual connection among all things facilitates connection and touch among all those conscious of this connection. She has taken it upon herself to struggle through an inner and a bodily quest toward wholeness, in the hope of healing her community. Her community includes anyone who would like to join her in her path toward El Mundo Zurdo. Anzaldúa has depicted the illness both within her own body and more broadly, in society, and underscores the psychic trauma caused by these ills. She posits writing and reading as performative and transformative experiences that can change the world. Her efforts at self-exposure and dismemberment, with the idea of reconstituting the self, create a map for her readers to respond likewise.

Anzaldúa recognizes the external imbalance and looks inward for a solution: “The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. Both cultures deny me a place in their universe. Between them and among others, I build my own universe, El Mundo Zurdo” (“La Prieta” 209). The construction of this new universe is completed word by word. Words, like imaginations, are powerful and can enact change: “I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world” (“La Prieta” 208). Words can be transformative, and that transformation can lead to transportation. As AnaLouise Keating has confessed,
Anzaldúa’s story’s images and words worked on and with her, compelling her to rethink her worldview; Anzaldúa’s words cracked Keating open and threw her into an ontological shift (“From the ‘Linguistic Turn’” 16). Keating’s is not an isolated experience.

Just as Anzaldúa valued the power of words, she recognized that words can hurt and words can heal: “Another motivation for writing Borderlands was to heal the wounds—which necessitated opening the wounds anew. That’s why I state ‘wounding is a deeper healing’ (“On the Process of Writing Borderlands/La Frontera” 196). Contrary to Western medicine, Anzaldúa follows an indigenous worldview that sees discomfort as a path to healing. Anzaldúa addresses herself in the second person, detailing the path toward healing: “Though modern therapies exhort you to act against your passions (compulsions), claiming health and integration lie in that direction, you’ve learned that delving more fully into your pain, anger, despair, depression will move you through to the other side” (“now let us shift” 553). The curious word choice of “the other side” seems to insinuate a binary opposition between “health and integration” and “pain, anger, despair, and depression.” However, Anzaldúa collapses this Western binary by showing how pain can lead toward health, while never dictating a destination point of perfect health and integration. Here again, Anzaldúa is more interested in the journey than reaching any point of closure. A shaman does not learn the root of an illness, but rather its mechanism, the underlining theory. Anzaldúa as writer and as poet-shaman educates herself through the physical suffering of her body, and offers that knowledge to her readers so that they too can heal. Through her writings, Anzaldúa exposes the theory of illness and the path to wholeness.
Anzaldúa’s is not a traditional shamanism rooted in a specific indigenous society, but rather her style of shamanism is more aligned with Daniel Noel’s “New Shamanism” outlined in *The Soul of Shamanism* (1997). Noel declares, “the core or soul of the West’s idea of shamanism is not factual at all, but fantastic, fictive, a work of imagination” (italics in original 37). That is, Western Shamanism has at its base the imagination, and Noel is quick to qualify the power of the imagination. Rather than dismissing the imagination or the imaginal as child’s play, Noel states, “it is the imagination, we shall find, radically taken as beyond mere make-believe, that emerges as the driving force and validating authority of the reappearance of ‘shamanism’ in our midst” (22). Drawing on the psychological work of Jung, and his follower James Hillman, Noel presents a literary tradition of Western Shamanism that takes its readers on ‘magical flights’ through the power of fiction. He likens the shamanic book, or the shamanovel in his terminology, to a traditional shaman’s drum, calling its community to focus and trance. The fictive power of literature allows active readers to explore their imagination for clues to their walking realities. The imaginal psychology Noel offers allows for a connection to the lost soul of the reader.

Anzaldúa’s insistence on the imaginal, her penchant for inducing altered states of reality, and her biographic similarities to traditional shamanism beg a reading of her work as contextualized by “New Shamanism.” Granting full credibility to the imagination and the self’s ability to alter their perception of reality, Anzaldúa’s “New Shamanism” offers a field guide to healing. The path to healing should not be misinterpreted as a utopic destination located in the mystical land of “El Mundo Zurdo.” As Anzaldúa was a

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94 AnaLouise Keating told me in personal email correspondence that this book and the books by Carlos Castañeda were especially important to Anzaldúa.
visionary pragmatist, the vision of a more hospitable location was worked on and toward in her writing. While she did not discount the formation of such a place here in this reality, the pragmatist part of Anzaldúa knew that its creation rested on shifting perceptions and realities. El Mundo Zurdo should be read as a perception shift and therefore a consciousness to be traveled. Anzaldúa references psychic healing when she writes, “In short, I’m trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be” (“La Prieta” 208). Herein lies the tension that plagues Anzaldúa life and writing. Unable to account for the quantity of oppressions and suffering, Anzaldúa decides to use her difference to empower herself. And through her writing and theorizing on El Mundo Zurdo, she provides a textual map.

While this chapter has attempted to unveil the process behind Anzaldúa’s writing, we must keep in mind that writing is a two-way movement:

Of course, writing is concealing, too...Writing is like spreading your legs. People are going to come in. They’re going to enter through your orifices. When you read me you’re coming into me. There are intimate secrets lodged in my body that I go around exposing to perfect strangers. Every writer is a bit of an exhibitionist. Exposing myself is a conscious act. As soon as I reveal myself to you, open my legs up to you, take my clothes off to you and open my heart to you, I also hide myself. This back and forth movement—revealing, concealing, revealing, concealing. (“On the Process of Writing Borderlands/La Frontera” Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 196-7)

Recognizing the exposed writer for her vulnerability, the subsequent chapter will guide the reader through some of Anzaldúa’s texts, focusing on her expansive views of queerness. Chapter three will then attempt to expose more of the “hidden” aspects in Anzaldúaan consciousness, such as the importance of the imaginal in her work, as it outlines Anzaldúa’s project of queer epistemology. Read together, these discussions will
introduce a new perspective with which to read Anzaldúa’s life and writing. This new look will seek to uncover hidden patterns in Anzaldúa’s work as well as bring attention to some of her unrecognized, yet groundbreaking theorizations on writing, queerness, and consciousness.
Chapter Three

“You make the inner changes first, and then you make the outer changes”:

Queerness, Spiritual Activism and Other ‘Unsafe’ Border Crossings

Expanding: An Introduction

_This Bridge Called My Back_ (eds. Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981) expanded the concept of feminism, which up until that point was dominated by white, middle class women, to include women of color, non-heterosexual women, working class women, and intersectional analysis. I argue that Anzaldúa’s writings, pre- and post-_Borderlands/La Frontera_ similarly expands the concept of queer even before queer theory was in vogue, to explore many types of queerness including but going beyond differences in gender expression and sexuality. This chapter will analyze “La Prieta” (1981), “El Paisano is a bird of good omen” (1982) and “Reading LP” ([1970s] 2009) to explore Anzaldúa’s inclusive conceptualization of queerness and its link to her theories of spirituality. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: not only will I argue for recognition of Anzaldúa’s contributions to the field of queer theory, but I will also show how Anzaldúa’s theory cannot be contained within this field, as her vision for social transformation goes beyond the scope of the field of queer theory into the realms of spirituality and epistemology.

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95 Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with coining the term “intersectional analysis” to discuss the need to address various identity categories simultaneously. As Crenshaw points out, the legal system needs to take into account both race in sex when dealing with Black women, as both of these identity markers are simultaneously affecting the women in question. The idea of addressing the axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality (among a growing list of other identity markers) developed from Crenshaw’s 1998 intervention “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.”

96 See Kathy Rudy’s “Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism and Queer Theory” (2001) as one source of documentation on this major shift in feminism, especially p. 202.
While not complete, as no one reading ever captures all of the influence and nuance of any text, this analysis adds the under-theorized aspects of spirituality to an equally under-theorized discussion of gender and sexuality in Anzaldúa’s life and work.

Even after *Borderlands* was published and widely used in classrooms, few critics acknowledged and validated the spiritual tendencies found throughout the book. In 2000 Anzaldúa’s co-edited collection of Anzaldúan interviews, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, addressed the spiritual dimension within *Borderlands* and extended it well beyond the mainstream’s comfort level. The existence of daemons and other realities, and the access to these realities through mind-altering substances and meditation, is still not a well-known aspect of her work. Here I hope to connect Anzaldúa’s insistence on the spiritual with her ideas of queerness, going beyond gay and lesbian studies to expose a queerer queer existence, always already cognizant of the importance and simultaneity of intersectionality. More than addressing the intersection of identities based on race/class/sex/gender, Anzaldúa’s writings invite an investigation of interconnectivity by focusing on identity categories in relation to others:97 that is, how is race articulates in relation to gender and class, etc. As no scholar works within a vacuum, it is important to note that other scholars have written about this connection between queerness and spirituality in Anzaldúa’s work.98 The analysis I present here is very much indebted to

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the close attention AnaLouise Keating has offered to the life and work of Gloria
Anzaldúa. As co-editor with Anzaldúa and prolific scholar of Anzaldúa’s written words
in her published and unpublished writings, Keating has provided me with the textual map
to explore this connection between queerness and spirituality in Anzaldúa’s work. In her
2009 publication of *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, Keating references this gap in
scholarly attention to queerness. She writes:

> Why have theorists so often ignored Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking contributions to queer theory? I don’t know. Do many heterosexual identified scholars fear being censured or labeled as gay? Do they simply not see the provocative, transgressive elements in her work? Are most queer theorists so Eurocentric or masculinist in their text selections that they have entirely ignored *This Bridge Called My Back*, where Anzaldúa’s queer theorizing first occurs in print? (5)

In the close readings that I offer here of the aforementioned Anzaldúa texts, which span
her writing career, I address this lacuna in Anzaldúa’s analysis.

This analysis attempts to link two rather slippery terms in the academy: queerness
and spirituality. It is ironic that that the challenge I face in holding these two terms
simultaneously for analysis seems imposed by academic limitations and not by the texts
themselves, as Anzaldúa travels between these two concepts seamlessly in her writing.

In fact, one could argue that all of Anzaldúa’s writings are saturated with references to queerness and spirituality. As evidenced in her writing, Anzaldúa draws no distinction between these terms (indeed, they often fuel each other) and it is precisely in their amorphous character where she is able to articulate her most innovative theories.

Overview of Mainstream Queer Theory and Hames-García’s Counter-Genealogy

I engage Anzaldúaan analysis99 with the current political landscape of queer theory in part because of Keating’s assurance that Anzaldúa wanted to be recognized for her contributions to the field.100 The history of queer theory as an academic discipline seems to be circular. According to many queer theorists of colors,101,102 queer theory has its roots in queer writers of colors (James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, The Combahee River Collective, to name a few) but was appropriated by white, mostly male homosexuals who initially deemphasized or erased

99 Linda Garber argues that Anzaldúa is better situated between lesbian feminism of the 1970s and 80s and queer theory. While Garber makes important contributions on Anzaldúa’s poetic legacy of lesbian feminism and its shift toward theorizing and into queer theory, I do not believe my argument of positioning Anzaldúa, as a queer theorist, is amiss. Just as Anzaldúa claimed to have allegiances to many identity groups, not exclusively belonging to any one group, I believe she can be both a lesbian feminist poet and a queer theorist. Indeed, my analysis shows how her work includes, but goes beyond queer theorizing.

100 In a personal conversation at the 2009 Society for the Study of the Life and Work of Gloria E. Anzaldúa Conference, AnaLouise Keating assured me of Anzaldúa’s wishes regarding her legacy and queer theory. Keating’s history, of being a close personal friend to Anzaldúa and Trustee of the Anzaldúa Papers lends credence to this statement.

101 I use the term “of colors” in the plural purposely to communicate the diversity of communities often subsumed under the term “of color” in the singular.

102 Here I refer to Michael Hames-García’s “Queer Theory Revisited” (2011), Robert McRuer’s Queer Renaissance (1997) and E. Patrick Johnson’s “Quare praxis” (2005), as queer theorists of colors that locate the origins of queer theorizing in communities of colors.
race as a intersectional category of analysis and who later “added” writers/critics of colors to “spice up” their anthologies. Queer theory dates its origins of the term to 1990 where Teresa de Lauretis employed the label “queer theory” at a lesbian and gay sexualities conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The field emerged from feminist studies and LGBT studies as a ‘sexy’ new field in which to investigate sexualities and genders.

Queer theory witnessed the rise of many (white) academic superstars in the 1990s such as Judith Butler, Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick, and Adrienne Rich, among others who have contributed to the field in a variety of ways. Mainstream, white, academic queer theory has at its foundation the following canonical texts in chronological order following the Stonewall Riot of 1969: Foucault’s “La volonté de savoir” (1976), Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Continuum” (1980), Gayle Rubin’s “Thinking Sex” (1984), Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick’s Between Men (1985), Leo Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?” (1987), the journal Out/Look which debuted in 1988, Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet (1990), Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble (1990), Diana Fuss’s anthology Inside/Out and the “queer theory” issue of differences edited by Teresa de Lauretis (both in 1991), and Butler’s Bodies That Matter, Michael Warner’s Fear of a Queer Planet and The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader all in 1993.

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103 It is interesting to note that De Lauretis was aware of Anzaldúa’s work and reviewed an Anzaldúa short story “El Caballo Negro” in April of 1989 (Archives 6_23PM, IMG_4978). It should also be noted that De Lauretis abandoned the term “Queer Theory” only three years after she coined it because she claimed it had been taken over by the systems it claimed to resist (Jagose, Queer Theory 1996)

104 Here I emphasize the distinction between academic queer theory and queer activism/grassroots organizing.
Recently, however, the field has been chastised for its lack of recognition of queers of colors and has slowly begun to incorporate a more diverse theoretical repertoire. This change is late in coming as Anzaldúa and other queers of colors\textsuperscript{105} have been living and articulating queer theory long before the academy took up the cause. Since the 2000s, there has been a “queer of color critique” renaissance (Roderick Ferguson).\textsuperscript{106}

Now, in 2011, as I attempt to posit Anzaldúa as a queer theorist, the “trend” in queer theory or queer studies is to reiterate, or for some, to find, that queers of colors have been producing queer theories for quite some time. In my attempts to locate Anzaldúa as a foremother of queer theory rather than as a corrective to mainstream queer theory’s inattention to race and other interconnected issues of identity such as class, I, as a white middle-class queer person in the academy, intentionally privilege the counter-

\textsuperscript{105} Here I am thinking of the writings of Audre Lorde, Paula Allen Gun and Cherrie Moraga, just to name a few.

genealogy of queer theory proposed by Michael Hames-García and other non-white writers and critics. I understand that mine is but one voice, but I believe that this current trend foreshadows the future of queer theory. With the critical distance of approximately twenty-five years of scholarship specifically addressing queer theory as an academic field (beginning with Gayle Rubin’s “Thinking Sex” [1984], not to mention Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* [1987], although I’m sure this date is debatable), a student of queer theory, such as myself, follows the documentation of white academia, appropriating themes and concerns of writers and critics of colors, all the while utilizing queers of colors as objects of study.

**Terminology**

The term “queer” in the discipline has eluded static definition and posits its elasticity as representative of the potentiality of queer analysis. I argue that Anzaldúa’s perception and use of the term “queer” is similar to Butler’s definition of the same. Butler critically situates the term “queer” as follows:

> As expansive as the term ‘queer’ is meant to be, it is used in ways that enforce a set of overlapping divisions…. Indeed, it may be that the critique of the term will initiate a resurgence of both feminist and anti-racist mobilization within lesbian and gay politics or open up new possibilities for coalitional alliances that do not presume that these constituencies are radically distinct from one another. (*Bodies That Matter* 228-9)

Likewise, Anzaldúa employs the term “queer” critically. In her 1991 essay “To(o) Queer The Writer,” Anzaldúa exposes the tensions associated with the identity label:

> If I have to pick an identity label in the English language, I pick ‘dyke’ or ‘queer,’ though these working-class words (formerly having ‘sick’
connotations) have been taken over by white middle-class lesbians in the academy. Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all ‘queers’ of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times, we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our difference. (250)

Perhaps it has been Anzaldúa’s uneasy relationship with the term that explains her exclusion from the ranks of queer theorists in the academy. Or perhaps Anzaldúa’s discussion of queer sexuality and gender expression was buried amidst her insistence on radical inclusion and expansive notions of queerness, not limited to, but including early and painful menstruation, spirit possession, near-death experiences, and her belief in cosmic connectedness, among others. I argue, however, that it is precisely this critical and inclusive standpoint of queerness, lacking within traditional queer theory, which makes acknowledging Anzaldúa’s contributions all the more important to the future of queer studies.107

Perhaps the recent Wiki-update is a critical first step to bringing queer theory into dialogue with Anzaldúan theory. It is interesting to note that, even though Anzaldúa employed the term “queer” in one of her first published works, “La Prieta” (1981), it wasn’t until recently that Anzaldúa was credited for her contributions to queer theory on the popular online encyclopedia Wikipedia.108 In April of 2010 one of Wikipedia’s users updated Gloria Anzaldúa’s wiki page to credit her for her contribution to queer theory.

107 There is a current trend away from queer theory in the singular to queer theories in the plural. See Donald Hall for example. Other critics are moving to using the more inclusive “Queer Studies” to delineate the field of studies principally but not exclusively focused on analysis of gender and sexualities.

108 While Wikipedia <<www.wikipedia.org>> is hardly a definitive academic source, it should be noted that Wikipedia represents and informs current imaginaries in our globalized context. Many turn to this online encyclopedia, which relies on its users to supply content, for brief, yet informed information on various subjects.
and also to add information about her various near-death experiences. This information
was, of course, always available within the corpus of her work, but was only made
available online through the Wikipedia update. This fact is important, as most scholars
are only familiar with Borderlands/La Frontera, where Anzaldúa certainly addresses
queerness and spirituality, but not to the extent that her other work address these issues.
And perhaps this, along with other efforts such as the formation of the Society for the
Study of Gloria Anzaldúa (founded 2006 by Norma Cantú), the acquisition of the Gloria
Anzaldúa Papers by the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University
of Texas, Austin, and the recent publication of previously unpublished Anzaldúaan work
and other’s reaction to that work,109 will encourage academic inquiry into Anzaldúa’s
corpus of work beyond Borderlands.

Gloria Anzaldúa as Queer Writer AND Queer Theorist

While the term “queer” can be employed as an identity category or a term of
positionality in the academy, more often the term is used as a substitute for lesbian or
gay, or perhaps a broad term for a variety of sexual and gender preferences. Anzaldúa is
commonly known as a gay or more specifically lesbian writer, due to her work in the
early 1980s within white feminist circles to draw attention to the needs of lesbian women

109 It should be noted that the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa has hosted two
international conferences focused on the life and work of Anzaldúa. Also, AnaLouise
Keating published formerly unpublished Anzaldúa texts in The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader
(2009) and co-edited the collection Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa’s Life and Work
Transformed Our Own (2011). I should also note here that I, along with the other
panelists of the 2010 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference panel “Anzaldúaan Theory
and Queer Theory: A Dialogue,” am in the process of soliciting submissions for a co-
edited anthology Queerness in Anzaldúa: Beyond Borderlands.
(and of lesbians of colors). And while she is well known in lesbian literary circles and Gender and Women’s Studies course syllabi around the world, I argue that her sexual desire is much more fluid than same-sex desire and, more importantly for this discussion, that she is also a queer theorist. In terms of categorizing Anzaldúa’s sexuality, one must also think in terms of expansiveness. Randy Conner uses the label “bisexual” in his 2009 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa (SSGA) Plenary Lecture to describe Anzaldúa’s sexuality (Conner, El Mundo Zurdo 197) and AnaLouise Keating prefers the term “polysexual” in addressing Anzaldúa’s earlier statement that because she was attracted to men, women, children, animals and trees she knew she wasn’t straight and so queer was the most adequate term (Interviews/Entrevistas 6).

According to Randy Conner, longtime friend to Anzaldúa, it was a popular belief of the 1970s and 1980s to attribute special qualities to homosexuals. In his 2009 Plenary Lecture at the SSGA conference, he traces Anzaldúa’s beliefs to three primary sources; first from local folklore attributing “magical, although negative, hybrid- or were-like status to Queer people...second, many of the lesbians, gays men and bisexuals she encountered in Austin, San Francisco and New York were practitioners of earth-centered spiritual traditions...and third, she read many works by Paula Gunn Allen” (191).

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101 At the 2011 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, keynote speaker and Latin American Scholar Mary Louise Pratt commented on the recent popularity of This Bridge Called My Back (1981) in Mexico, due to the belated diffusion and slow movement of the Spanish translation of the text, Este Puente, mi espalda (1988).

110 Paula Gunn Allen frequently discusses homosexuality and racial identity in her poetry. She is said that homosexuality is a state of life-long liminality. Keating cites a 1990 interview where Gunn Allen “associates her lesbianism with the Native American worldview and explains that ‘perversity (transformationality)...constitutes the sacred moment, the process of changing from one condition to another-life-long [her emphasis] liminality” (“Myth Smashers, Myth Makers: (Re) Visionary Techniques in the Works of Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde” 78).
Paula Gunn Allen, a Native American writer and lesbian addresses issues of sexuality and spirituality in her work and is often studied alongside Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde as queers of colors who theorize their subject positions.

In response to the criticism of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa expanded her vision of mestizas and the new mestiza consciousness, in her later writings to include nepantleras and New Tribalism. The racial connotations of the term “mestiza” seem to be too limiting for the broad vision of planetary interconnectedness Anzaldúa envisioned in her approximation of threshold identities. The Aztec word “nepantla”-- the world in between--and those who dwell in this in between space, the nepantleras, seem to offer more appropriate terminology for the shift in consciousness Anzaldúa recognized and encouraged. The consciousness or ways of seeing the world, enacted by these mestizas and later nepantleras-comes to be known as the New Tribalism. The New Tribalism is a more inclusive, self-appointed identity category of nepantleras who have as a base a spiritual awareness and connection. As Keating notes, Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is “spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (“Shifting Perspectives” 242).

Queers of all types and colors are at the forefront of this new consciousness for Anzaldúa. She states:

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112 In keeping with Anzaldúa’s practice of not italicizing non-English words, I purposely do not italicize or otherwise “mark” Spanish and Náhuatl words as “other.”

113 Even in *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa includes intellectual mestizas alongside racial mestizas.
Queers are ‘divine warriors’ because we have to fight. But it’s not physical fighting. It’s fighting with the spirit. To be healthy, you must awaken a sense of who you are and keep it strong and assert that you’re OK, that you’re not sick, that society—religion, political systems, morality, the movies, the media, the newspapers—that they’re all wrong and that you’re right. So, you start tapping into your strength, your source of power. (Interviews/Entrevistas 122)

This is indeed the case with Andrea in “El Paisano” and with LP in “Reading LP.” The source of power is accessed by changing perceptions of reality as it is currently constructed, and initiating the process of re-membering the self fragmented by societal norms; a decolonization, of sorts. The refusal to be fragmented or categorized is a weapon against oppression. For Anzaldúa, this refusal is spiritual, and spirituality is resistance:

I didn’t have the money, privilege, body, or knowledge to fight oppression, but I had this presence, this spirit, this soul. Spirituality—through ritual, meditation, affirmation, and strengthening myself—was the only way I could fight oppression. Spirituality is oppressed people’s only weapon and means of protection. Changes in society only come after the spiritual. (Interviews/Entrevistas 11)

As Anzaldúa explores via the characters of Andrea and LP, spirituality includes recognizing our interconnectedness with nature and all humans. This sense of connectedness might encourage others to use their material bodies to bridge societal divides, as Anzaldúa did in her lifetime and does now through her writings. Queers are different than straights, people of colors experience life differently than whites, but we

114 “Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic lives. The work of decolonization must make room for the deep yearning for wholeness, oftentimes expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning both material and existential, both psychic and physical, which, when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment.” (Alexander “Remembering This Bridge, Remembering Ourselves: Yearning, Memory and Desire” 99).
are all human and we are all connected spiritually. This idea may sound like utopic fantasy, and may expose Anzaldúa’s texts to charges of impracticality and a consequent lack of urgency. Not so. Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is rooted firmly in the physical body and demands social action as explained in the first chapter. By being publicly queer in many ways, Anzaldúa’s life example helped to disorient heteronormative assumptions about sexuality. Rejecting dualistic thinking and constantly challenging how we perceive our reality, Anzaldúa was enacting a queer praxis. Her consciousness, her spirituality was queer. Her life and her writing is echoed in the words of Sara Ahmed,

> It is not up to queers to disorient straights, although of course disorientation might still happen, and we do ‘do’ this work. Disorientation would not be a politics of the will, but an effect of how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by a prior matter—simply, how we live. (“Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology” 569)

Anzaldúa’s life and her writings disoriented a number of previously assumed givens: that women of colors didn’t have valuable insights to share; that women of colors couldn’t write theory; that theory had to be abstract and not rooted in lived experience; that writers write in one language; that code switching was not a legitimate means of communication; that queer was limited to non-heterosexual; that we must separate mind and body, male and female; us and other; and the list goes on and on.

Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is similar to other queer “world making” projects. Insisting on the imaginal, stating that new realities start in our minds before they are enacted in this reality, is an invitation to conceive of the world in a new, more inclusive,

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115 Evidence of this constant challenging of our perceptions can be found in the circular “to do” lists in the Anzaldúa archives.

116 See José Esteban Muñoz’s *Dissidentifications* for more discussion of “world-making.”
and less harmful way. While Anzaldúa does call on queers and other marginalized identities, she importantly does not limit the world-making process to only queers or only queers of colors. Inclusiveness is crucial as we are all connected. Spirituality rooted in the body is non-hierarchical and consists of a two-way movement explained as inner work and public acts. By practicing an embodied spirituality, Anzaldúa effectively collapses the mind/body binary.\textsuperscript{117} She further queers spirituality by rooting the inner spiritual work in the embodied subject. This is not spirituality intent upon transcending the body; but rather, the inner work is always associated with outer public acts for social change. And in her efforts to locate a larger identity category, she queers the definition of queer to include more than just sexual difference. Following the trajectory of her ideas in her writings, Anzaldúa employs the label “queer” to describe border dwellers, “…the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (\textit{Borderlands} 3). In the course of \textit{Borderlands/La Frontera}, she expands this definition to the “new mestizas” which later expands to nepantleras, who share an identity category of spirit larger than any other category.

In one of her first publications, “La Prieta,” Anzaldúa introduces the term “QUEER” to describe her lived experience (\textit{This Bridge} 1981, capitalization in original).\textsuperscript{118} The connotations of the term in this instance are more in line with early dictionary definitions of queer as:

\textsuperscript{117} See Jacquelyn N. Zita’s chapter on “The Anzaldúaan Body” for further exploration on this topic.
\textsuperscript{118} Randy Conner states: “For Anzaldúa, the term ‘queer’ embraces not only lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered persons, but also perceived as different, or who self-
The term queer was also used colloquially in the working-class Chicano community that Anzaldúa grew-up in, along with “de las otras,” “marimachos, jotitas, jotas, tortilleras” to describe women who desire women (Reuman 35-36). Based on the content of “La Prieta,” I believe Anzaldúa was exploring all of these definitions of queer and how she and others applied this term to her life. The title of the essay “La Prieta,” literally meaning “the dark [female] one” published in This Bridge Called My Back, immediately implicates race in the discussion of Anzaldúa’s contributions to queer theory. As mentioned earlier, queer theory, much like early feminism, has been reluctant to address racial differences and has been dominated by mostly white, middle to upper class males. Here, the autobiographical protagonist is first marked as “other” at birth: “When I was born, Mamá Grande Locha inspected my buttocks looking for the dark blotch, the sign of indio, or worse, mulatto blood” (“La Prieta” 198). She was racially othered for being darker than her “colored family,” and the subsequent instruction “Don’t identify as be different from, ‘the norm’ It should be noted here that she first used the term ‘queer’ in this way in or around 1976, developing the definition in the early 1980s though she is seldom recognized as an early user of the term as it is currently employed. Also not recognized is that her use of the term embraced rather than rejected the realm of the spirit” (Conner 63-64)

go out in the sun,” (“La Prieta” 198) to avoid being perceived as Indian, led to the social
collection that dark skin was inferior to the dominant “white-is-right” mentality. The
label of “prieta” employed by Anzaldúa’s grandmother serves as a category of control
over the young Anzaldúa. Aída Hurtado summarizes the power of labels:

Society puts us into neat little compartments to label us and keep us in our
places. India, mestiza, naca, vieja, Latin spitfire, Chicana-dyke-feminist,
tortillera, sexy, burro, maid, stupid, prieta, hocicona, bocona, cabrona,
loser, whore, malinche, bad writer, worse thinker, undeserving,
affirmative-action hire---you name it, we’ve heard it. (Bridging 55)

For Anzaldúa, queer can also be applied to the patriarchal Chicano society into
which she was born that favored males over females, represented by Anzaldúa’s mother
whose “allegiance was and is to her male children, not to the female” (“La Prieta” 201);
to the historical racial climate of the 1940’s Texas that privileged Caucasians over
Mexicans as depicted in the pocket westerns she read as a child; and to her early and
painful menstruation. The rare hormonal imbalance that caused menstruation at three
months of age and accelerated her physical growth made Anzaldúa feel like an alien in
her own home and in her own skin. Her mother insisted on hiding Anzaldúa’s body by
wrapping her “budding breast” at seven years with “tight cotton girdles so that kids at
school would not think them strange beside their own flat brown mole nipples” (“La
Prieta” 199). The feelings of isolation lead Anzaldúa to retreat “into books and solitude
and keep away from others” (“La Prieta” 199). Her interest in reading and knowledge
also differentiated her from her Chicano peers in school, who were thought and taught to
be “dumb Mexicans.”

120 A discussion of the performativity of race will be reserved for another occasion.
Each paragraph of “La Prieta” describes another aspect of queerness in the young Anzaldúa. The death of Anzaldúa’s beloved father as she entered puberty “irrevocably shattered the myth that there existed a male figure to look after me…I lost my father, god, and my innocence all in one bloody blow” (“La Prieta” 200). All of this, added to the sexual feelings for other females in a homophobic society as well as sexual feelings toward her father, left Anzaldúa isolated.121 As she states in an interview with Keating, Anzaldúa never felt like she belonged anywhere, that she was “always on the other side” and that she “always felt like all my difference was visible” (Interviews/Entrevistas 170, 171). Witnessing two women making love in college was spatially and chronologically linked for Anzaldúa with witnessing her roommate’s epileptic seizure during her freshman year. These experiences expanded her view of queerness, of difference, which ultimately led her to feel like she wasn’t “the only one on the other side” (Interviews/Entrevistas 170).

Alongside establishing herself in many ways as queer, it is her reflection on difference, in my opinion, that makes her a queer theorist. In witnessing her mother turn to her brothers after her husband’s death for protection and guidance, Anzaldúa observes, “She and I both knew she wouldn’t be getting any from them. Like most men they didn’t have it to give, instead needed to get it from women” (“La Prieta” 201). Starting with her body and from feelings of resentment for not being allowed to show physical intimacy toward her mother, Anzaldúa theorizes on the gendered dynamic of power in her Chicano

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121 Anzaldúa discusses these intense feelings toward her father as at times sexual, and at other times sensual or spiritual feelings. See the 1983 interview with Christine Weiland in Interviews/Entrevistas (especially p. 79).
family. The self-created genre of autohistoria\textsuperscript{122} is Anzaldúa’s vehicle for this self-reflection and theorizing. Keating defines autohistorias as follows:

Anzaldúa coined this term, as well as the term autohistorias-teoría, to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms. Deeply infused with the search for personal and cultural meaning, or what Anzaldúa describes in her post-

\textit{Borderlands} writings as ‘putting Coyolxauhxqui together,’ both autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría are informed by reflective self-awareness employed in the service of social-justice work. Autohistoria focuses on the personal life story, but as the autohistoria tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells the life stories of others. (\textit{The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader} 319)

Keating categorizes Anzaldúa’s text “El Paisano is a bird of good omen” as “fiction/autohistoria” and I would argue that “Reading LP” is also an example of autohistoria. Before I turn to analysis of these texts, let me first address some recent scholarship on the queer aspects of Anzaldúa’s writing.

\textbf{Surveying the Queer Landscape of Anzaldúan scholarship}

While there is a growing body of scholarship recognizing Anzaldúa as a forerunner of queer theory, this is a relatively new intervention, which unfortunately has contented itself with an investigation of queerness within \textit{Borderlands}. The present chapter offers another voice to the growing current, urging Anzaldúan scholars as well as queer studies scholars to embrace the entirety of Anzaldúa’s oeuvre.

Surprisingly, one of the earliest articles addressing queerness in Anzaldúa’s writing is Marcus Embry’s 1996 “Cholo Angels in Guadalajara: The Politics and Poetics

\textsuperscript{122} This new genre follows a long tradition of thinking and thinkers. Miguel de Unamuno’s concept of intrahistoria is applicable here. See his \textit{En Torno Al Casticismo}. 

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of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera.*” (I say surprisingly, because the academic conversation on queerness was well into its prime by 1996.) Perhaps the most important contribution of this article is the context in which it was published; a special edition of *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* edited by Latino queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz and Amanda Barrett. Embry brought Anzaldúa’s name and writing to a queer conversation that includes the voices of renowned queer theorists Judith Halberstam, Lisa Duggan, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and to lesser known critics 123 Richard Fung and Robert F. Reid-Pharr. To his credit, Embry does include Anzaldúa’s queerness, read homosexuality, as critical to understanding her position of subjectivity that should elucidate a reading of her texts. Regrettably, however, by focusing on narrow definitions of mestizaje and the fear of universalizing the Chicano experience, Embry decides to undermine Anzaldúa’s insistence on the spiritual, instead accusing her of “‘New-Age’-type passages” in *Borderlands.* He insists that Anzaldúa queers spirituality as she resignifies Guadalupe and Coatlicue, yet he refuses to validate the “more ‘mystical’ episodes from her childhood” (Embry 101). 124 Embry is unable or unwilling to simultaneously hold queerness and spirituality as important Anzaldúaan influences.

The following year, Ian Barnard published an article entitled “Gloria Anzaldúa’s Queer *Mestizaje*” (1997) which claims:

*Borderlands/La Frontera* provides a model for queer theory of how to delineate the pluperfect sexualization of racial identities and racialization

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123 I say “lesser known” here in terms of queer theory: both Fung and Reid-Pharr are both well-known in the field of Masculinities Studies.

124 See Anthony Lioi’s “The Best-Loved Bones: Spirit and History in Anzaldúa’s ‘Entering Into The Serpent’” for a more nuanced view of how Anzaldúa’s re-appropriation and re-signification of Guadalupe as Coatlicue is not as revolutionary as Embry contends.
of sexual identities without prioritizing either identity or losing the force and particularity of an anti-homophobic or anti-racist critique, but thereby destabilizes the identity of queer theory itself. (50)

I agree with Barnard and wish here to extend his analysis to pre-and post- Borderlands Anzaldúaan writings. While it is true that “no single reader will be able to ‘understand’ every addressed identity of Borderlands/La Frontera” (Barnard 47) and that it is crucial to acknowledge that understanding is always partial, this should not serve as an obstacle to approaching Anzaldúa’s corpus from a multitude of perspectives. Indeed, dwelling on the contradictions, on the fragmentation, is a lesson many Gay Shame\(^{125}\) theorists are currently exploring. Anzaldúa invites her readers to investigate the many sites of nepantla\(^{126}\) that compose their lives, and to learn from this in-betweenness.

That same year, Robert McRuer published a chapter on Anzaldúa in his book *Queer Renaissance: Contemporary American Literature and the Reinvention of Lesbian and Gay Identities*. McRuer emphasizes Anzaldúaan tactics of fluidity and disruption, especially in the poetry portion of *Borderlands*. According to McRuer, *This Bridge Called My Back* “stands at the crossroads where border theory, feminism, and a nascent queer theory intersect…. [T]he collection is one of the first texts of the Queer Renaissance” (123). While McRuer is working to bolster his thesis of a Queer Renaissance, I would argue that there were queer writers theorizing before Anzaldúa and that Anzaldúa’s contribution is an immensely pivotal one, effectively changing the landscape of how we view queer writers and queer theorizing. That is, while other writers were occupied articulating queerness in terms of gender and sexuality (Gloria


\(^{126}\) Please see Chapter one for an explanation of nepantla.
Naylor, for one), Anzaldúa was already incorporating other forms of queerness in her work. In his attempts to centralize Anzaldúa’s role in the theoretical agenda of queer theory, McRuer argues, “Anzaldúa exhibits an awareness of the complexity of ‘existing borders forged in domination’ and controverts queer theorists who do not. She even queries ‘queerness’ if and when it seeks to escape the complexities of history and identity” (128). In this query of queerness, or a critical look at the narrowly defined concepts of queerness, McRuer concludes by stating that

Anzaldúa’s retreat, then, is not from queerness per se but from monolithic and overly celebratory understandings of it….Anzaldúa shapes, as she has since This Bridge Called My Back, long before queerness was hip—what Butler might call a ‘critical queerness’ (Bodies That Matter, 223): a queerness that is both critically necessary and critical of itself; a queerness that insists on foregrounding, and hence undermining, the ways in which identities (even, potentially, other queer identities) are structured in domination so that certain histories of exploitation or appropriation are effaced. (128)

McRuer links Anzaldúa to Butler again in their emphasis on coalition, and notes that some of Anzaldúa’s most important work has been her work on anthologies (This Bridge Called My Back (1981) and Making Face/Making Soul/Haciendo Caras (1990)127 (McRuer 153). (This was before Anzaldúa was to co-edit the anthology, this bridge we call home [2000] with Keating that further emphasized her insistence on radical [racial] inclusion and identity as a [spiritual] collectivity.)

McRuer and Barnard both offer solid analyses of Anzaldúa’s contribution to queer theory and to disrupting identity categories. They like many other critics, focus on

127 1990 is an important year as this was the year Butler’s Gender Trouble debuted and turned her in to an overnight rock star of queer theory. While Butler may have emphasized the need of coalitions in her theoretical writing, Anzaldúa formed those coalitions.
Borderlands to the neglect of Anzaldúa’s other writings, both published and unpublished. It is refreshing among Borderlands articles to have someone take on the challenge of Borderlands poetry as McRuer does, a wider look at Anzaldúa’s corpus of work and her development over time, however, is still lacking. Each piece of her writing is part of a larger whole that, because of its complexity, took Anzaldúa a lifetime to break down into palatable images and stories. Individual analysis of the parts is important, but it must be carried out in the context of the full corpus of her work. In that regard, this chapter focuses on connections between queerness and spirituality and will lead to a discussion in chapter three on Anzaldúa’s larger project, her epistemology and philosophical musings on life. McRuer notes that “only through this constant shifting can the Queer Renaissance guard against the exclusionary practices that already endanger it and that have plagued—and ultimately grounded—earlier movements” (22-23). I anticipate that evaluations of Anzaldúa’s work will continue to shift and to evolve, as scholars look at uninvestigated areas in her writing. The next evolution of Anzaldúaan thought, I believe, will turn its attention to the spiritual and epistemological implications of Anzaldúa’s body of work.

In my survey on Anzaldúaan criticism focusing on queerness, I conclude that Barnard and McRuer offer the most comprehensive critiques. Other studies, such as Tace Hedrick’s “Queering the Cosmic Race: Esotericism, Mestizaje, and Sexuality in the Work of Gabriela Mistral and Gloria Anzaldúa”128 fall victim to narrow definitions of

128 Judith Raiskin offers a more nuanced account on the conflation of sexual and racial differences than Hedrick, Raiskin’s article “Inverts and Hybrids: Lesbian Rewriting of Sexual and Racial Identities.” Her article focuses on Anzaldúa’s use and rewriting of 19th sexologist jargon to formulate the identities composed on “queer” and “mestiza.” Importantly, Raiskin observes, “the mestiza in Anzaldúa’s writing is less a biological
mestizaje. Still others tend toward the personal accounts of the effect of Anzaldúa’s life project like Mark Bundy’s 2005 “‘Know me unbroken’: Peeling Back the Silenced Rind of the Queer Mouth” in Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa, Hector Carbajal’s “A Letter to a Mother, from her son” (136-7) and Marla Morris’ “Young Man Popkin: A Queer Dystopia” (137-145) whose work appears in this bridge we call home. This 2002 anthology co-edited by Anzaldúa and Keating expanded the scope of queerness in practice as the editors intentionally solicited both colored and white authors, as well as pieces penned by both men and women. Importantly, this bridge we call home also included at least one transgendered voice: Anita Valerio, who contributed their article “It’s in My Blood, My Face—My Mother’s Voice, The Way I Sweat” (41-45) in This Bridge Called My Back, published “Now That You’re a White Man: Changing Sex in a Postmodern World-Being, Becoming, and Borders” (239-254) as Max Wolf Valerio in the 2002 anthology. Personal accounts of the enormous impact Anzaldúa’s life and writings have had on people form the basis for many articles written on Anzaldúa, as her willingness to expose the most private details of her own life invites others to do the same. Personal reflections account for the entirety of the articles in Bridging: How the Life and Work of Anzaldúa Transformed Our Own (2010).

Conner’s 2009 plenary lecture at the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa Conference raised many eyebrows as he addressed some of Anzaldúa’s “unsafe” characteristics. As a longtime personal friend of Anzaldúa’s, Conner exposed many of entity than a consciousness” (162). This discussion is valid and Raiskin’s research in enlightening, but unfortunately falls out of the scope of this chapter.

129 I intentionally employ ‘their’ in the singular as I am unsure which pronouns Valerio uses to self-identify.

130 This speech was later published in the conference proceedings. See El Mundo Zurdo in the works cited.
her thoughts on spirituality and sexuality as well as her experimentation with mind-altering substances. While Conner focuses on the ‘racier’ aspects of Anzaldúa’s person, Keating steadfastly attends to Anzaldúa’s broader legacy.131 Throughout Keating’s scholarship on Anzaldúan writing, she has been cognizant of Anzaldúa’s unrecognized contributions to queer theory and has on multiple occasions elicited further scholarship on the subject.132 She has contributed to this scholarship with her own short piece entitled "Gloria Anzaldúa: Queer Theory’s Other Mother, and Lover" in 2010 which emphasizes Anzaldúa’s ‘mother’ role as an early, unrecognized contributor to queer studies in terms of her refusal to study gender and/or sexuality in isolation. According to Keating, Anzaldúa’s refusal to be limited by any academic field led her to create “a complex, interwoven identity. Anzaldúa challenges conventional western concepts of personhood as well as contemporary forms of identity politics which tend to reify monolithic, narrow identity formations” (Keating, “Queer Mother” 3). This refusal to be limited was fueled by Anzaldúa’s “inclusionary, holistic worldview--her belief that” all existence is imbued with spirituality (Keating, “Queer Mother” 3). Keating continues to note the importance of spirituality in Anzaldúan thought; she states: “spiritual activism includes a theory of relational selfhood that offers an important alternative to the traditional forms of hyper-individualism which too often inform queer theory” (Keating, “Queer Mother” 3-4). This brief contribution offers Anzaldúaan scholars a glimpse into

131 It could also be argued that Keating is a co-creator of Anzaldúa work, a concept that could constitute future work.
132 Both in her published texts, “From Borderlands and New Mestizas to Nepantleras and Nepantleras: Anzaldúaan Theories for Social Change” Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge. (2006) 5-16 footnote 4), The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader (2009), and in personal communication (2010 SSGA Conference and email correspondence), Keating has encouraged others to examine Anzaldúa’s understudied contributions to queer theory.
Keating’s thoughts on the connections between Anzaldúa’s writing and queer theory.\textsuperscript{133}

Keating was also instrumental in publishing Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba’s contribution in \textit{Bridging}, where he labels Anzaldúa’s project as one of queer imagination. As a result of my own research and through many conversations with Robyn Henderson-Espinoza,\textsuperscript{134} I have come to realize that queer imagination is but one of the many aspects of Anzaldúa’s larger, queer epistemology project.

\textbf{Shamanism and Spiritual Activism}

As I explored in chapter one, Anzaldúa’s approach to writing shares many similarities with shamanism.\textsuperscript{135} Conner exposed Anzaldúa’s grandmother as a curandera and reported that Anzaldúa had intended to follow in her footsteps, but that she instead chose the medium of the written word to share her experience as a wounded healer.\textsuperscript{136} The fact that Anzaldúa’s writing is infused with spirituality is in line with other writings by women of colors who are deeply preoccupied with women’s spirituality and non-Western spiritual traditions. Some of these authors share the pages of the anthologies

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133 Keating offers a discussion that strongly supports her claim that Anzaldúa should be recognized as a foremother to queer theory. In personal correspondence, I have suggested that Keating expand her argument to show the ways that Anzaldúa is also queer theory’s lover, as her title titillates.

134 Henderson-Espinoza was co-organizer of the 2011 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference panel: “Anzaldúaan Thought and Queer Theory” from which a co-edited anthology on queerness and Anzaldúa in her pre and post \textit{Borderlands} writings emerged. Henderson-Espinoza has presented on Anzaldúa’s queer epistemology at the 2009 SSGA conference. The other co-editors are Kathleen Douglas and Elisa Facio.

135 Please see Chapter one for my discussion of differences between shamanism, Curanderismo and Anzaldúa’s employment of both. For this chapter, shamanism is one aspect of a larger spiritual focus.

136 This is one aspect Conner discusses in his 2009 plenary speech published in \textit{El Mundo Zurdo}.
\end{flushright}
Anzaldúa co-edited: Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, and Cherríe Moraga, for example. Yet Anzaldúa is also part of a larger community of spiritually-inflected writers which counts among its members Louise Erdich, Toni Morrison, bell hooks, and Maxine Hong Kingston, to name a few. Indeed, this collectivity of authors who value and explore spirituality through the artistic means constitutes a school of thought in its own right, contrary to the “elision of this spirituality in the broader frameworks of feminists, liberals, progressives, and racial and ethnic civil right organizations and academics” (Delgadillo 17). While there has been much recent scholarship in the field of queer theory, there is also a rich literary history that underscores the importance of spirituality in the lives of African American and Native American women and feminists.  

An excerpt from Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, the chapter entitled “Entering into the Serpent,” appears in the 1989 anthology co-edited by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. Here Anzaldúa’s spiritual foundation is contextualized within other feminist movements to point to the larger theoretical implications of spirituality within feminism and the power of the spiritual to inform and, in fact, transform feminisms.

Following Keating, my theorizing of spirituality is informed by Leela Fernandes’ definition of the term:

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137 Here I want to be careful to emphasize that I am noticing a trend in writings by women of colors. I am no way attempting to essentialize the importance of spirituality in all women of colors lives.

138 It is interesting to note that for many, spirituality is an alternative for an oppressive religion. Indeed this what Daniel Noel is referring to when he states, “As modern Western seekers, we long for ‘direct experience’ beyond rigid dogma and bureaucratic institutions, even beyond ‘book learning.’ It is most of what we mean by preferring ‘spirituality’ to ‘religion’ as the designation of our quest for deeper meaning in our lives” (60)
When I speak of spirituality, at the most basic level I am referring to an understanding of the self as encompassing body and mind, as well as spirit. I am also referring to a transcendent sense of interconnection that moves beyond the knowable, visible, material world. This sense of interconnection has been described variously as divinity, the sacred, spirit or simply the universe. My understanding is also grounded in a form of lived spirituality, which is directly accessible to all and which does not need to be mediated by religious experts, institutions or theological texts; that is what is often referred to as the mystical side of spirituality. (*Transforming Feminist Practice* 10)

Indeed, Anzaldúa’s recognition of spirit as embodied and present everywhere is akin to the concept of engaged Buddhism advocated by Thich Nhat Hanh, where mindfulness is the path toward social engagement.139 Hanh’s engaged Buddhism (*Peace is Every Step* 91) parallels Anzaldúa’s insistence on inner change working toward outer change.140 Mindfulness, for Anzaldúa, is linked to tapping into hidden knowledge:

> We’re not supposed to remember...We’re supposed to ignore, forget, kill those fleeting images of the soul’s presence and of the spirit’s presence. We have been taught that the spirit is outside our bodies or above our heads somewhere up in the sky with God. We’re supposed to forget that every cell in our bodies, every bone and bird and worm has spirit in it. (*Borderlands* 36)

Once spiritual interconnectedness is gained, according to Anzaldúa, action is required. Thus, Anzaldúa’s queer spiritual activism is similar to engaged Buddhism, where inner

139 Anzaldúa explicitly makes this connection from her own theories to Buddhism in her 2001 interview with Irene Lara “Daughter of Coatlicue: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa” where she likens the transparency of a mindful heart: un corazón con razón, that she uses in speaking engagements. Anzaldúa states “it’s an entirely feeling heart because feelings—anger, bitterness, y todo eso—can overwhelm you, but it’s a mindful heart like what Buddhists advocate about being attentive and aware” (*Entre Mundo/Among Worlds* 44)

140 In discussing the desire to learn about other peoples and other cultures with the motivation of appreciation instead of appropriation, Anzaldúa includes her research interests in Tibetan Buddhism (“On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*” *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 193).
change requires social action. The character Andrea in “El Paisano is a bird of good omen” exemplifies Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism. Andrea is a fictionalization of what Anzaldúa addresses in one of her last publications. She states that, once you break “out of your mental and emotional prison and deepen the range of perception,” you are able to “link inner reflection and vision…with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges” (“now let us shift…” 542). And Keating goes on to label Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism as a “metaphysics of interconnectedness” (this bridge we call home), the implications of which will be explored further in chapter three. Suffice it to say that Anzaldúa’s belief of radical interconnectedness is another aspect of seeing through identity categories that would otherwise divide. This spiritual connection lays the groundwork for the social action that accompanies spiritual consciousness. This is spirituality intent on breaking down barriers.

**Queer Theory in “El Paisano is a bird of good omen”**

In terms of queerness, for the purposes of this chapter, I will explore the following critical points of traditional queer theoretical analysis: social construction of sex and gender, performativity, compulsory heterosexuality, deconstructing and going beyond binary thinking, and fluidity in identity. I will also add the idea of self-reflection that both challenges power structures and demands social transformation via spiritual connectedness, to expand this list of queer theory tenets. It should also be noted that, while Anzaldúa’s writing and theories contribute to the field of queer theory, they are not limited to this field, as the editors of *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa’s Life and Work Transformed Our Own* (2011) note: “Anzaldúa thought is borderless; Gloria Anzaldúa,
the human being and the producer of knowledge, goes far beyond any fixed identities and cultural boundaries” (11). Commenting on the shortest biographical statement\textsuperscript{141} “Feminist visionary spiritual activist poet-philosopher fiction writer” written by Anzaldúa, Keating confirms that Anzaldúa “viewed herself in extremely expansive terms” (The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 3). Even the proposed elasticity of queer theory is too constraining for Anzaldúan theory. In her contributions to queer theory she challenges the field to expand many forms of queerness. As women of colors feminism has emphasized the simultaneity of social oppressions (The Combahee River Collective Statement [1977], and This Bridge Called My Back [1981] among others), it is only fitting that Anzaldúa’s writings take on a variety of queer theory issues simultaneously.

“El Paisano is a bird of good omen” is a short autohistoria set in 1940s-1950s Texas, where the main character--a masculine female, Andrea de la Cruz--is vacillating about her decision to marry her effeminate friend Zenobio; “this marriage will save [them] from having to marry” (“El Paisano” 161). The story takes place on Andrea’s family ranch where the reader witnesses the reception the night before the wedding is scheduled to take place. The “paisano” in the title refers to the caged roadrunner brought to the reception as a wedding gift, and in many ways this symbol parallels Andrea’s inner conflict regarding the limitations of marriage and social norms. In fact, the reception scene falls to the background as the author explores Andrea’s inner monologues and her connection to her family’s Texas ranch, in particular the animals that Andrea looks after and with whom she feels a deep spiritual connection. Anzaldúa discusses this feeling of

\textsuperscript{141} The bio statement is taken from Anzaldúa’s personal journal dated 2002. Housed in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Austin, these journals are closed to researchers until 2040. As a trustee to the estate, Keating is privy to this material.
interconnectedness in her 1993 interview with Keating. Anzaldúa states: “…here is the so-called real world and there’s a wall, a partition, and then over here is the world of spirit and the world of ideals. I don’t think we need that partition” (115). Through her protagonist Andrea, Anzaldúa destabilizes the division between the spiritual and the material in Andrea’s connection to nature, and thus links Andrea’s queerness and her spirituality.

According to Donald Hall, queer analysis has at its emphasis “the disruptive, the constructed, the tactical, and performative” (*Queer Theories* 5). The short story “El Paisano is a bird of good omen” is a fitting example of how Anzaldúa employs queer analysis before the 1990 inception of queer theory as an academic field. According to Keating, this short story was first conceptualized by Anzaldúa in September of 1972, underwent many revisions, and was intended to be part of a novel that Anzaldúa referred to as “Andrea.”

From the title of the story, the reader notes Anzaldúa’s signature use of code switching between Spanish and English. The subject of the title, el paisano, is here a roadrunner but linguistically also a countryman, for Andrea is connected to the land and the animals that inhabit it. In keeping with Anzaldúa’s larger project of disrupting and questioning assumptions, she does not italicize and rarely translates the Spanish in the

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142 “El Paisano is a bird of good omen” (1982) published in *Conditions* 8: 28-47, reprinted in *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*. Eds. Alma Gómez, Cherrie Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona (1983) by Kitchen Table Women of Color Press. The version that Keating includes in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* includes some translation of the Chicano Spanish and some alternative line spacing compared to the 1983 version published in *Cuentos*. All citations referenced will follow the 1983 version. I should also note that the subtitle to “El Paisano” indicates that this is part of a larger work “Andrea: a novel in progress” that was never published.
short story. Unlike in some of her other stories, Anzaldúa also does not provide a glossary for monolingual English speakers. The employment of Spanish in this text occurs mostly in dialogue, adding to the verisimilitude of the story: “Sí ‘Amá, ¿qué quieres?,” “No seas tonta, hijita...,” “Go and change, greñuda, muchacha chiflada….Tell them to bring out more tortillas de masa y la carne” (“El Paisano” 154, 155). She also uses Spanish to refer to the things Andrea is deeply connected to, “la tierra,” The Papalote, and her body, “Anda en la garra—on the rag” (“El Paisano” 153-154).

This first evidence of linguistic disruption in the story’s title is followed by a formal disruption of non-traditional line breaks and spacing which on first notice complicate the reading process. Read more carefully, these non-traditional line breaks and spacing add a poetic dimension to the text and ironically serve to show the connection of the protagonist to the land and the omnipresent spirit with which she communes: the breaks connect and expand meaning rather than fragmenting it. In the following passage, for example, the nontraditional spacing allows the author to connect the protagonist to her surrounds by showing concentric circles of connectivity:

Under her, the hard roundness of the mesquite post seems an appendage of herself, a fifth limb, one that’s also part of the corral, the corral that’s part of the land. The corral is a series.... (“El Paisano” 153).

143 In keeping with Anzaldúa’s practice of not italicizing or otherwise othering non-English words, I do not italicize the Spanish words from the text. I join co-editors AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López when they state, “...the non-italicized format is our political and theoretical attempt to avoid the ‘othering’ of non-English language. And second, we follow Anzaldúa’s own beliefs and practice. In her later works, she strongly preferred not to italicize Spanish or other non-English words.” (Bridging 16).
This spacing invites the reader’s mind to anticipate possible connections and also allows the protagonist to wander as the reader wonders:

She feels her body flowing from one post to another until it, too, encircles what the corral encircles. But the gates are wide open, the circle will be incomplete until dusk when the newly calved cows are rounded in for the night. No, not complete until her new house is finished (“El Paisano” 154).

Still in other passages, the spacing emphasizes the second half of the slash, enriching the experience of reading:

Both connected...somehow. The trunk—a black wrung-out piece of cloth whose whorls and twists point toward some revelation (“El Paisano” 156).

This is a sampling of a literary technique found throughout the autohistoria that point to the author’s willingness to take risks, both formally and in content. My reading of the nontraditional line spacing, serving to connect rather than disconnect, is in line with Annamarie Jagose’s interpretation of the use of the slash in Borderlands as both a technique of separation and a suturing of the same.

In addition to the non-traditional line spacing that formally breaks up the text, Anzaldúa also inserts italicized dialogue of a wedding ceremony, and social commentary on the ceremony, to further disrupt linear conceptions of time and identity. These passages serve to show the many possibilities among which the protagonist has to choose.

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144 While the form of nontraditional line breaks is not a new invention on Anzaldúa’s behalf, indeed this is a common feature of Avant Guard literature. I argue that the thematic intention of this form is a new. Likewise, the effect on the reader is also a new contribution. It could also be argued that this nontraditional line spacing, the caligramatic writing is meant to symbolize the spacing of fence posts and that it then becomes a sexual metaphor of openness to alternative sexualities, as evidenced by Andrea bringing herself to orgasm on a fence post.
Passages in Latin—for example “Ego jungo ves in matrimonium” (“El Paisano” 156 italics in original) reminding the reader of the church sanctioning of the matrimony between one man and one woman, are interspersed with social commentary, “You will go through this ceremony cabezona.” (“El Paisano” 159 italics in original) and “You have to go through with it. You don’t want to end up a solterona like your aunt Ramona?” (“El Paisano” 159 italics in original). While one can assume a priest presides over the wedding, the reader is led to wonder who delivers the social commentary. It is safe to say that it is Andrea who is the responsible locutor in the following parenthetical insertion, and who is asked to provide proof of baptism: “I never was baptized because I never was born. Mamagrande gave birth to me in her kettle. Mamá’s baby was born dead. I was put in its place so she wouldn’t grieve its death” (“El Paisano” 162). These parenthetical insertions remind the reader that time is not linear, but complex and layered. The italicization of these passages serves to highlight “the otherness” that they produce in Andrea. While Anzaldúa does not italicize Spanish words in the text, as the mixing of Spanish and English is natural for a tejana character like Andrea, the language of the Church and of societal norms are indeed foreign to her.

Similar to other Anzaldúaan protagonists, Andrea does not conform to her society’s view on gender expression and condoned sexual desire. Before the reader learns that Andrea prefers to wear men’s pants (“El Paisano” 154), has hairy armpits, does “men’s work,” and notices the López girl for her “nice tits” (“El Paisano” 161), her connection to the land is made clear: atop a mesquite post of the corral, the post “seems an appendage of herself, a fifth limb, one that’s also part of the corral, the corral that’s part of the land (“El Paisano” 153). Once the connection between Andrea and the
corral/land is made, Anzaldúa includes the seemingly innocuous simile of relating the 
posts to people and the corral to society: “if the tops of the posts are not flush with the 
average height their heads are either lopped off to make a tidy corral or they are cast out 
as deficient, unsuitable” (“El Paisano” 153-4) foreshadowing the central conflict of the 
story. (Note the interesting word choice--“heads”--as posts are not usually referred to as 
having heads.) Andrea, for many reasons, is one of the ‘posts’ that is not flush; she is 
defiant to her mother, she is mysterious and feared by her neighbors, and she is 
reluctantly marrying Zenobio, an effeminate male character, so that they “won’t have to 
go through a ‘real’ marriage” (“El Paisano” 170).

These two main characters, Andrea and Zenobio, exhibit non-conformist gender 
expression. (Andrea is portrayed in a masculine way and Zenobio is associated with 
traditional female behaviors: cooking, sewing, and looking beautiful [“El Paisano” 169].) 
Both characters point to the malleability of social constructions of gender. Many 
theorists have contributed to the discussion of the social construction of gender and 
sexuality. Chief among them are West and Zimmerman, who in their article “Doing 
Gender” (1987) extricate sex from gender expression. For the authors, gender is a 
performance that we cannot not do in our everyday lives. Judith Butler, too, applies the 
linguistic work of J.L. Austin in terms of performative utterances that enact the action 
spoken to questions of identity and more specifically to gender. (For example, “I now 
pronounce thee man and wife” cites previous authority and, once uttered, legally binds 
the two referents in marriage, thus serving as an example of a felicitous performative.) 
Butler separates sex from gender; sex being based largely on genitalia and chromosomes 
while gender is a social behavior that one “does.” Acting in a masculine way, for a male-
bodied person, cites previous felicitous performatives of socially accepted masculine behavior and, in effect, renders the male masculine and rewards his gender-appropriate behavior. Butler is quick to point out where gender performatives do not match up with the sex of the performer and notes that any incongruity is often socially punished. And it is precisely the policing of gender and sexual borders that necessitates the wedding of Zenobio and Andrea.

The setting of the story, the dinner at the bride’s house the night before a wedding in Texas sometime in the 1940s-50s, is created by compulsory heterosexuality imposed by society. Marriage is one way to conform so that neither Andrea nor Zenobio are “lopped off” to fit in with the society or “cast out as deficient” (“El Paisano” 153-4). In her 1980 article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich explains how heteronormative and homophobic societies leave little option for nonconformists, and how those reared under these circumstances are guided from an early age to follow the “straight and narrow” path of heterosexuality and marriage regardless of personal sexual inclinations and desires by marrying. Both Andrea and Zenobio are engaging in a performance of compulsory heterosexuality, but this is a queer performance because both of them know that the ritual will only provide them with some social safety, of superficially masking their queerness that the family/town has already

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145 Due to her inattention to physical bodies, Butler has been highly criticized for her assumptions of unmarked whiteness with little critical attention paid to race, class and other socio-economic matters. Butler’s opaque language and philosophical approach to epistemology have been charged with being elitist to the point of impracticality.

146 Adrienne Rich’s work parallels Sedgwick’s study of men in British novels, in that Rich explores female same-sex relationships in 19th-century epistolary correspondence that lead to her theory of the lesbian continuum. Of course, their work also differs in a number of important ways. Unfortunately, that discussion falls out of the scope of this chapter.
noticed. With the abundance of homosexual desire at the reception (Zenobio’s sexual encounters with José Manuel, Don Efrain’s tendency to stand too close to Zenobio and talk in whispers, Andrea dancing with Belinda López), I wonder if Sedgwick’s idea of a glass closet is appropriate here: while society will not allow the characters to live openly as sexual nonconformists, their difference is an open secret. Everyone in the town knows that Andrea and Zenobio are not heterosexual, so why go through with the wedding? For Andrea, this marriage will secure her future in terms of maintaining her land. As a female she is unable to inherit property. Her union with Zenobio will allow him to inherit her land for her and allow her to maintain her spiritual connection to it. For Zenobio, this marriage will compensate for his ‘failed’ gender expression and grant him full status as a Chicano male.

The autohistoria begins with Andrea’s awareness of the land:

…she watches the white sky dwarf the chaparral, the cattle and horses, the house, and the portal with the guests moving under it. The sun/dominates the land. Always. La tierra. Everywhere, punctuated here and there with mesquite thickets and clumps of prickly pear. (“El Paisano” 153)

The sun produces an unbearable heat that necessitates a temporary building to provide shelter to the wedding guests. It is not much of a stretch to say that Anzaldúa may be playing on the words “sun” and “son,” symbolizing patriarchy. The author links marriage, even between two queers, to the makeshift construction of the portal, noting that both are temporary shelters from the dominating sun/son. Much like the portal, “erected with corrugated aluminum of different lengths and cedar branches that still distill their piney fragrance, looks unnatural,” the marriage between Andrea and Zenobio is likewise constructed (“El Paisano” 156).
Queerer than homosexual

Early in the story we learn that Andrea is menstruating—“anda en la garra”—and that during her menses, “she feels fragile, expansive, the limits of her body stretched beyond her skin, she flows out like a sheet, encompassing, covering trees, people, everything around her” (“El Paisano” 154). Her identity and her physical body are thus both presented as fluid. In the blink of an eye she is capable of moving from the top of the mesquite post to the monte where the cattle take shelter. Fluid in the queer theory sense of identity as relational and provisional, Andrea is also fluid in her sense of a spiritual connectedness to nature. This analysis builds on Keating’s observation that “the protagonist in this story enacts Anzaldúa’s holistic, participatory epistemology and her definition of queer, a definition that includes but goes far beyond sexual identity” (The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 51).

In reflecting upon her feelings of connectedness to nature, Andrea ponders. “She wonders: what encircles, what excludes, what sets apart” (“El Paisano” 154). She certainly does not set herself apart from the rancho where she lives. The reader quickly learns that Andrea can bring herself to orgasm on a post: “She shifts her bottom, the post is now on the left side of her cunt. Gently, she sways back and forth. If she does it just right she can bring herself to orgasm” (“El Paisano” 154). She can also bring herself to

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147 The character of Andrea shares many similarities with other Anzaldúaan protagonists, especially the autobiographical Prieta of “La Prieta” and the Prieta of “Reading LP” discussed later in this chapter. And in a 1991 interview with AnaLouise Keating, Anzaldúa, speaking of her never published novel-in-stories, Prieta: The Dark One, states that the character of Andrea in “El Paisano” has morphed into the character of Prieta (161). That is, her preferred reoccurring protagonist has developed from Andrea to Prieta.
orgasm while riding a horse and comments that the orgasm on a mesquite post is "not as good as during a fast run, the wind whipping the mare’s mane, her own hair across her mouth, no one hears her" ("El Paisano" 154). Given the physical appearance of Andrea and her contempt for societal mores, it is not surprising that the horse that induces the more pleasurable sensation is a mare, a female. Being connected to the land and animals, Andrea is able to share rhythms of the horse for her own pleasure. She does not separate herself from animals or the land, but rather uses this connection to form a deeper bond between herself and the land.

From neighborhood gossip, she knows that people talk about her behind their back. They liken her and her odd behavior to her grandmother, Mamagrande, who is thought to be a bruja. In addition to befriending rattlesnakes, taming mad dogs and running a ranch better than her male neighbors, Andrea drinks beer (which women are not supposed to drink) and can see the future, "and what else can she do that others can’t, besides remembering events before they happen?" ("El Paisano" 158). She exposes her powers in front of the wedding guest in a confrontation with José Manuel who ‘playfully’ puts a pair of pants on a heifer’s head and slaps her shanks to send her running. The frightened heifer runs straight for Andrea, who jerks the pants off her head, causing the animal to stop abruptly. "Andrea whispers to her and walks into the corral. The wild heifer follows meekly" ("El Paisano" 174). Andrea ignores the guests’ remarks and tells herself that her closeness, her connection "is not a sickness, nor is it evil" ("El Paisano" 174). Andrea must find strength in her queerness, both sexual queerness and spiritual queerness. She must learn that that what sets her apart from the others is what makes her so powerful and so threatening in their eyes.
As a ‘masculine’ female, Andrea poses a threat to the gender status quo, but her connection to nature is perhaps more threatening. She wonders if it is female strength or her tenderness that is so threatening to the males in her life (“El Paisano” 164). Andrea goes to her grandmother for comfort and advice. Without speaking, her grandmother confirms Andrea’s fears and states that her feelings are “a closeness, a connection” that soon “will become comfortable and in time indispensable” (“El Paisano” 173). It is Andrea’s grandmother who immediately links Andrea’s “poder” to commune with nature to her “querer” of women, the connection of spirituality and queerness that sets her apart from the others. The grandmother continues, “because you are wholly yourself. That terrifies people who are prisoners of others’ upbringing, who are molded by others” (“El Paisano” italics in original 173). Here her grandmother simultaneously observes Andrea’s principal tension, between compulsory heterosexuality that ‘molds’ society into a way of thinking and Andrea’s dissident identity. This connection, shared by both Andrea and her grandmother, to nature and certain people, explains why Andrea can feel the pain of the horned toad being held over a swarm of red ants, why she “hears the thud of knives that a couple of adolescent boys are throwing at a tree stump out of sight in the backyard” and why she feels the impact of the young boy crashing into the girls jumping rope after the boy had been chased by an enraged turkey (“El Paisano” 165). Andrea’s connection with animals is so complete that she can feel, and must absorb, the pain other humans inflict on animals. This connection to animals via human cruelty demonstrates the inseparability of Andrea’s body and soul from the universal rhythms of the land and animals. This connection also helps to explain her feelings of expansiveness when drinking a beer “her hands are fluid. Where does the edge of the glass end and her mouth
begin?” (“El Paisano” 162). She recognizes that she has lost some of this connection in relation to her mesquite tree. She remembers “gazing up at the tree and talking to it in its own language when she was about three” (“El Paisano” 156). She knows that she must continue to hone her skills.

The short story is laced with connections and associations between humans, animals and the land, which underlines the other humans’ lost connection to the land. Andrea likens the clinking of guests’ knives on their plates/chickens clucking over their food (“El Paisano” 153) and notices how the mocking bird, like many humans, imitates another bird’s trill. The murmur of the guests becomes quiet “like baby chicks under the mother hen” (“El Paisano” 157). No other character remarks on the parallels Andrea draws between humans and animals. The only relationships other people (with the exception of the boy in the purple shirt) have with animals is one of cruelty. The young boys torture toads; José Manuel cages a bird and teases a heifer for amusement. The two things in nature that Andrea feels most connected to are a mesquite tree she has climbed since she was a child and the water source of the windmill she constructed with the help of her brothers. Commenting on the depth of the windmill’s root and the underground water source that it taps, Andrea reflects on how “she wants to tap that deep place too. Maybe if she stayed still long enough her feet would worm roots into the moist core” (“El Paisano” 156). She knows that her two totems--The Papalote, (the windmill) and The Mesquite (capitalization in the original)--are “both connected...somehow” (“El Paisano” 156). It is the two-way movement symbolized by the inner roots of the windmill and the

Anzaldúa discusses a similar event in her life in Borderlands. She states: “I remember listening to the voices of the wind as a child and understanding its messages” (Borderlands 36).
outer heights of the mesquite that Andrea wishes to emulate. The two-way movement is also found in the tracks of the roadrunner Andrea frees from its cage, “two toes pointing forward, two toes point backward-to mislead the evil spirits, people say” (“El Paisano” 169). It is interesting to note that Andrea always portrays nature as female, as evidenced in the mesquite tree whose trunk “oozes a black gummy secretion from a lipless vagina mouth” (“El Paisano” 155), the mare that she rides to achieve orgasm and the heifer she tames after José Manuel sends it running with pants on its head. Andrea’s connection to the windmill and the mesquite is known to others as Don Efrain’s daughter presents her with a cow’s pelvic bone with the windmill and mesquite painted on it as a gift (“El Paisano” 160). Some view this connection to nature as an asset that allows her to manage her ranch more effectively than do her male neighbors. Others look to this connection as something to be feared as many superstitions of bruja power circulate among the men at the wedding reception. Andrea’s connection to nature, like other aspects of her queerness, does not go unnoticed by the townspeople, but neither do the townspeople engage Andrea in conversation about this connection.

Andrea’s tono,149 or her animal counterpart, is her pet rattlesnake Víbora. The reader learns of this friendship from gossip that Andrea overhears: “Fue un escándalo…sleeping naked with la serpiente” (“El Paisano” 163). Andrea had had the snake as a pet since it was a baby, “no more than a foot long and thin as a tapeworm. Now it was over eight feet long and as thick as her thigh” (“El Paisano” 163). For the

149 Anzaldúa’s tono is also a serpent, discussed in Borderlands (26); the snake is a recurrent image found throughout her corpus. See Zita’s and Lioi’s articles for a further discussion of the metaphorical use of serpents in Borderlands. Especially interesting is Lioi’s claim that “the function of the snake in ancient Gnostic texts [was] as a female mediator of cosmic wisdom” (Lioi 81).
townspeople, Andrea’s having a pet rattlesnake was indeed a scandal: they “could stomach/her taming wild bulls and mad dogs/but not a snake” (“El Paisano” 163) perhaps because the snake was venomous, but more likely because of the symbolism associated with snakes and the forbidden knowledge that Andrea seem to be able to tap into through this totem. In light of this relationship, José Manuel’s wedding gift of a roadrunner, a “killer of rattlers” (“El Paisano” 168), is all the more symbolically significant.

Importantly, Andrea does not wish harm upon the roadrunner even to save Víbora; she knows that all living things need to be free. Fearful of Andrea’s relationship to the rattlesnake, the wedding guests equate Andrea with a wild horse:

...they would like to throw a saddle on her, dig their spurs deep into her sides, pull hard on the bridle until her mouth runs red, loses its adamancy. Or tie her to a post like a wild heifer; tail between her legs, head caught in the trough and milk her. Sand down her dentata to a toothless grin. (“El Paisano” 157)

Again, everyone in her small Texas ranch town is familiar with Andrea’s unique awareness and connection to nature. Some fear this connection and wish to “lop off” Andrea’s head as they would do to an irregular post when constructing a fence. It is clear that difference is not tolerated by the townspeople, and that Andrea grates against their definition of normal.

Andrea can connect with nature almost instantly, “She has to—no, not think, just allow the quiet to seep into her body and wait for the flash to strike ‘the knowing’” (“El Paisano” 159). She never tires of looking at the land. Andrea could conceive of leaving

150 This “knowing” is what Anzaldúa later describes as conocimiento defined in The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader as “…like la facultad, conocimiento often unfolds within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perception” (320).
her family and her community, but her connection to the land introduces doubt as to whether or not Andrea actually leaves at the end of the story. In the same time it takes the roadrunner to cloud and uncloud its eye, Andrea bilocates and moves from her position on the post to the lagoon ("El Paisano" 157-8). It is only when a thorn scratches her cheek and sends her back to the corral, that the men’s voices grow louder ("El Paisano" 158) and she is once again rooted to the reality in which she is hostess to her own wedding party. The ability to perceive other realities or to travel to other realities threatens the social norms of the time. The land comforts her amidst the confusion of the wedding party and her inner confusion about the permeability of realities. Andrea “waits for the everydayness to fold its wings around her again. Warm and safe. Home” ("El Paisano" 157). She is able to touch the spiritual within and without her, marking the border of her skin as unimportant and thereby destabilizing the border between the spiritual and the material.\

The tension between the lure of the land and societal rules agonize Andrea. Ultimately, though, her desire to live her life according to her own rules impels her to make a scene at the wedding party. After she and Zenobio inaugurate the dancing at the party, as is the custom, Andrea approaches Belinda López, who has been “turning down man after man, all bunched up around her like cattle around a salt lick, tongues falling out” ("El Paisano" 171), to dance with her. Dancing with Belinda, Andrea becomes connected to the music and unaware that everyone else has left the dance floor, her “pelvis mak[ing] circles around Belinda’s navel” ("El Paisano" 171). When Belinda urges her to stop, Andrea tells her “I’m tired of all the millions of things we’re not
supposed to do” (“El Paisano” 171) highlighting her frustration with the status quo and foreshadowing her imminent departure. Much like the wild paisano had yearned for its freedom; Andrea realizes she too must escape the narrow confines of her society. Where she will go is uncertain; she just knows that she needs to go “away from here” (“El Paisano” 175). She and Zenobio talk about the possibility of finding acceptance for their gender and sexual non-conformity in the “gavacho” (“El Paisano” 173) world, but given the racial climate of the 1940s-50s, it is unlikely that they will find peace in the “white” world. And given her spiritual connection to nature and supernatural powers with animals, it is unlikely that she will find a place where all of her is accepted and encouraged. Ultimately, Anzaldúa might posit “El Mundo Zurdo”152 as her destination point; she may be too queer for any existing society. It is in El Mundo Zurdo that Anzaldúa’s connection between spirituality and queerness is most evident. El Mundo Zurdo is the refuge for queers of all kinds to come together to construct a new world where differences are celebrated rather than erased. Queers and the spiritually inclined are able to inhabit El Mundo Zurdo as wholly themselves.

Compulsory Heterosexuality Highlights Difference

Ironically, it is within this site of compulsory heterosexuality where the non-heterosexual qualities of the society are most on display. In fact, Zenobio’s former lover

152 El Mundo Zurdo, as defined by AnaLouise Keating, “indicates communities based on commonalities, visionary locations where people from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and concerns coexist and work together to bring about revolutionary change.” (The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 322). “El Mundo Surdo” is also the title given to reading series and writing workshops Anzaldúa initiated in the 1970s. The Chicano “S” was replaced to a “Z” in the printing of This Bridge Called My Back without the consent of the author.
and Andrea’s cousin, José Manuel, causes some of the main drama at the reception. Anzaldúa complicates the faux marriage between two queer characters by introducing a triangle of desire between José Manuel, Zenobio and Andrea. This triangle of desire is a queered version of the triangle-of-desire motif Sedgwick discusses in *Between Men*, where two men, who appear to be fighting over a woman, are really more concerned with the other man than with the woman. Here, all three are queer characters with homosexual desires in a homophobic society, and the woman rather than playing the role of an inconsequential actor represents the biggest threat to the other two men. Andrea has the power to expose José Manuel as a man who has sex with men, and she could also break off the marriage to Zenobio and force him to marry someone less understanding of his non-conforming gender expression and sexual desire. In Andrea’s inner monologue, the reader learns that she questions Zenobio’s choice of lover in José Manuel: she states; “What had ever possessed Zenobio. It’s not like José Manuel is the only one around. There’s Pete and Mando” (“El Paisano” 167). She sympathizes with Zenobio and realizes that she should have warned him about her cousin: “poor Zenobio, duped, seduced, betrayed” (“El Paisano” 167). Andrea encounters José Manuel as he arrives to the dinner with the caged roadrunner as a wedding gift. When the verbal argument between Andrea and José Manuel escalates into a physical fight, Don Efraín, Andrea’s queer but married uncle, intervenes, quietly imploring Andrea to “consider Zenobio” (“El Paisano” 168) as he whisks her from the site of conflict. As Andrea releases the captured bird, it is the boy in the purple shirt, who earlier in the story had released a horned toad from the cruelty of other children, who now asks Andrea to teach him how to commune with nature and animals. The color of his shirt is a thinly veiled reference to
homosexuality and the “lavender menace”\textsuperscript{153} that popularized the color purple as a homosexual signpost.

In a society where “people do not tolerate what’s different” ("El Paisano" 169), the myth of heteronormativity is exposed by the presence of so many characters with homosexual desires and/or gender nonconformity. With so many queer Chicano characters in this story, Anzaldúa may be undermining Chicano associations of homosexuality with whiteness. None of the characters identify as white, yet many of them, if only briefly (such as when Andrea asks Belinda López to dance), express/perform their homosexual desire under the radar of compulsory heterosexuality. Andrea’s masculine performance and Zenobio’s feminine gender performance destabilize the notion that masculine is necessarily linked to male, or feminine to female. These “exceptions” to the gender rule are predated by elder queer role models like Don Efrain, who shows how a Chicano male can perform life-long heterosexuality while simultaneously indulging in same-sex desire. Furthermore, Andrea and Zenobio serve as queer role models for younger gender/sex non-conformists such as the boy in the purple shirt.

Through two characters in particular, Andrea and the boy in the purple shirt, Anzaldúa links homosexual desire, or queerness, with a connection to nature. This

\textsuperscript{153} See Karla Jay’s \textit{Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation} (1999) for more discussion on the lavender menace. Randy Conner also mentions purple as a queer color: “Color symbolic of royalty, magic and spiritual enlightenment, frequently associated with androgyny and same-sex passion, its various hues including lavender, lilac, magenta, mauve and violet. ...In the early twentieth century, purple, especially violet, served in the West as a signifier of lesbian desire. As lavender, the color was claimed by the contemporary gay liberation movement...” (272).
connection or power to nature is perceived as threatening to others, especially the men, and among them, especially José Manuel, who through his macho gender performance and homosexual relationship with Zenobio has more to gain by cosmetically conforming to society’s ideals of what a man should be. In fact, José Manuel brings up the right of inheritance in his confrontation with Andrea when she tells him that she will evict him from her land. He responds “Your land? You’re a woman—or are you? Women don’t inherit” (“El Paisano” 166-7). To hide his own social infractions, he attacks Andrea for her gender transgressions. Curiously, Andrea does not inflict harm; instead, José Manuel harms himself on her knife; “As he tries to push her a third time she takes a knife out of her jeans and his hand/runs into it” (“El Paisano” 168). José Manuel is pulled to the side by a friend and leaves Andrea staring at him. Her stare is accompanied by her inner monologue: “in the future I will not need a knife” (“El Paisano” 168) hinting at the potential development of her spiritual/supernatural powers.

José Manuel’s performance of Chicano masculinities—by having (an) effeminate male lover(s), by confronting Andrea’s perceived usurpation of masculine authority— inversely mirrors Zenobio’s ‘failed’ performance as a Chicano man. This failure to conform to the masculine code is evidenced by his mother’s isolation at the party. Introduced alongside Andrea’s mother who “made it a point to dress better than the other woman” (“El Paisano” 154), Zenobio’s mother, Doña Inés, is first mentioned in her distinction from the other party guest. Unlike Andrea’s mother who is dressed “in a pinstriped two-piece suit, white blouse, black hat veiled at the back, white open-toed pumps” (“El Paisano” 154), Doña Inés sits “under a crownless parachute hat her face is emaciated and passive. Her beige jacket hangs loose from her thin shoulders, her black
wide hemmed skirt drags on the dirt” (“El Paisano” 155). Clearly the repercussions for raising a son who does not live up to society’s standards have taken their toll on Zenobio’s mother. Zenobio, however, never seems flustered or self-conscious, “he always looks beautiful” (“El Paisano” 169). He has found a sanctuary of sorts with Andrea since both can ‘hide’ under the marriage they are about to enact; according to Andrea’s mother, Zenobio “keeps himself hidden all afternoon in the house with [Andrea’s] sisters draping themselves around him like an harem” (“El Paisano” 154-5). Just as the townspeople are unable or unwilling to acknowledge sexual and gender dissidents as queers, Andrea’s mother is unable to see that Zenobio and Andrea’s sisters inhabit more of a henhouse than a harem.

Andrea’s mother is unnamed and serves as the transmitter of social and cultural norms. Because she is constantly challenged by Andrea and, to a certain point, acquiesces, her relationship with Andrea is complex. When Andrea’s mother comments on Doña Inés—“All she talks about is how well her ‘baby’ can cook. I suppose if he wanted to she would let him take up sewing” (“El Paisano” 155)—Andrea speaks up for Zenobio, arguing with her mother that Zenobio should be allowed to do what he wants; she defies her mother’s orders to make herself more presentable as a bride and to perform the role of a female by serving the wedding guests food (“El Paisano” 155). Andrea recognizes and blames her mother for perpetuating and reifying cultural gender norms:

…at once regretting her habit of contradiction her mother, her habit of heaping all her griefs, from infancy to womanhood, on her mother’s back. She knows that on top of the stored-up grievances, she will lay future ones. But the thought is an old one, too familiar to explore, and almost at once she forgets her mother. The land. She never tires of looking at the land. (“El Paisano” 155)
Her constant struggles with societal norms are temporarily alleviated by Andrea’s connection to the land. Here queerness and spirituality become eternally linked for Andrea. Unfortunately, Andrea’s respite in the bosom of the natural world proves too fleeting for the queer character, who decides that she must leave the land to find a community that understands her many manifestations of queerness.

Heteronormativity becomes the cage that constrains dissident sexual desire and gender expression.\(^\text{154}\) There is no discussion of the option to ‘come out’\(^\text{155}\) as a homosexual. Andrea doesn’t really have a choice but to marry because, as Efraín states “it’s all been decided for you” (“El Paisano” 160).\(^\text{156}\) (It is also Efraín who carves cattle bones found in the desert to show Andrea how to adapt and survive in an inhospitable climate like the homophobic one in which they both live.) Andrea’s linkage to the land and animals is what compels Andrea to set the bird free, and this connection also complicates Andrea’s decision at the end of the story to leave. The inner struggle Andrea

\(^{154}\) Anzaldúa discusses cages as boundaries in her interview with Anne E. Reuman when discussing identity labels: “So I feel very close to the white dykes, and I have a love of them and their community and their art and their writing and their theories, but it began to be very constrictive in that I thought I was in a cage and they were defining the bars; and I needed to break out of that cage, just like I needed to break out of the cage of my family and the nationalistic cage of just being a Chicana and nothing more” (36).

\(^{155}\) For queers of color, there is rarely the option to ‘come out’ and live as a homosexual in their community. As McRuer notes, “coming out here becomes a suspiciously white and middle-class move toward ‘self-respect,’ not revolutionary social change, and many contemporary coming-out narratives might be seen as products of this shift toward individualism and essentialism” (McRuer 36).

engages in throughout the story, regarding whether or not to marry Zenobio and stay on her ranch, changes Andrea’s perception of her community. This change in perception makes Andrea more aware that she will be unable to live as herself, fully Andrea, as a married woman on the ranch. This perception shift necessitates social action. By seeing the inability of other queers to enact social change in her environment (Don Efraín continues to be married to a woman while he flirts with Zenobio and counsels Andrea to do the same, José Manuel presumably will continue to engage in sex with men while publicly performing heterosexuality), Andrea decides that she must leave. The inner work of self-inspection has propelled her to make the public action of leaving her beloved land in an attempt to find a more hospitable climate.

**Cracks in this Reality: “Reading LP”**

As mentioned earlier, Judith Butler’s notions of gender performativity are born out of the pragmatic linguistic work of J. L. Austin in *How To Do Things With Words* (1962), and Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). For Austin, as we have seen, performative utterances differ from constative utterances in that they cannot be true or false; rather, the performative utterance actually accomplishes what the utterance purports to accomplish. Butler applied this logic to her deconstructionist discussion of gender and sex as performative acts, which create and reify gender in the act of performing it. To quote Butler, “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 33). Her foucauldian reading of gender and sex effectively questions
the naturalness of gender and sex as fixed categories and gives birth to a new generation of scholars working in the field of queer studies. She, and other poststructuralists, debunk the myth of an essential core, and show how gender is a social construct that serves particular purposes and institutions, especially obligatory heterosexuality.

Butler views gender as “regulatory fictions” (Gender Trouble 141) and demonstrates that, because there is no such thing as an inner core, gender must be constituted through repetition. Butler’s line of philosophical reasoning seems to be liberating to the self (voluntarist); free from the shackles of fixed binaries, it seemed as though the subjects are liberated to perform gender and sex as they please. For Butler, the self does not exist before language. Her 1990 text Gender Trouble was met with high acclaim and much criticism. Susan Bordo specifically criticized Butler for her inattention to physical bodies, stating that gender cannot be reduced to language. For those whose languages are not recognized and made legitimate, such as women of colors, reducing gender to language is highly problematic and eludes specificity bound in the discourses of race,157 class, nationality and ability, for example. Butler followed with Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (1993) in an attempt to address some of this criticism, clarifying that even though the self is constituted of and through actions, gender is not something that can be put on or taken off at will.

157 Marlon Bailey, among others, has noted queer theory’s shortcomings in terms of race (The Labor of Diaspora: Ballroom Culture and the Making of a Black Queer Community 37).
“Queer” for Anzaldúa is not limited to a sexual definition of non-heterosexual.158 For Anzaldúa, queer is thinking beyond the binaries (all of them) to create a third space:159 Hence the multiple sites of boundaries and the multiple identities of the border crossers, physical, spiritual, sexual, psychological, in her work. This is where Anzaldúa’s thinking is performative: not in that repetition and citationality create and solidify gender norms, but in stating that “nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (Borderlands 109). Part of her Spiritual Activism, her “new tribalism,” where the subject is defined by what it includes rather than excludes, is the realization that desired realities first take root in the mind. Anzaldúa’s queer revolution questions, deconstructs and finally occurs outside of the binary system.160

Traditionally, Chicana identity has been formed by rigid power structures created/perpetuated by misogynist intellectuals such as Octavio Paz who have held fast to notions of essentialism. By embracing non-dualistic, non-essentialist notions of identity, figures such as Anzaldúa are widening the scripts available to other Chicanas. In my reading of the short story, “Reading LP,” which Anzaldúa begun writing in the 1970s but which was only recently published as part of the Gloria Anzaldúa Reader, I will show how Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism explodes dualistic thinking and opens completely new

158 Moraga publicly criticized Anzaldúa for not directing all of her attention to her ‘lesbianism’ and her sexuality in her review of Borderlands/La Frontera. Moraga, Cherré. “‘Algo secretamente amado’: A Review of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,” Third Woman (Fall 1989): 151-56. This documents Anzaldúa movement away from identity politics (and Moraga) based on assumptions that sexual inclinations, practices and desires are expressions of a person’s core identity. Anzaldúa instead proposes a poststructuralist positionality of the New Mestiza.
159 Anzaldúa also predates Homi K. Bhabha’s discourse on liminality.
160 Anzaldúa’s vision of new reality predates and mirrors José Muñoz’s notion of “world making,” a strategy for queers to create alternative views of the world (qtd. in Bailey 48-9).
realms of investigation. Key to Anzaldúa’s spiritual mindset is the idea of nepantla, defined as the “interface space between all the worlds” (The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 250). This liminal space, this nepantla is the “Borderlands” with a capital ‘B’ that the author explored in her 1987 book. In “Reading LP,” Anzaldúa employs her semi-autobiographical protagonist, La Prieta, to show the permeability of all borders. The code switching in the text immediately shows the inseparability between Spanish and English for a tejana writer. Jarred by a near death experience (also autobiographical), and a book that she can’t put down, LP comes to awareness of different ways of viewing reality that in turn change her identity. LP is a queer character in the sense that she is a masculine female in South Texas, who works her family’s land, and has a same-sex lover, Bar-Su. But her relationship with a piece of fiction that allows her certain nexus with other realities is perhaps queerer to the modern reader than is her sexuality.

“Reading LP” has as its protagonist a tejana dyke rancher, who is also a graduate student, and tells her experiences as she repeatedly reads a mysterious book with a glyph title. Each reading of the book produces shifts in LP’s perception of reality. As LP becomes more entrenched in the reality of the book, she questions the stability of her own

161 As noted in The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader, “Reading LP” went through several drafts “stretching back to the 1970s when the protagonist was a man, named PQ, who was related to Andrea de la Cruz, the protagonist of “El paisano is a bird of good omen” (250). This story was to be included in Anzaldúa’s novel-in-stories, La Prieta, The Dark One which was not completed before her death in 2004.

162 Anzaldúa discusses her personal fear of letting go, of knowing, that often accompanies a near-death experience: “I am afraid of drowning. Resistance to sex, intimate touching, opening myself to the alien other where I am out of control, not on patrol. The outcome of the other side unknown, the reins falling and the horses plunging blindly over the crumbling path rimming the edge of a cliff, plunging into its thousand foot drop” (Borderlands 48).
reality, effectively slipping through ‘cracks’ in her reality that allow for physical transmutation and time travel.

Queer theorist Judith Halberstam uses “the topic of female masculinity” to explore a queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity” (9). Not only does Halberstam want to celebrate mannish women, but she also proposes that by looking at masculinities in females, we can better understand masculinity in males as a social construct. Her “queer methodology” sheds light on Gloria Anzaldúa’s approach. Both refuse to be limited by disciplinary boundaries in the academy; in Halberstam’s words, “The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam 13). Halberstam’s research agenda, to turn the stigma of masculinities found in women into strength, mirrors Anzaldúa’s vision of the new mestiza:

> The New Mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity, […] She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode-nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Borderlands 101)

Looking at masculinities without men certainly complicates the masculine/feminine binary and questions notions of gender as “natural,” but this approach also privileges gender expression over other aspects of identity. In Halberstam’s attempt to collapse the

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163 I believe a more appropriate label would be masculinities. This oversight is representative of Halberstam’s token attention to difference of race and class.
164 Halberstam fails to cite Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne’s 1994 Dislocating Masculinities: Comparative Ethnographies as a precursor to her work on female masculinities.
masculine/feminine binary, she leaves little space for thinking about what comes after this binary is deconstructed; she offers no reconstruction. Anzaldúa’s theories seem to offer a wider view of dualistic thinking, creating a third space outside of the binary where border dwellers of all types can find community based on their positions of being different. This is the world which Andrea from “El Paisano is bird of good omen” hopes to find as she leaves her family and community. But, here it would seem that “the new mestiza” consciousness, much like Anzaldúa describes queer theory, could run the risk of becoming an umbrella term that erases individual difference under the label of “Difference.”

It is my intention to show that the new mestiza consciousness proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa both predates and transcends the work of gender performativity as proposed by Judith Butler, West and Zimmerman, and Judith Halberstam. By focusing on the deconstruction of binary thinking, Anzaldúa offers a wider vision of the world she would like to inhabit. Crucial to Anzaldúa’s ways of seeing the world (her definition of

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165 Because Anzaldúa’s theories are based on a consciousness, a positionality, not an identity, do they run the risk of becoming so inclusive as to make “membership” meaningless? This is a question I posed at the First Gloria Anzaldúa conference in San Antonio, where I was assured of the inclusivity of Anzaldúa’s message and witnessed the power of community forming around her words. I don’t think the theory runs the risk of losing “value,” but I do think that some academics will deem the work not theoretical enough, or others may be put off by the spirituality/interconnectedness of her work: after all, the academy perpetuates the mind/body divide.

166 Anzaldúa first presented the groundwork for the New Mestiza Consciousness in Borderlands/La Frontera (1987) and continued to refine the term throughout her writing career. See the talk delivered at St. Olaf College “The New Mestiza Nation” (1992).

167 Anzaldúa’s work also predates (and often transcends) work in the fields of Masculinities Studies, White Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Disability Studies, and Interdisciplinary Studies
theory) has at its root the body: the “theory of the flesh,”\textsuperscript{168} as a starting point and the feeling of being an outsider.

Triggered by a series of unusual events that accompany the protagonist’s reading of a book, the protagonist LP hears a voice that states: “When you read fiction you enter its reality. When it is compelling enough it will enter your reality” (“Reading LP” 261). Her multiple experiences of reading the book produce the sensation of stepping out of time.\textsuperscript{169} For example, while fixing her truck, she becomes displaced from the self, hears a voice and feels as though a spirit enters her body, showing that there are no borders between spirit and non-spirit world. She finds “holes” and “cracks” into other realities; she goes through one of these cracks on her bedpost and comes out at her girlfriend’s mother’s house (and actually gained time doing it). The intrusion of fiction posits the book as a trigger of a preschool memory of visiting other realities through fiction, of being carried away to different worlds while listening to her teacher read aloud (Reading LP” 259).

“Reading LP” has undergone numerous changes in its many versions housed in the Anzaldúa Papers at the Nettie Lee Benson Library. As Keating notes, the protagonist was originally a man “named PQ who was related to Andrea de la Cruz” (The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 250), the protagonist from “El Paisano” discussed earlier. Anzaldúa has

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\textsuperscript{168} Cherrie Moraga, coeditor with Anzaldúa on This Bridge Called My Back (1981) proposed this “theory of the flesh” stating that the body and the daily-lived experiences of the queer colored body should form the basis for theory. “Theory of the flesh” is akin to E. Patrick Johnson’s “Quare praxis,” that appropriates his grandmother’s vernacular “quare” to describe his theory rooted in and for queer people of color.

\textsuperscript{169} This is similar to the Coatlicue state that Anzaldúa describes in Borderlands that allows her to “slow down, to leave the everyday world, and to exit the demands of the literal-centered Anglo-European reality” (Zita 174).
noted that this story is about metamorphosis and transformation, dealing specifically with changes in perception. This autohistoria is an exemplary fictionalization of Anzaldúa’s reinscription of nepantla, the liminal space between worlds. As do other Anzaldúan protagonists, LP, or La Prieta, undergoes a series of events that enable her to change her perception of reality, and that ultimately end in a shift in her identity. This perception shift and identity creation is fueled in part by LP’s insistence on the interconnectedness of all things and that the construction of boundaries is unnecessary and only socially constructed. I say “only” socially constructed with the idea that if someone made them, that therein lies the possibility that someone else can deconstruct them and reconstruct them differently.

Like Andrea in “El Paisano,” LP feels an intimate connection with nature, which emphasizes the author’s theory of planetary interconnectedness. LP considers herself part of a continuum. In her family’s cemetery she does not distinguish between the alive and the dead; they are all the same family, of the same land.

This interconnectedness perhaps allows her to cross borders more freely. She crosses gender and sexuality borders by self-identifying as a masculine marimacha. She even changes the name of the family ranch from “El tigre” to “La tigra” to match her own gender. This self-proclaimed “full time marimacha” realizes the permeability of sexual desire and acknowledges her temptation to join ex-girlfriend Llosí and her husband in a ménage à trois, recognizing that “she’d been as captivated by [the husband] as Llosí had been” (Reading LP” 262). La

170 This connection to deceased ancestors was also discussed in Borderlands when Anzaldúa recalls how Anglos cheated her grandmother out of her land and fenced off their family cemetery: “We couldn’t even get in to visit the graves, much less bury her [grandmother] there. Today, it is still padlocked. The sign reads: ‘Keep out. Trespassers will be shot’” (Borderlands 8). This may be an example of a forced autobiographical separation reworked as connection in her fiction.
Prieta crosses still other borders when she drinks directly from a cow’s udder and then imagines drinking milk from her girlfriend’s breast (Reading LP” 257). At dusk, the liminal space between day and night, she dances and the air feels so thick that she feels like she is suspended between earth and sky (Reading LP” 259). La Prieta also crosses the border of appropriate attire; she patches the fence in a shirt and boots with no pants--only to realize that skin is a porous border and that she needs denim for protection (Reading LP” 261). Seemingly no border can constrain La Prieta. She even believes that the walls aren’t solid, that there are entremados, spaces between where LP feels like she could stick her head through the wall (Reading LP” 256). And toward the end of the story, she does in fact go through the wall into a different reality. This is the reality envisioned in the mind, which can ultimately become the physical reality.

Getting beyond the idea of possible alternative realities seems a logical step for a character who is uninhibited by other borders. While not necessarily logical, exploring other realities seems like the next step for La Prieta. The idea of holes or cracks in this reality, which allow nexus with other realities, is presented as a similar experience to that of reading fiction, where the reader is consumed by the words and transported to the “reality” of the short story/novel/etc. With each reading of the book, it is easier for her to enter into other realities; each time it takes her less time to read it cover to cover. By the end, she doesn’t even need the book to explore other realities. She comes to the awareness that these realities exist, and she musters the courage to explore them. Here, LP is again an autobiographical reflection of the author. Anzaldúa believed in the

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171 Here, Anzaldúa’s research in Latin American literature especially that of Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges, is evident. It should be noted that Anzaldúa differs significantly from Cortázar and Borges in her introduction of feminist elements to her speculations of alternative realities/worlds.
existence of alternative realities and the interconnectedness of all things.\textsuperscript{172} If her body was somehow connected to the wall, there was no reason why she couldn’t pass through the wall.\textsuperscript{173} Her widely accepted theories of the new mestiza and \textit{Borderlands} dovetail neatly with her theories of metaphysical realities and alternative planes of existence: yet this is the spiritual dimension of \textit{Borderlands} that is often glossed over.

The character LP feels pulled in many directions; she must choose between spending time with her girlfriend, working on the ranch and succeeding in school. She never has enough time for any one part of life. Through multiple readings of her book, however, she finds herself between two realities and suggests a new identity construction based on her new consciousness; “It’s like there’s two of me” (Reading LP” 270) she says to her girlfriend. And with the possibility of gaining time through alternative realities, this seems to be a solution to La Prieta’s problems. LP even suggests that she and her girlfriend explore this other side together, and the girlfriend responds with fear: “Sure. La gente will really have something to talk about then. Two women who fuck each other now passing into otros mundos. That will be the absolute limit. We’ll get burned alive” (Reading LP” 270). This statement shows that Anzaldúa is well aware of the radical nature of her spiritual activism and the possible social repercussions. Yet the short story ends with LP taking apart the walls of her house to explore the entremados, the spaces between.

\textsuperscript{172} Anzaldúa was an avid reader of Latin American fiction, especially that of Julio Cortázar, who frequently questioned the single-reality frame by paralleling multiple storylines connected by a nexus. See \textit{Final del juego} (1956) for examples on how Cortázar master’s this technique.

\textsuperscript{173} Randy Conner confirmed Anzaldúa’s use of mind-altering substances to induce challenge perception in his 2009 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa Plenary Speech.
As I posit Anzaldúa as a foremother to queer theory, I continue to wonder why she has not been embraced by the academy with as much fervor as has Judith Butler. Perhaps Anzaldúa’s spirituality makes academics, especially traditional philosophers who maintain a Cartesian duality, turn away from this part of her theory. However, Anzaldúa’s new mestiza consciousness seems to be aligned with thoughts of many feminist theorists who affirm that theory needs be rooted in the personal. Anzaldúa’s clear discourse contrasts with Butler’s opaque writing style; Butler’s insistence that difficult philosophical ideas must be worked through in difficult language attests to her white, educated, privileged status. Anzaldúa cites Virginia Woolf when she says that she writes for those who do not have even a room of their own in which to write—she suggests that people write while on the john or waiting in line for welfare (in this sense she is queering queer like Cathy Cohen, urging us to think outside the system). Is the lack of attention paid to Anzaldúa’s visionary theories another case of academic racism and elitism? Or is Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism overlooked because it is just too queer for the academy?

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174 Cathy Cohen urges queer theorist not to assimilate into the academic mainstream and states that if queer theory intends to be truly revolutionary in its aim for social change, it should align itself with the most marginalized of citizens, the punks, the bulldaggers and the welfare queens.

175 In a manuscript draft to “Speaking in Tongues,” Anzaldúa explicitly outlines her queerness: “Because white eyes do not want to know us, he does not want to know us, he does not bother to learn our language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. Our common oral speech and uncontrived rhythms are just too simple for the ‘educated’ complex minds” (Box 44, folder 20, IMG_8005)
Beyond Queer Theory into the Spiritual

“You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label”
(Anzaldúa “now let us shift…” 558)

This chapter attempts to posit Gloria Anzaldúa as a founding member of queer theory by utilizing her vision of Spiritual Activism as a queer agent for change. Chicana theorist Anzaldúa offers a more radical potential for queer theory than do her mainstream, mostly white, queer theorist counterparts. Tenets of Anzaldúaan theory, specifically her insistence on inclusiveness—which stems from her theory of the radical connectedness of all things—and her rejection of stasis, her insistence on constant fluidity in various aspects of identity, speak directly to queer theory. While traditional queer theory has notoriously refused to engage in critical race theory, Anzaldúaan theory has always factored race into the necessary intersectional analysis of identity formation/negotiation/construction. In addition to her more widely recognized "new mestiza consciousness," Anzaldúa's insistence on spiritual activism as an agent for social change perhaps locates her work outside of traditional Cartesian academic parameters and is thus "queerer" than mainstream queer theory.

Readers only familiar with Gloria Anzaldúa’s 1987 oft-cited Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza may note the disorienting style that Anzaldúa employs to decenter whiteness and English as a primary site of identification in describing her particular lived experience. These same readers may also note that in Borderlands, Anzaldúa seems to provide a homogenous view of queers, as a “chosen” people with the
skills, la facultad, and the lived experience necessary to link people together under the
banner of humanity: “The mestizo and the queer exist at this time and point on the
evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is
intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls” (Borderlands
85). Speaking of queer people in a later interview, she offers a more nuanced view of
queers:

    We have always existed, but we’ve always been persecuted…I think gay
people have a role…to unite people. Not in any grandiose way but just in
calling attention to the fact that we’re all human, we all come from the
same spark…That is the spiritual to me…I think faggots and lesbians are
crossroads, because we come from all colors, all cultures, all nations, all
time periods. (Interviews/Entrevistas 123)

This connection of spirit, of consciousness, is what compels Anzaldúa to do the
work she does. In one of her final published writings before her death in 2004, Anzaldúa
re-employs the metaphor of being a bridge to unite people, to also include being a bridge
home to yourself. In her essay “now let us shift…the path of conocimiento…inner work,
public acts” (this bridge we call home 2002), Anzaldúa utilizes second person narration
that, although it is most probably the author addressing herself, implicates the reader into
c o-creation of meaning as she discusses the awakening of consciousness sparked by a
visual stimulus. For Anzaldúa, the sighting of a black snake, which she routinely uses

176 La facultad: “I think lesbians and faggots have access to this other world….It’s almost
like cultivating an extra sense that straight people don’t have, or that straight people who
are insane or persecuted, or poor whites or creative people have. Most lesbians and
faggots have it because it is a matter of survival. You’re caught between two worlds.
You’re a half and half” (Interviews/Entrevistas 122). “La facultad: Anzaldúa’s term for
an intuitive form of knowledge that includes but goes beyond logical thought and
empirical analysis” (Keating, The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 323).

177 Here again the symbolic importance of snakes in Anzaldúaan cosmology.
metaphorically to denote knowledge, engages all of her senses to tap into an alternative epistemology, whereby she can use that new knowledge to connect the personal and the societal, enacting two-way movement. She states, “Beneath your desire for knowledge writhes the hunger to understand and love yourself” (“now let us shift…” 543).

Anzaldúa’s paradigm shift that moves beyond binary thinking is one way to remember individuals fragmented by society:

> When you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She’s no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anti-colonial struggle, has been to componerlas, to put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit. That’s why for me there’s such a link between the text and the body, between textuality and sexuality, between the body and the spirit. (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 220)

The process of remembering brings with it empowerment and desire to change other’s realities. Anzaldúa’s project of spiritual activism enacts the definition of queer as described by the Asheville Queer Studies Conference: “1) to transgress boundaries, 2) to change lives, and 3) to …” and speaks to the potential of queerness and queer theory to change lived realities. Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism does indeed transgress boundaries and, when enacted, does change lives. One concrete manifestation of spiritual activism as described by Keating is the idea of listening with “raw openness.” She states, “When I listen with raw openness, I expose myself to you; I am willing to be altered by our encounter” (“Shifting Perspectives” 249). This sentiment mirrors Anzaldúa’s perceived vulnerability that many have written about upon meeting her for the first time, her attempt at achieving nakedness with her readers, and her habit of removing podiums and other furniture that separated her from her audience during her lectures. Herein lies the
potentiality of Anzaldúa’s queer praxis. Experiences of queerness, in its many forms, can be internally gathered and directed outward to change our reality.

So I posit the question: Can we unite under a category of interconnected spirit to change our world? Is it utopic to think that the disenfranchised can change our current system of power imbalance? Those in power, like José Manuel in “El Paisano” have no interest in changing the status quo, so it follows that we are the only ones who can do it. I leave you with Anzaldúa’s concise answer to this query in her discussion of nepantlera action:

You seek out allies and, together, begin building the spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice. By compartiendo historias, ideas, las Nepantleras forge bonds across race gender, and other lines, thus creating a new tribalism. Éste quehacer—internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world. (“now let us shift…” 574)

Gloria Anzaldúa was a resolute optimist, believing in the potential for human change. To explain and to encourage this psychological and spiritual growth, she developed a sophisticated epistemology, to guide fellow nepantleras along the path. This epistemology will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Four

Anzaldúa’s Queer Epistemology

This chapter delineates Gloria Anzaldúa’s life-long project of what I am calling a queer epistemology. While Anzaldúa never selected this adjective to describe her search for knowledge and to understand how and why she knew what she knew, I argue that this is a queer project in that it challenges the status quo and provides an alternative epistemological map to Western epistemology for Anzaldúa and her readers.\(^{178}\) Anzaldúa’s search for knowledge is queer to Western epistemological projects -- which are based on Aristotle’s hierarchical dualisms -- both in its similarities to indigenous world views and its parallels to feminist re-visionist philosophy. Anzaldúa also queers feminist epistemology by focusing attention on the power of the imagination and the potential of spiritual activism to effect social change. While the first chapter of my analysis presents a possible link between Anzaldúa’s spirituality with global tenets of shamanism, and the second chapter positions Anzaldúa as a precursor of contemporary queer theory, this third and final chapter combines the author’s spiritual inclinations with her queer tendencies in order to better understand her writings and the development of her philosophy on life. As I mentioned earlier, Anzaldúa viewed herself in very expansive terms, not only in terms of identity formation, but also in the fields where she

\(^{178}\) This queer project is discussed in *Borderlands*: “...I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system which images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only produces both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (81). Anzaldúa is thus challenging the institutions of power and the ‘norms’ they perpetuate.
conducted her research. This research, of course, was self-guided and unrestricted by the disciplinary boundaries established in formal academia. Influential reading, as reflected by the sources cited in her later work, include investigations in the fields of chaos theory, quantum physics (especially the work of David Bohm), as well as steadfast references to Carlos Castañeda and alternative spiritualities. It should not be surprising then, that Anzaldúa’s pursuit of self-knowledge, and her project of leaving a blueprint to allow her readers to do the same, recurs throughout her writing in various genres with various influences.

In tracing the development of Anzaldúan queer epistemology throughout the author’s career and in her published and unpublished texts, I must first navigate Anzaldúan jargon, whose meanings, like much of Anzaldúa’s writings, underwent continuous revision and redefinition throughout Anzaldúa’s career. Theoretical vocabulary, here, benefits from the same fluid nature that is characteristic of Anzaldúa’s approach to identity formation. While this is an exciting and perhaps liberatory theoretical move, the constantly shifting terrain demands a vigilant eye from the

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179 Let us not forget that Anzaldúa’s initial attempt at a doctoral degree was denied because her interest in studying Chicana feminism was deemed an invalid area of study and that she only received her Ph.D. posthumously (“now let us shift…” 548). Throughout her career Anzaldúa modeled an independent scholar positionality that allowed her the freedom to conduct research and write in areas of interest unrestrained by the pressures and structures of higher education.

180 The fact that Carlos Castañeda’s writings were declared to be fictional, effectively calling Castañeda on his hoax that he presented to the world as ethnography, does not seem to dissuade Anzaldúa from referring to his texts and the teachings within them. Perhaps, as Daniel Noel has suggested, the factual base of Castañeda’s books means less to his devout followers than the lessons they included. Noel’s book that explores this paradox, The Soul of Shamanism, was among Anzaldúa’s collection and I am told that this was a very important book for Anzaldúa (personal correspondence with AnaLouise Keating). The transformative power of fiction, as Noel describes it, could easily be used to describe Anzaldúa’s own work.
researcher intent upon understanding Anzaldúa’s oeuvre. Keating provides a glossary of key Anzaldúan words in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, which will act as a principal guide in this exploration, but I will also include Anzaldúa’s multiple definitions from her published texts to round out Keating’s concise, yet multilayered definitions.181 Because I understand Anzaldúa’s philosophical projects as ongoing, I hesitate to point to a single definitive text that explains Anzaldúa’s lifework. Anzaldúa herself, however, does point to the essay “now let us shift…the path of conocimiento…inner work, public acts” (2002) in two of her later writings182 as a suggestion for further reading, possibly due to the concise definitions and thorough explications of new terms such as nepantla and conocimiento offered in that text -- or perhaps out of fatigue, as her health was in steady decline due to diabetes-related complications. In this regard, I will highlight “now let us shift” as the most complete-to-date183 example of Anzaldúan epistemology and will show how she describes each stage of conocimiento in her fiction.

Employing the second person (you) in “now let us shift,” the essay enacts a sort of guided imagery, reminiscent of the sort of auto-shamanism hinted at in chapter one, but perhaps more firmly rooted in the 1980s women’s spirituality movement, whereby the author takes the reader on an imaginal journey to enact specific change. The reader is

181 Keating’s collaboration with Anzaldúa throughout the later part of her career is evident in their multiple co-edited anthologies. A more thorough investigation into Keating’s role as protector of Anzaldúa’s legacy and co-creator of her many theories is the substance of another project. Indeed, an interview with Keating on her role in Anzaldúan studies is a future project this writer would embrace.

182 “You’ll find all these themes in “now let us shift” in *this bridge*” (SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures “email interview” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 293) and Anzaldúa also points to “now let us shift” in her essay on Liliana Wilson’s artwork “Bearing Witness” [2002] also found in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 278.

183 I say “most complete-to-date” as the majority of the Anzaldúan Archive remains unpublished, unanalyzed and under-theorized.
hooked by the use of the interpellational “you,” even though s/he may be conscious of the autobiographical resonances with Anzaldúa’s life in the text, believing that the “you” refers to the reader and thereby is encouraged to identify with the narration. Identification with the narration and attention to the narrative “gaps” in the essay allows the reader to provide his/her own autobiographical details to fill in the storyline. By allowing the self to be guided by Anzaldúa’s imagery and wordsmithing, the reader undergoes the change that the essay encourages, to more fully understand him/herself. In effect, second person narration jars the reader into “shifting” along with the author. This guided journey takes the reader through the seven stages outlined in Anzaldúa’s cosmology. It is my intention to follow this inner field trip, explicating each stage and offering fictionalized accounts from Anzaldúa’s other texts to flesh out the conceptual framework of the mental process described in each of the seven stages. In essence, the following analysis acts as a guide for my readers, to walk them along the epistemological map Anzaldúa provides in “now let us shift…” just as Anzaldúa has guided me throughout the study.

**Anzaldúa and Feminist Epistemology**

Epistemology, as the study of knowledge, begs the questions of how we know what we know. Western Philosophy takes as its foundation Descartes’ famous line “I think, therefore I am” and is largely based on Cartesian assumptions. Feminist philosophers Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, utilizing the lens of feminist philosophy, list the following as Descartes’ most crucial epistemological assumptions:

1. Reality has an objective structure or nature unaffected by or independent of either human understandings of or perspectives
1. The structure or nature of reality in principle is accessible to human understanding or knowledge. When considered with the first point, this assumption sometimes is called “objectivism.”

3. Humans approach the task of gaining knowledge of the world as solitary individuals, rather than as socially constituted members of historically changing groups. This assumption may be called “epistemological individualism.”

4. The principal human faculty for attaining knowledge of reality is reason (rationalism), sometimes working in conjunction with the senses (empiricism). This assumption has been called the rationalist bias.

5. The faculties of reason and sensation are potentially the same for all human beings, regardless of their culture or class, race or sex (universalism). Differences in the situations of human beings, rather than being recognized as providing alternative perspectives on reality, are seen as conquerable impediments to a neutral, ‘objective’ view of things. Given these assumptions, the Cartesian tradition takes the task of epistemology to identify a method by which individual investigators may best utilize their faculties to gain knowledge of the objective structure of reality—what Descartes called the identification of “the method for rightly conducting the reason.”

6. The recommended methods typically endeavor to show how systematic knowledge may be inferred validly from certain or indubitable premises. The assumption that genuine or reliable knowledge is built from simple components that are thought of as epistemologically certain or indubitable is known by philosophers as foundationalism. (Gender/Body/Knowledge 3)

As Jaggar and Bordo highlight, these assumptions fall along the lines of dualism that separate the “universal from the particular, culture from nature, mind from body, and reason from emotion” (3). As the previous close readings of Anzaldúa’s texts in the
current analysis attest, it is precisely this rejection of dualism\textsuperscript{184} as the only or most valid premise on which to build a philosophy that is central to Anzaldúa’s writing projects. Anzaldúa also counters traditional Western philosophy by insisting on subjectivity, unveiling the socially constructed nature of culture, fusing the mind with the body\textsuperscript{185} and reason coupled with emotion as valid pathways to knowledge. Anzaldúa’s writing removes the tension between supposed binary opposites; Showing how both work together, and effectively collapses the presumed binary. A primary example of this deconstructive queer project is Anzaldúa’s reconceptualization of the Spanish feminine plural “nosotras” into her term, nos/otras, where radical interconnectedness refuses to separate “us” from “them.” The slash, here again, serves to suture the supposed opposite of “us” and “them” because in Anzaldúa’s cosmovision, this is a false division that only serves to perpetuate existing power structures.

This example of nos/otras also points to how language informs our perception of reality. The idea that language, and more broadly speaking, culture, informs our perception of reality is an idea put forth by Edward Sapir and later by Benjamin Whorf, both late-twentieth century anthologists from Yale. The Whorf hypothesis, or the idea of

\textsuperscript{184} I am not the first Anzaldúaan scholar to note this goal of her work. Tamdgidi takes this rejection of dualism as his starting point: “I will begin by noting that for Anzaldúa, the transformation of self/world essentially involves the task of healing/transcending/bridging a vast array of habituated dualisms deeply ingrained in our personal and global landscapes” (Tamdgidi 266). See my discussion of his article later in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{185} Susan Bordo speaks to the powerful symbolism of the body: “The body—what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body—is a medium of culture. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body. The body may also operate as a metaphor for culture” (Bordo, \textit{Gender/Body/Knowledge} 13). Anzaldúa likewise highlights the body and lived experience as necessary elements in re-envisioning culture.
linguistic relativity, essentially means that “the language someone speaks affects how he perceives the world” (Language Files 463). And although the Whorf hypothesis has attracted much criticism (“especially over the last 15 years from researchers who regard the mind as a collection of evolved thinking devices that operate independently of language” [Bower 6]), the underlying notion resonates with Anzaldúa’s writing. It has been argued that Whorf never met an Apache and based his analysis strictly on Apache grammar, thus making a circular argument on the role language plays in one’s perception of reality (Pinker 61). Pinker also attributes Whorf’s “outlandish” claims of linguistic relativity to poor analysis and “his long-time leanings toward mysticism” (63). Similar claims were levied against Castañeda, that he never met the Don Juan, the Yaqui Indian featured in his texts and that he, too, leaned toward mysticism. Anzaldúa has also been elsewhere accused of “new age” mysticism. In linking Anzaldúa to both Whorf and Castañeda, both anthropologists by training, I hope to bring attention to the extent of her intellectual queries and also to show how, in her articulation of the nos/otras concept, Anzaldúa goes beyond the Whorf hypothesis to expose the malleability of language, and by extension, culture. If language does in fact affect one’s perception of the world, Anzaldúa argues that changing language is the necessary first step to changing one’s perception of the world. Language here is not a limiting category, but rather a vehicle for change. Interestingly, Anzaldúa advocates for the malleability of language and our perceptions of reality at the same time that she, echoing Jung and Hillman, values the (pre-discursive) image as a powerful poetic device.

186 Many thanks to Phyllis Bellver for discussing these ideas with me.
As observed in *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa had never heard the female plural *nosotras* used in her Chicano social sphere. The masculine form *nosotros* was employed, even to describe an all-female group. Only when she heard the term used by Puerto Rican friends did she realize the extent to which language had limited and gendered her perception of reality. In Anzaldúa’s conceptualization, only upon hearing the term *nosotras* and recognizing the damage the lack of this word had caused her psyche, did she realize that language was malleable. Gregory Cajete speaks to Anzaldúa’s linguistic experience as one common to indigenous science: “language and its use are the ways a society conditions the mind toward particular ends. Language and its codified meanings are a created structure of culture” (28). With this realization, Anzaldúa determined that if language could be constructed, then it could be reconstructed differently; and she offered *nos/otras* as a feminist revision of patriarchal language. Here it should be noted that while Anzaldúa does tend to employ feminine pronouns in her writing (*nos/otras*, the new *mestiza*, *nepantleras*, *comadres*), she does not exclude males from embodying these subject positions. This technique can be seen as a corrective to the ubiquitous use of masculine pronouns to refer to both males and females. Due to the lack of gender-neutral options, both in English and in Spanish, this corrective can be signaled as one of Anzaldúa’s areas that could benefit from further scrutiny. That is, the binarism of gender specific language is challenged, but not overturned, as she fails to locate and utilize gender-neutral language.
Anzaldúa is not alone in arguing against metaphysical realism, showing how spirituality and religion as well as fiction, open up new realities. By exposing the “cracks” in our consensual reality, Anzaldúa points to the possibility of alternative realities. Cracks in consensual reality become evident as binaries collapse upon themselves under analytical stress. The previous example of nos/otras opens up new possibilities for interpersonal relationships, initially constructing a plural feminine space of connection and ultimately breaking down barriers that separate self from the “other.” If individuals and groups operated from a mindset of interconnectedness, as opposed to a dualistic perspective, many of the identity politics issues that separate, in terms of race, gender, sex and class, would fall by the wayside, in favor of coalition building around common issues/problems. This profound interconnectivity has the potential to radically alter the status quo. As Keating points out in her article “From Intersections to Interconnections: Lessons For Transformation from This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color” (2011), Keating positions Anzaldúa’s first edited anthology as joining the growing number of feminist voices urging feminism to include intersectional analysis. Keating also argues that many of the book’s contributors went beyond intersectional analysis to offer “complex relational perspectives on identity formation and alliance making” (“From Intersections to Interconnections” 81). This relational perspective is one of the more radical messages of This Bridge Called My Back.

187 Jaggar and Bordo note that “in the past hundred years, however, the challenges have strengthened and multiplied: individual voices have become choruses of dissent.” They list Marxism as one example of a dissenting voice: “Marxism, for example, has challenged methodological individualism and sometimes objectivism, emphasizing how our beliefs about reality arise out of particular forms of social organization, and urging a more historical understanding of the production of knowledge” (Gender/Body/Knowledge 4).
that Keating argues has gone unrecognized by the last thirty years of feminist thought. One reason for this collective shying away from radical relational connection, argues Keating, is the collective investment in status-quo stories, “worldviews that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and standards...that deny the possibility of change” (“From Intersections to Interconnections” 83). The danger in perpetuating these status quo stories, for Keating, is that “status-quo stories train us to believe that the way things are is the way they always have been and the way they must be. This belief become self-fulfilling: we do not try to make change because we believe that change is impossible to make” (“From Intersections to Interconnections” 83). It is precisely this unwillingness to imagine differently that Anzaldúa challenges in her readers. By continuously revealing the cracks in the current construction of consensual reality, Anzaldúa encourages her readers to inhabit the cracks, the borderlands, in their myriad locations, to build coalitions for change and create a different account of reality. Basing interpersonal relationships on a relational model188 founded on the premise of radical interconnectedness opens up new possibilities for collective change.

Many feminists, following Foucault,189 have shown the inefficacy and impossibility of objectivity as a productive hermeneutic in light of the systematic study of

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188 This is an instance of where Anzaldúa’s queer epistemology parallels quantum physics. According to Tamdgidi, “quantal” is relational, and underlines the basic hypothesis that all matter is composed of similar, if not identical, atoms: “I use ‘quantal’ to refer to that sociological perspective which treats society as an interactive system of sub-atomic selves rather than of presumed atomic dobies/individuals” (Tamdgidi 280). Hence a relational model would be in lock step with a quantum physics approach to interpersonal relationships.

189 Susan Bordo offers the following feminist utilization of Foucault: “Following Foucault, we must first abandon the idea of power as something possessed by one group and leveled against another, and we must think instead of the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination.
power inequities in society. These analyses point toward subjectivity as the prevailing human condition, a condition that Anzaldúa explores in depth. Accused of being too anecdotal to be theoretical, Anzaldúa’s work in fact embodies subjectivity and explores the possibilities that such a focused study can produce. In the introduction to her 1990s edited anthology *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, Anzaldúa addresses the Western academic preference for objectivity:

>This anthology is meant to engage the reader’s total person. I do not believe that ‘distance’ and ‘objectivity’ alone help us come to terms with our issues. Distancing cannot be a major strategy—only a temporary breather. Total feeling and emotional immersion, the shocking drench of guilt or anger or frustration, wakes us up to some of our realities. The pieces in this book awaken the emotions—our emotional bodies ‘take in’ and process the whole spectrum of states of consciousness from waking to dreaming. The intellect needs the guts and adrenaline that horrific suffering and anger, evoked by some of the pieces, catapult us into. Only when all the charged feelings are unearthed can we get down to the ‘the work,’ la tarea, nuestro trabajo—changing culture and all its oppressive interlocking machinations. (“Haciendo Caras, una entrada” [1990] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 127)

Here Anzaldúa directly confronts prevailing Western models of objectivity as being inadequate due to the need to consider not just the intellect, but the “total person.” Objectivity, in Anzaldúa’s words, cannot assist the contributors or its readers in understanding their social “issues.” The contributors to this anthology, whose subtitle is “Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color,” occupy a very distinct subject position from the 17th century, European, male Descartes who argued for the objectivity of reality. These contributors also question the Cartesian assumption of universalism, and argue that because of their subject positions in a hierarchical and biased society, that

within a particular domain” (*Gender/Body/Knowledge* 15). This is perhaps one reason why Anzaldúa wrote children’s books. She chose to confront the many sites of power imbalance and to introduce alternatives to the traditional institution of education and the formation of young people’s minds.
their perspectives are necessarily altered due to their culture, class, race and sex. In view of this corrective, Descartes’ “method for rightly conducting the reason” smacks of “white is right” racism and narrow definitions of womanhood that assume a stance of universal womanhood but actually represent that womanhood in terms of whiteness, middle class and heterosexual privilege, both of which dismisses alternative perceptions of reality due to differentiated subject positions. Anzaldúa goes beyond recognizing different subject positions to state:

These pieces are not only about survival strategies, they are survival strategies—maps, blueprints, guidebooks that we need to exchange in order to feel sane, in order to make sense of our lives. Besides being a testimonial of survival, I wanted a book which would teach ourselves and whites to read in nonwhite narrative traditions—traditions which, in the very act of writing, we try to recoup and to invent. In addition to the task of writing, or perhaps included in the task of writing, we’ve had to create a readership and teach it how to ‘read’ our work. (“Haciendo Caras, una entrada” [1990] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 127-8)

Not only does the anthology witness and, in fact, highlight, nonwhite narratives of existence and self-knowledge, this collection takes as its task the pedagogical imperative to “teach ourselves and whites to read in non-white narrative traditions.” Anzaldúa, as editor, notes that this is both a recovery and an invention, as these voices and this type of narration have been erased by Cartesian assumptions of objectivity and universalism in Western philosophical traditions. Moreover, Anzaldúa’s central positioning of the body as a site of knowledge, and the writing about her particular body to speak to universal conditions in her readers, counters a rationalist bias and provides a collective alternative to epistemological individualism. Anzaldúa’s personal journey of self-discovery is put

190 This collectivity is perhaps a key facet in Latin American and Latina/Chicana testimonio style writing. Mohanty acutely states in her Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (2003), that “testimonials do not focus on the
on display for her readers, encouraging her readers to undergo similar developmental processes.

The body has long been a contested site of terrain for feminists. Jaggar and Bordo note that the “the body, notoriously and ubiquitously associated with the female, regularly has been cast, from Plato to Descartes to modern positivism, as the chief enemy of objectivity” (Gender/Body/Knowledge 4). Anzaldúa’s reclamation of the body as a principal source of knowledge, and her claims that “all responses to the world take place within our bodies” (“Speaking across the Divide” Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 292-3) join the arguments of her feminist peers in revisioning the body’s role in intellectual pursuits that provide an alternative to Cartesian epistemology. Cindy Cruz, in her article “Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body,” likens her quest for Chicana epistemology to that of African American women’s situated knowledge outlined by Patricia Hill Collins, in that

the brown body must be made central in any consideration of an epistemology of women of color; it is essential that an epistemology of Chicana critical thought must be grounded in histories of the Third World women’s movement that produced the backbone of women’s presses and created the foundational texts of This Bridge Called My Back (1981) and Hacienda[sic] Caras (1990). (658)

Anzaldúa is the common thread tying the two groundbreaking cited anthologies together. These anthologies foreground non-white bodies and explore the intricacies of these bodies as thinking, theorizing subjects not merely as objects of study.¹⁹¹ On this point,

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¹⁹¹ This is, of course, in contrast to the current tendencies of mainstream queer theory written by mostly white, middle class academics who focus on non-white bodies as objects of study. See Gay Shame for many examples of this type of exploitative
Cruz also adds poignant commentary. She states, “Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness is a movement toward divergent thinking—an inclusive, plural, constantly shifting, suturing synthesis of an epistemology that signals the rupture in the subject-object duality that grounds Enlightenment epistemologies” (Cruz 660-1). Anzaldúa’s project is one of rupture, of disruption. This queer project focuses on the “messy” work of fragmented post-modern bodies and tends to the resubjectification of those bodies, Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui imperative. The feminist epistemological turn to material bodies signals the beginning of the healing process for bodies that were erased, violated, and purposefully forgotten.

With the reclamation of the body, especially the female body, feminist theory championed the personal voice often found in feminist biography or autobiography, as juxtaposition to the “objective” patriarchal voice. Feminist psychologist/anthropologist Muriel Dimen argues in “Power, Sexuality, Intimacy” that the combination of empowerment and engaged personal voice results in a third voice that “might thereby open a window on as yet unimagined, ungendered possibilities of speaking, knowing, and living” (Gender/Body/Knowledge 35). Anzaldúa takes this third voice a step farther, arguing not only for a third voice that would be simultaneously a combination of the first two voices, but also more than the sum of its parts. Instead of arguing for a third voice, she offered the idea of arguing from a third space, the liminal space of borderlands, as a theorizing. “Latin inches” by Ellis Hanson in “Teaching Shame” is an exceptionally glaring case in point (132-64).
fruitful site of embodied synthesis. This third space is located between the “opposite” poles of a binary. This is, of course, a disruption in the Western logic.\(^{192}\)

On all points heretofore discussed, Anzaldúa’s queer epistemology, documented in her writing, joins contemporary feminist epistemology in refuting Cartesian epistemology as inadequate.\(^{193}\) Indeed, Anzaldúa’s philosophical project incorporates many aspects of feminist epistemology developed in the 1980s and 90s, but differs in its insistence on the imagination, the power of reading, and the creation of a new sense of self. In Anzaldúa’s parlance, the new mestiza re-coined as the nepantlera represents the queering of the feminist epistemological subject, to go beyond validating the female and attempting to correct power imbalance in binary oppositions. Anzaldúa’s nepantlera, the “unique type of mediator,” who lives “within and among multiple worlds, and, often through painful negotiations,” develops “a perspective from the cracks” enact a new epistemological project, a queer project that challenges existing frameworks (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader Appendix I 322).

Anzaldúa’s epistemology is rooted in the belief that binaries are not only un-useful, but that they are also untrue, and that the misrepresentation of binary opposites malnourishes and misinforms society. In effect, the concept of binaries, of dualism itself, is constituted as a trauma that Anzaldúa’s writing seeks to heal. In one of her last published essays, “Let us be the healing of the wound,” (2002) Anzaldúa described her

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\(^{192}\) In her entry on Gloria Anzaldúa for the biographical sourcebook Significant Contemporary American Feminists, Judith Richards cites Lourdes Torres who notes “Anzaldúa’s intentional interruption of traditional autobiographical constructs challenge the reader’s own expectations of a text that works according to Western logic” (Torres 1991, 284 qtd. in Richards 18).

\(^{193}\) “Contemporary feminist epistemology shares the growing sense that the Cartesian framework is fundamentally inadequate, an obsolete and self-deluded world view badly in need of reconstructing and revisioning” (Gender/Body/Knowledge 4).
role as an artist in term of healing: “my job as an artist is to bear witness to what haunts us, to step back and attempt to see the pattern in these events (personal and societal), and how we can repair el daño (the damage) by using the imagination and its visions. I believe in the transformative power and medicine of art” (93). Many artists, writers among them, have a special gift for observation of their surroundings, which they choose to express via creative means. Some writers merely observe and report on their culture, while others attune their observations to the task of discerning patterns. Feminist scholar and playwright Donna Wilshire explores the pattern of binaristic thinking entrenched in Western thought in her essay “The Uses of Myth, Image, and the Female Body in Re-visioning knowledge.” Wilshire includes the following table as an observation of the binaristic mentality of Western epistemology that valorizes the first column over the second:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge (accepted wisdom) / Ignorance (the occult and taboo)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher (up)                                          lower (down)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good, positive                                      negative, bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind (ideas), head, spirit                           body (flesh), womb (blood), Nature (earth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason (the rational)                                emotion and feelings (the irrational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool                                               hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order                                              chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control                                            letting-be, allowing, spontaneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective (outside, “out there”)                     subjective (inside, imminent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal truth, fact                                 poetic truth, metaphor, art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals                                               process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light                                               darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written text, Logos                                 oral tradition, enactment, Myth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo as sky-sun                                    Sophia as earth-cave-moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sphere                                       private sphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing, detached                                    listening, attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular                                             holy and sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear                                              cyclical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanence, ideal (fixed) forms                      change, fluctuations, evolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“changeless and immortal”                           process, ephemeras, (performance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wilshire argues that theory is the articulation of patterns and that therefore, in effect, theories create new knowledge. Part of diagnosing the disease of binaristic thinking is pointing to the established binaries to show the systematic devaluation of certain groups of people or ways and sites of knowledge. With this necessary first step of the healing process, Wilshire points to the wounds of dualism for women, especially for the brown skinned, sexually dissident Anzaldúa who seeks to reinscribe devalued attributes (the occult, body, nature, emotion, chaos, letting-be, subjective knowledge) via the oral tradition she grew up with and the poetic tradition of metaphor urging her readers to listen to the private inner landscape of the imagination in her holistic, connectionist epistemology that is based on the disruption of identity categories. Anzaldúa thus takes the challenge of uprooting dualism head-on. In developing her concept of the New Mestiza, shortly after the publication of Borderlands, Anzaldúa acknowledges: “the new mestiza is a category that threatens the hegemony of the neo-conservatives because it breaks down the labels and theories used to manipulate and control us. Punching holes in their categories, labels and theories means punching holes in their walls” (“The New Mestiza Nation” [1992] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 205). “Punching” here functions as a direct assault to Western epistemology, with an end goal of dismantling the entire system. In her later theorizing, Anzaldúa expands upon the notion of new mestiza to that of la nepantlera. She envisions la nepantlera as a different sense of self “that does not rest on
external forms of identification (of family, race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality), or attachments to power, privilege, and control, or romanticized self-images” (“Disability and Identity” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 302). This queering of perception in relation to defining the self intriguingly comes from her reflections on disability. Confronting the limits of her physical body as her body experienced diabetes and diabetes-related complications, Anzaldúa questions the effectiveness of the ability/disability binary in relation to identity. Astutely, Anzaldúa draws attention to the way “we mourn (here is where La Llorona comes in) the loss of the ‘healthy,’ abled, integrated self, a self we never have possessed.” She instead decides to theorize from the position of never going “back to the way things were before I lost my ‘health’ or home or whatever” (“Disability and Identity” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 302). Exposing the impossibility of a romanticized, anterior, somehow imagined as-more-whole experience, Anzaldúa collapses the abled/disabled binary and connects this deconstruction to other methods of identification (home or whatever). In this sense, Anzaldúa employs nepantleras as a queer¹⁹⁴ new construction of self that has at its foundation connectionist thinking instead of binary opposition.

**Deconstruction of Dualism Leads to Connectionist Thinking**

In Anzaldúa’s quest for self-knowledge and a deep understanding of how that knowledge is produced and by whom, she undertakes the tasks of understanding identity.

Personal identity is explored in an effort to know and understand the self and, in relation, to know others. Anzaldúa explodes traditional identity categories by refusing to be limited to one or more identity label:

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and -legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.

Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me. (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 2)

For Anzaldúa, like the North American poet Walt Whitman, the self “contain[ed] multitudes” and could not be expected to fit neatly into any preconceived identity category. Concomitantly, Anzaldúa refused to stagnate her many identities, rejecting stasis in favor of fluidity:

My identity is always in flux; it changes as I step into and cross over many worlds each day—university, home community, job, lesbian, activist, and academic communities. It is not enough for me to stay I am a Chicana. It is not enough for me to say I am an intellectual. It is not enough for me to say I am a writer. It is not enough for me to say I am from working-class origins. All of these and none of these are my primary identity. I can’t say, this is the true me, or that is the true me. They are all the true me’s. (“The New Mestiza Nation: A Multicultural Movement” [1992] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 95)

In this regard, Anzaldúa views the self as relational, being both/and instead of either/or. The self is constantly shifting and changing and cannot be reduced to the singular.

Instead, Anzaldúa encourages her readers to explore the multitudes of the self. This knowledge, warns Anzaldúa, is not only necessary, but it is also painful: “I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (Borderlands 48). The barriers that have been set up to encourage individuals to disregard

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195 See Whitman’s poem “Song of Myself” section 51 (1855).
part of their identity both serve to limit the articulation of self and to demean aspects of the self that society has deemed inferior. Anzaldúa’s new mestiza recognizes and validates the African, indigenous and Anglo contributions to her identity formation.

In order to recognize and claim all aspects of individual identity, the subject must be open to change, which can also be painful. Not painful in the sense that Octavio Paz perpetuates as the open, receptive chingada who is painfully torn apart by each rendition of the chingón (discussed in chapter two), but painful in the sense that to be open means that you are vulnerable to change. Anzaldúa was a sensitive child who felt a deep connection to her surroundings: “I had very thin skin, everything came in—people’s words, people’s looks, any kind of put down. If another person was hurting, I would hurt. If my mother killed a chicken or a hog or a steer, I would feel that pain” (“Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness” [1986] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 103-4). To protect herself from this sensitivity, she felt it necessary to construct temporarily walls. This openness may also be painful in that it forces the individual to accept parts of the self that have been demonized. Embracing all parts of identity allows the individual to know the multitudes of the self, requires a refusal of categorization and labeling and demands an awareness of interconnectivity. Anzaldúa’s nepantlera chooses to define the self by what it includes, rather than define the self on a basis of exclusion. This radical inclusion aligns with contemporary quantum physics that reduces all matter to common substances,

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196 Anzaldúa explores this construction in her 1990 essay “Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar, or Island: Lesbians-of-Color Haciendo Alianzas” where she speculates on the various land formations and constructions identity can take. She, of course, chooses to be a bridge, as difficult as the task is.

197 Openness to external stimuli also entails an openness to multiple senses of self. “Significant in Anzaldúa’s sociological imagination is her openness to conceive of the self in its multiplicity as well as hybridity” (Tamdgi 276).
showing how everything actually consists of the same basic building blocks. This is how the protagonist in “Reading LP” (manuscripts originally dated 1970s, [under revision at the time of Anzaldúa’s death] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 250-73) is able to justify her hand passing through her bedpost (see my discussion in chapter two), because her hand and bedpost are intimately related by a common chemical make-up. This quantum interconnectivity, of course, extends from knowing oneself to knowing others.

Anzaldúa’s desire to understand herself and her surroundings is a desire to understanding others, because, as she shows with the nos/otras concept, the binary between “us” and “them,” is as unproductive as it is false. Anzaldúa’s nepantleras turn from dualistic thinking to interconnectivity and connectionist thinking.

Once binaries have been shown to implode upon scrutiny and dualism is diagnosed as a principle cause of trauma, Anzaldúa offers connectionist modes of thinking as a possible alternative to dualistic thinking. Offered first in terms of the mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa later refers to this nonbinary connectionist mode of thinking in terms of conocimiento. In Borderlands, she anticipates that the future belongs to the new mestiza because “the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures” (79). As I mentioned earlier, uneasy with the narrow biological readings of her interpretation of the new mestiza, Anzaldúa employed the term nepantlera to better address the multiple borderlands she was referring to in her consciousness project. This project was intent on “creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness” (Borderlands 79). Though the crux of the project remained focused on “a massive
uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness”

(Borderlands 80), Anzaldúa widened the scope of her project by moving from the “new mestiza” to “nepantlera,” and from “new mestiza consciousness” to “conocimiento,” with the end goal of healing the trauma of dualism. According to Keating, “conocimiento underscores and develops the imaginal, spiritual-activist, and radically inclusionary possibilities implicit in these earlier previous theories” (Glossary, Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 320). Conocimiento also incorporates Anzaldúa’s earlier theory of la facultad, as both la facultad and conocimiento “often unfold within oppressive contexts and entail a deepening of perception” (320). Part of this deepening of perception entails the exposure and deconstruction of Western epistemologies and the creation of a pedagogy of shifting modes of consciousness.¹⁹⁸ The necessary first step is of course to take inventory of the current situation:

Pero es difícil differentiating between lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto…this step is a conscious rupture will all oppressive traditions of all cultures and all religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. (Borderlands 82)

The continuous process of deconstruction and reconstruction enables the reader/nepantlera to switch in and out of different modes of consciousness. In her pre-

¹⁹⁸ Anzaldúa addresses this shift: “We are creating ways of educating ourselves and younger generations in this mestiza nation to change how students and teachers think and read by de-constructing Euro-Anglo ways of knowing; to create texts that reflect the needs of the world community of women and people of color; and to show how lived experience is connected to political struggles and art making” (“The New Mestiza Nation” [1992] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 205).
*Borderlands* talk at Vermont College in May of 1986, Anzaldúa links this ability with creativity. In “Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness” (1986), Anzaldúa argues that the artist is more adept at switching modes of consciousness due to their ability to construct “concrete universes” in words or paint (104). She clarified this statement on two fronts. With a nod to James Hillman, Anzaldúa discusses the power of images; she claims, “To me, everything is real. Fiction is as true as whatever happens literally to people” (“Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness” 108). She further advances the notion that it is not she who creates, but rather that her body acts as a medium, a conduit for different modes of consciousness. “I don’t write in a vacuum. I have helpers, guides from both the outer realm like my writing comadres and invisible ones from the inner world. I write in-community, even when I sit alone in my room.” (“Speaking across the Divide” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 293).199

Likewise, nepantleras, because they travel among many social situations (worlds), are more adept at seeing the ruptures from one world to the next, and because they have to continuously shift their identity, they are more in tune with shifting modes of consciousness. This shifting exposes differences between worlds and realities, but ultimately unveils deep spiritual interconnections.

**Philosophical Connectionist Reflection: Seeing Through Culture**

Las nepantleras, like the ancient chamans, move between the worlds. They can work from multiple locations, can circumvent polarizing binaries. They try not to get locked into one perspective or perception of things. They can see through our cultural conditioning and through our

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199 This community that accompanies Anzaldúa during the writing process is similar to the connections available to shamans. See chapter one for a discussion on the ways Anzaldúa’s life and work parallels that of a shaman.
respective cultures’ toxic ways of life. They try to overturn the destructive perceptions of the world that we’ve been taught by our various cultures. They change the stories about who we are and about our behavior. They point to the stick we beat ourselves with so we realize what we’re doing and may choose to throw away the stick. They possess the gift of vision. Nepantleras think in terms of the planet, not just their own racial group, the U.S., or Norte America. They serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater conocimiento; they serve as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being. (“Speaking across the Divide” [2003] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 293)

Traveling between realities, nepantleras must reflect on their multiple identities to understand the underlining power structure of culture. As the above quote suggests, nepantleras are able to see through cultural conditioning because they have witnessed many different cultures’ ways of structuring reality. Just as the shaman has experienced illness in order to bring out healing, nepantleras use their experience of fragmentation and differentiation to change our perceptions of reality. And because nepantleras are not limited by personal or collective identity categories, they are able to envision a more holistic alternative. Nepantleras are able to see through Western rational thought that separates subject from object, to the inseparability of spirit. The act of seeing through a culture enables the nepantlera to reconstruct the culture differently.

Anzaldúa counts border artists as nepantleras in their capacity of dual-conscious consciousness. “Border artists are in the precarious position of having our feet in different worlds: the dominant, the ethnic, and the queer, which often induces a double being-ness.” (“Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing” [2002] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 277). This artistic third eye allows for a detached witnessing, a reflection on the contemporary construction of society that is capable of enacting revolutionary change.
Anzaldúa names this strength in the introduction to her second anthology, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990). Keating notes that “Haciendo caras, una entrada” is one of Anzaldúa’s most oppositional pieces (*Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 138). This essay applies the concept of seeing through culture to the context of women of colors. Anzaldúa likens women of colors to nepantleras in terms of harnessing supposed weakness as strengths:

> Our strength lies in shifting perspectives, in our capacity to shift, in our ‘seeing through’ the membrane of the past superimposed on the present, in looking at our shadows and dealing with them...we are slowly acquiring the tools to change the disabling images and memories, to replace them with self-affirming one, to recreate our pasts and alter them—for the past can be as malleable as the present. (“Haciendo caras, una entrada” [1990] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 138)

Women of colors feminists, like queers and nepantleras, must see through the damaging and disparaging parts of their culture in order to reaffirm their personal and collective identities. Yet women of colors must also be vigilant of feminist discourse that attempts to erase difference. Women of colors must also see through common assumptions: “one is that there is no such thing as a common ground. As groups and individuals we all stand on different plots. Sisterhood in the singular was a utopian fantasy invented by whitewomen” (“Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar, or Island” [1990] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 149). This skill, or perhaps labor, of constant vigilance becomes a survival strategy for both the women of colors and nepantleras (as women of color can identify with/as nepantleras). This skill assists the nepantlera in navigating potentially hazardous cultural terrain, so that the nepantlera can deconstruct the damaging parts of her culture and participate in the construction of a new culture.
From the onset of Anzaldúa’s published writing career, she embodies the survival strategy of a nepantlera in her ability to see through culture and in her propensity for understanding herself and the world. In “La Prieta” (1981) Anzaldúa stats that writing functions as tool to help her grasp the world and her position in it. Also in “La Prieta,” Anzaldúa divulges personal information about the pain and suffering experienced by her body through a succession of traumas. This embodied experience of pain, transcribed via writing and sent out in the world, was Anzaldúa’s attempt to understand her mortal condition: and by sharing her pain, to help her readers heal their pain, she states: “All of my work, including fiction and poetry, are healing trabajos” (“Speaking Across the Divide” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 292). Part of the healing that Anzaldúa’s writing and life example performs takes the form of exploration of the self and the world.

Unable to explain the physical pain of early menstruation, and why she was singled out as different, the young Anzaldúa took refuge in books. Reading, as I stated earlier, was not a common habit among her family or her community. Further differentiated from her peers because of this love of reading, Anzaldúa became more isolated. Feelings of isolation led to depression and emptiness, which led to the development of her spirituality. Linking her spiritual quest with feelings of sexual and gender difference, Anzaldúa took solace in the written word:

> For me, spirituality is a source of sustenance, a way of knowing, a path of survival...When I began to suspect that I might be una de las otras..., I went to one of those places I always go for solace, for guidance, and to better understand myself and others—books. (“Foreword to Cassel’s

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200 Anzaldúa later attributed her early menstruation to spirit possession and noted that the spirit was not accustomed to inhabiting bodies (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 35). She describes this sensation in the poem “The Occupant” originally written in the mid-1970s and included in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 21.
Survival, then, meant a deep interrogation of the status quo of culture and the necessary retreat into fiction to protect the thin skinned-Anzaldúa: a two-way movement deeper into the imaginal reality of her mind and an extending into consensual reality.

As an outsider to her family and culture in many ways (see chapter two for a discussion of the many ways Anzaldúa thought of herself as queer), Anzaldúa became a keen observer of her culture. Dissatisfied with the possibilities afforded Chicana females, Anzaldúa begins to see through cultural norms. In “Never Momma,” (Third Woman, Fall 1983) one of her early publications, Anzaldúa depicts her uneasiness with the cultural norms she and her mother faces as Chicana females. Describing her mother’s limited access to formal schooling and her belief in alternative spiritual realities (the poetic narrator recalls the conversation between mother and daughter about financial difficulty as a result of truncated schooling due to childbirth, additional strain due to a husband’s early death, and the hardships of being laid off from her job for exercising human empathy), the poetic narrator, Prieta, resolutely declares to her mother that, even though the mother needs assistance, she will never return to the limited and limiting conditions of her mother’s life. Prieta effectively refuses to perpetuate the culture that forced her mother to toil in a nursing home, “bathing the old/…powdering the soft folds and bellies” for “2.65 an hour” (“Never Momma” 7). Here Prieta is not just refusing her mother’s lot in life; she is denouncing the systems responsible for her mother’s hardships: the education system, compulsory heterosexuality, marriage, and workplace restrictions. Interestingly, Prieta notes that her mother would loosen the straps of a “crazy old woman” from her wheelchair to grant her ‘the freedom’ to flap her arms, to drivel, to
screech” (“Never Momma” 8) because, as the author states in a parenthetical aside “(She thought she was a bird/and you believed her.)” (“Never Momma” 8). This ability to give credence to a woman who thought she was a bird grates against the medical establishment guidelines embodied by the registered nurse, who “caught” Prieta’s mother loosening the restraints on her patient and called for her dismissal. This incident speaks to the alternative worldview held by Prieta’s mother. Belief in the connected nature of humans and animals is perhaps the only vestige of her mother’s culture that Prieta would retain. In later stories, the same author and autobiographical protagonist rail against the educational system (in “Speaking in Tongues” [1981]) and interviews where Anzaldúa discusses the rejection of her doctoral thesis focus on Chicana lesbian literature), compulsory heterosexuality (especially in “El Paisano” [original manuscript 1974, published 1982]), and the status quo in many of her other works.

**Participatory Project**

Anzaldúa’s epistemological project requires active participation on many fronts. Anzaldúa as writer must call on the active participation of her writing guides, both inner and outer, mentioned above. She as a writer must also actively trust “in unseen helping guides, must surrender to the mysterious forces that guide me. I rely on the part of myself that has this ability to connect with these forces, to the imaginal world” (“Speaking across the Divide” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 293). Likewise, she must rely on others, her readers that access a similar imaginal reality, to understand and expand upon her theories and stories. She makes her intention of co-creation implicit in the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*: “Let the reader beware—I
here and now issue a caveat perusor: s/he must do the work of piecing this text
together...As the perspective and focus shift, as the topics shift, the listener/reader is
forced into participating in the making of meaning—she is forced to connect the dots, to
connect the fragments” (“Haciendo caras, una entrada” [1990] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader
127). This call for reader participation is perhaps the crucial narrative implement
Anzaldúa brandishes to elicit empathy in her readers and boost participation in her
epistemological project.

It is my contention that Anzaldúa also fictionalizes stages of her own path to
knowledge, in order to further invite reader identification and in effect provide multiple
entries and explanations of each stage, both for her own intellectual development and for
that of her readers. To this end, I will illuminate each stage of the process with an
Anzaldúan text, to trace Anzaldúa’s process in working out each stage of her queer
epistemology. But before I do so, it is important to explore Anzaldúa’s conceptualization
of conocimiento.

Conocimiento

Conocimiento: A Spanish word for ‘knowledge’ or ‘consciousness,’
Anzaldúa uses this term to represent a key component of her post-
Borderlands epistemology. With conocimiento, she elaborates on the
potentially transformative elements of her better-known Borderlands
theories of mestiza consciousness and la facultad. Like mestiza
consciousness, conocimiento represents a nonbinary, connectionist mode
of thinking; like la facultad, conocimiento often unfolds within oppressive
contexts and entails a deepening of perception. Conocimiento underscores
and develops the imaginal, spiritual-activist, and radically inclusionary
possibilities implicit in these earlier previous theories. (Keating, Appendix
I Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 320)
Sometimes defined as knowledge, other times as understanding, insight and deep awareness, conocimiento is Anzaldúa’s revision of her earlier concept of la facultad (see my discussion of la facultad in chapter two). Conocimiento is central to Anzaldúan queer epistemology, as it refers to the flash of new knowledge initiated from a shift in perception or a crack in a previously conceived notion. Anzaldúa’s fiction explores different paths to conocimiento, jarring her protagonists into imagining reality differently.

For as Anzaldúa notes in her discussion of spiritual activism, once new knowledge is gained, the individual must take social action in light of the new understanding.

Anzaldúa depicts conocimiento and spiritual activism in the image of a left hand, replete with its sinister connotations, yet reclaimed, to symbolize subversive action. The palm of the hand houses two eyes: “Los ojos represent seeing and knowing which can lead to understanding or conocimiento. It means getting to know each other and, as mestizas from many cultures, seeing from multiple points of view...It means looking in, looking from more than one direction at the same time” (“The New Mestiza Nation” [1992] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 211). The eyes here serve discrete yet connected functions. Not only do the eyes see the other, but also the eyes see from “multiple points of view.” The eyes can see through dualism that separates the self from the other (nos/otras) and the eyes are the tools with which the new mestiza (later nepantlera) can exercise her complex identity to strengthen her perspective, by allowing for multiple simultaneous interpretations of reality. The nepantlera can hold binary opposites, such as queerness and spirituality synchronously without concern for superficial conflict (a concept I explored in chapter two).
The eyes alone are not enough to engage in spiritual activism. Anzaldúa reminds the reader that “to activate the conocimiento and communication we need the hand” ("The New Mestiza Nation" 211). The hand is importantly the left hand, much maligned in Western traditions as the tool of evil, the backward, the female: “The left hand has always been seen as sinister and strange, associated with the female gender and creativity” ("The New Mestiza Nation" 211). This is the left hand of radical social revolution, of the coming of El Mundo Zurdo. Spiritual activism requires the combined efforts of the eyes, of conocimiento, and of the hand -- social action to connect theory to action and activism. Anzaldúa represents this social action with the mouth in the palm of the hand, to represent communication, and with the tip of the tongue being a pen to exercise spiritual activism through the written word. Keating notes that this formulation marks the beginning of Anzaldúa’s theorization of spiritual activism and that later she added an ear to the drawing to symbolize inner and outer listening. (figure 9 Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 226).\footnote{Keating then co-develops the listening aspect of spiritual activism in her essay “Shifting Perspectives” (Interviews/Entrevistas) where she challenges her readers to “listen with raw openness,” a strategy that allows for transformation to take place in the listener who approaches each new encounter empty and open.}
Conocimiento may shock the reader into a new way of seeing and reading the world (“Transforming American Studies” [2001] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 241). Conocimiento can be encouraged by the political act of creating anthologies, as was the intention with *this bridge we call home* (“(Un)natural bridges, (Un) safe spaces” [2002] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 247) or it may be a sudden shock to the system “triggered by an odor or some trivial incident” (“Llorona Coyolxauhqui” [2003] *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 297). Conocimiento is also described as both a path and the destination of that path.

The path of conocimiento is described as the path to heal the wounds. This path could be that of the artist who uses art to represent inner completeness. Anzaldúa is steadfast in her reckoning that the path of conocimiento is a difficult one; she introduces the path of desconocimiento, or willful ignorance, as an easier path in “Let us be the
healing of the wound.” Conocimiento envisioned as a path of spiritual knowledge, is fueled by creativity: “Creativity sets off an alchemical process that transforms adversity and difficulties into works of art. All of life’s adventures go into the cauldron, la hoya, where all fragments, inconsistencies; contradictions are stirred and cooked to a new integration. They undergo transformation” (“Speaking across the Divide” [2003] Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 292). This cauldron is the body203 since, Anzaldúa states, “All responses to the world take place within our bodies” (292). And the most frequent body to populate Anzaldúa’s fiction is that of the child protagonist, Prieta.

Conocimiento and Literature for Children

In my own autobiographical writing sometimes the things are so painful to write about that I have to dislocate myself from myself. So I’ll say, ‘This is happening to Prietita,’ and I’ll use the third person. Once I get over the trauma of experiencing his thing I’m writing about and putting it into words, the pain is lessened so then I can say, ‘this was me. Yes, this happened to me.’ (Interviews/Entrevistas 223)

202 Here Anzaldúa could be accused of setting up a binary opposition, even though she labels dualism as one of the key illnesses of society. To be fair, Anzaldúa only sets up this false binary so that she can inhabit and embody the position in between conocimiento and desconocimiento in her discussion of the response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. And this binary is established in her final published essay before her death, so she has not had the opportunity to address this concern in print.

203 The body as the Nietzsche-ian victim of the writing muse as well as the path toward wholeness: “the writing is my whole life, it is my obsession. This vampire which is my talent does not suffer other suitors. Daily I court it, offer my neck to its teeth. This is the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice. For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth’s body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my offerings, are my Aztecan blood sacrifices” (Borderlands 75).
In addition to using a child narrative voice to address children and young adults, Anzaldúa employs the narrative stance of Prieta to temporary distance herself from actual physical pain. In her literature for children, Anzaldúa both seeks to illustrate concrete examples of the theories she develops in her writing for adults and performatively enact the changes described diegetically in her readers (and thus, in consensual reality). Anzaldúa fictionally embodies different ways of knowing (conocimiento) in her books for children and looks to teaching children as the path to changing a culture. As Tey Diana Rebolledo points out, Anzaldúa shows how to be receptive to different types of knowing, of conocimientos, in her treatment of her recurring protagonist, Prieta in both of her books directed toward children. In *Friends from the other side/Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993), Prietita physically experiences the tension among the neighborhood boys, including her cousin Teté, and Joaquín, her new acquaintance from Mexico. This is the sensation Prieta feels in “La Prieta” between “what is and what should be” (207). The young protagonist knows “what is:” that the Mexican-American boys are teasing

204 In addition to using the voice of a child narrator to distance herself from past trauma, Anzaldúa also states that this is one of the voices she most cherishes:

I think the voice I most treasure is this little voice I had when I was little, which I call Gloria Gaurita; which was my little child-self. She was repressed and never got a chance to be a child. She had to be an adult. I associate creativity and imagination with her. She’s tender, open and vulnerable. I think that’s my main voice. And then I have these other voices. You know, Gloria the lesbian, Gloria the feminist, Gloria the person interested in philosophy, psychology, psychic phenomena. (Interviews/Entrevistas 61)

205 In “Prietita y el Otro Lado: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Literature for Children,” Rebolledo discusses Anzaldúa’s concept of conocimientos and states that “here Anzaldúa honed her sense of ‘conocimientos,’ other ways of knowing” (279). While Anzaldúa does further develop the idea of conocimiento in a platform designed for young adult levels of understanding, I would argue that this insight into the concept of conocimiento is still being “worked on” in this 1993 publication and that Anzaldúa continues to add layers of complexity to the concept in her later writings. I do, however, agree with Rebolledo that Anzaldúa was producing literature for children in an attempt to dispel myths about Chicanos and Mexicans and to instill her insights in the next generation of her readers.
Joaquín for being a “mojado” and for being outside of their social group. But the illustration shows an additional layer of complexity as the boy pointing his finger at Joaquín.

This boy, which could either be Prietita’s cousin Teté calling “Look at the mojadito, look at the wetback!” or another boy saying “Hey, man, why don’t you go back to where you belong? We don’t want any more mojados here” is also wearing a shirt featuring “Pocho Ché” on the back. (*Friends From The Other Side* n.p.) “Pocho” is
sometimes used as a derogatory label for Mexican-Americans who are distanced (either by forgetting or via disavowal) from the language and culture of Mexico, but here the shirt could represent a reclamation of the term to depict a certain cultural pride. Adding the symbolism of Ché — of Ernesto Ché Guevara — may suggest a revolutionary zeal to the active erasure of Mexican language and heritage from the Mexican American male characters. While the additional detail of the young boy’s shirt is most probably a contribution by the illustrator Consuelo Méndez, it is important to note that on the following page the reader sees the front of this same young boy’s shirt with the word “BULLY” block-written across the chest, making transparent the character’s role as aggressor/instigator in his interaction with Joaquín. This same inhospitality is echoed in the seemingly misplaced “Keep Out” sign on the U.S. border fence. Misplaced if we assume that the children are on the U.S. side of the fence and the sign is warning them to “keep out” of Mexico. Here Joaquín is situated as closer to the border fence than the other children, symbolizing that his place of origin is most likely on the opposite side of the fence, placing him squarely in the population the fence was intended to “keep out.”

The inhospitable males allow for Prietita’s contrasting compassion to take center stage as she steps in front of Joaquín to protect him from the boys’ jeers and from the rock one of the boys has picked up. Prietita verbally scolds the boys, calling into question their maleness: “What’s the matter with you guys? How brave you are, a bunch of machos against one small boy. You should be ashamed of yourselves! ¿Qué les pasa a

206 Though I agree that “while illustrations play an important role in any children’s story, they play an even more pivotal role in Anzaldúa’s children’s books because they provide a counter-narrative to the dominant culture’s most prevalent images of Mexican immigrants” (López and Serrato 208), I would also argue that the illustrations here add a layer of complexity that should be read as a parallel and intersecting text to the words in the book. This is my intention in the analysis that follows.
ustedes? Qué valientes son, un montón de machos contra un pequeño muchacho flaco. ¡Deberían tener vergüenza!” (Friends from the Other Side n.p.). Prietita, being a strong young girl and protagonist to Anzaldúa’s project of interconnectedness, shows compassion to Joaquín and thereby shows the neighborhood boys “what should be.” Connecting with Joaquín on a human level renders his immigration status unimportant for Prietita.

As an extension of Anzaldúa’s collusion of physical and psychological wounding evident in Borderlands, Joaquin’s arms are scarred by disease: “large boils on his forearms/sus brazos estaban cubiertos de llagas horribles” (n.p.). These boils reflect his socio-economic and immigration status position of being a poor, undocumented Mexican who has come to the United States to find a better life.207 Anzaldúa’s selection of the name for this new “friend,” Joaquin, also carries significance in Chicano history, as Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez’s epic poem “Yo Soy Joaquin” (1967) symbolically united Chicanos as a people with a shared history and presumably a desire for a shared future in the struggle for civil rights. Soon after the rallying around the Chicano movement and the need to unite as a racial/ethnic identity, dissident voices from Chicana feminists began to emerge critiquing the movement’s lack of mobility for females, noting the movement’s double standards for men and women, and exposing the heteronormative assumptions of the movement. Anzaldúa’s children’s literature joins this critique as she places the protagonist of Gonzalez’s poem in a position of needing help and guidance from a female Prietita. Not only does Prietita help the male namesake of the Chicano

207 I thank Tiffany Ana López and Phillip Serrato for pointing this out: “In Friends from the Other Side, the sores on Joaquin’s body continue Anzaldúa’s figuration of the U.S.-Mexico border as an unhealed herida abierta, a ‘1,950 mile-long open wound/dividing a pueblo, a culture’” (López and Serrato 208).
movement, the Chicano “every-man,” but she is also portrayed as the more active, more knowledgeable social agent. Anzaldúa’s rewriting of Joaquín’s role in the formation of Chicano identity effectively questions who has the authority to construct knowledge. This critical reflexivity informs conocimiento:

Conocimiento is a way of knowing connected with intuition and with an understanding of the natural world, as well as of our culture and our history. Because culture and history have been denied to Chicanos (desconocimiento), it is imperative that we look at who is constructing ‘knowledge, reality and information and how they control people’s identities through that construction. (“(Un)Natural Bridges” 3)

This questioning not only concerns Anglo constructions of Chicano identity, but also male Chicano articulations of the same identity. Importantly, Anzaldúa does not construct an oppositional scenario in Friends from the Other Side; she does not present a Chicano identity resolute on matriarchal role that privileges the feminine. Rather, the inquiry into knowledge and the production of knowledge opens her protagonists to attempt a more inclusive community.

Joaquín’s mother’s hospitality contrasts with the boys’ previous hostility, as she speaks to Prietita in the respectful formal register of Ud. and offers her something to eat even though Prietita knows “that they would offer a guest the last of their food and go hungry rather than appear bad-mannered” (Friends from the other side n.p.). The family’s strength is reflected not only by the reception they offer Prietita, but also by the illustrations that accompany the scene where Prietita first meets Joaquín’s mother. The sparse attempts to warm their “tumbledown shack with one wall missing” include a wooden cross with an ear of corn, representing their syncretized faith in both Catholicism and the indigenous world-views of humanity as deriving from corn. The sign on the wall that reads “la espada rota no se rinde nunca” reminds the reader of the family’s resolution
to survive despite their bad luck, symbolized by the upside down horseshoe above the door, that had caused their destitute situation in Mexico and formed the impetus of their subsequent immigration. Prieta, who is obviously from a higher socio-economic class, (as she was first portrayed climbing the mesquite tree in her fenced-in backyard filled with green grass, flowers and chickens) does not hesitate to enter the tumbledown shack and sit down on the “straw mat that covered a dirt floor.” Just as Prietita is able to see past Joaquín’s immigration status and physical deformity, his poverty does not cause her to hesitate. Instead, Prietita notices the pride in Joaquín’s mother’s face as she enters their home. Here Prietita shows the openness that characterizes Anzaldúa’s theory of conocimiento. Instead of allowing borders to separate her from Joaquín (immigration status, poverty, skin ailment, sex, gender [Joaquín is put into a feminized position by the other boys]208), Prietita’s portrayal of a mature perception of humanity allows her to befriend Joaquín, who is in many ways abject.

Prietita’s acceptance of Joaquín as a friend also depicts a key aspect of conocimiento. In addition to being inclusive, “in conocimiento, the next step after knowing is activism” (Rebolledo 281). Not only does Prietita stand up for Joaquín in the face of physically danger, she immediately thinks of la curandera when she glimpses the boils on his arms. After Prietita helps Joaquín and his mother hide at the curandera’s

208 I agree with López and Serrato that Joaquín is portrayed as inferior in many respects. López and Serrato state “In addition to his status as a poor, undocumented Mexican immigrant, he also has a grotesque condition that the other boys find both unattractive and unmanly. Anzaldúa represents Joaquín as morally superior, abject, and wounded—all of which put him in a feminized position and paradoxically work against a larger project of blurring boundaries and embracing contradictions...Anzaldúa’s feminized Joaquín is as much an icon of political agency as Prietita even though she certainly has greater access to power” (211).
house while the border patrol guard comes through town, Prietita becomes apprentice to the curandera: “It’s time for you to learn. You are ready now” (Friends from the other side n.p.). Importantly, Prietita, not his mother or Joaquín himself, will learn how to make the herbal paste needed to cure Joaquín’s boils: the Chicana is instructed to heal the wounds of the male, much as Chicana (lesbian) feminist sought to rectify the gender bias in the Chicano movement.

In Anzaldúa’s second book for children, Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona (1995), Prietita takes on where the first book left off. Prietita is apprenticing with the curandera, only this time, it is her own mother who is ill and the missing ingredient to the remedy, rue, can only be found on the King Ranch. Here again we see Prietita’s daringness, as she, stands up against bullies. Instead of the young macho boy, this story presents the King Ranch as an institution of aggression and injustice. The King Ranch somewhat symbolically represents the stealing of land by Anglos who took advantage of non-English speaking residents like Anzaldúa’s grandmother (Borderlands 8). In contrast to the land-ownership focus of the Ranch, the author presents Prietita’s connection to nature in her abilities to distinguish other plants from the rue, to smell water, and to communicate with wild animals. In fact, Prietita depends on the animals to

209 Both Rebolledo and López and Serrato’s articles point to the humor of the neighborhood woman’s response to the Chicano border patrol guard when he asks “Does anyone know of any illegal’s living in this area?” (Friends n.p.). The woman points to Anglo side of town, insinuating that the Anglos are the true illegal’s in a land that was once part of Mexico and ceded to the United States as part of the Hidalgo-Guadalupe Treaty in 1848.

210 The mother’s illness is not named, only mentioned as “the old sickness” opening up room for speculation. Is “the old sickness” perhaps societal, in terms of racism, sexism, etc.

211 It is interesting to note that the Spanish version of the text refers to the King Ranch as “la kineña como aquí le dicen al Rancho King” (Prietita n.p.). This insider information is omitted in the English version of the story.
guide her to the rue. She follows the female whitetail deer into the woods until the terrain impedes her progress, and even though “she knew from her nature book in school that salamanders have no voice” she asks the feminine “salamandra” to show her the rue even if she couldn’t speak. Following animal after animal, Prietita ventures deeper and deeper into the woods on the King Ranch – transgressing its borders -- until she reaches a clearing where she sees a “dark woman dressed in white” (Prietita n.p.). Only after asking for guidance to find the rue does Prietita call her “Señora Llorona:” Señora as a sign of respect, and Llorona as the mythical woman who wails in the night over her lost children.

Aware of the legend that La Llorona is looking to take naughty children away, Prietita trembles but does not run from the “ghost woman.” Instead, she is able to see through the myth and find the courage to tap into La Llorona’s knowledge. After finding the rue, La Llorona guides Prietita out of the woods in a journey that makes Prietita feel as though she is flying. Unable to thank La Llorona, who has already disappeared, Prietita quickly joins up with the search party that includes the curandera, Prietita’s little sister Miranda, and her cousin Teté (who also appeared as the bully in Friends from the Other Side). Upon hearing that Prietita was aided by La Llorona, Teté exclaims “But everyone knows she takes children away. She doesn’t bring them back” (Prietita n.p.). The curandera responds, “Perhaps she is not what others think she is” (n.p.), anticipating Anzaldúa’s author’s note at the end of the book. In that note, Anzaldúa’s states that her intention in writing this book was to explore the idea that there was another side to La

212 Here also we see an example of the butterfly effect, or of the relational properties of quantum physics: “Micro can determine the macro, self can shape society, the individual can liberate oneself from the shackles of ‘social origins’ ‘social determinism,’ and diverse forms of dualistic thinking, feeling and being” (Tamdgidi 270).
Llorona, “a powerful, positive side, a side that represents the Indian part and the female part of us” (Prietita n.p.). Anzaldúa continues that she encourages children “to look beneath the surface of what things seem to be in order to discover the truths that may be hidden” (n.p.). According to Rebolledo, “Because Prietita is open to other ways of conocimiento, she is open to the power of la Llorona” (Rebolledo 283). In this way, Anzaldúa models an example of conocimiento in action, in her literature for children.

Anzaldúa reinvents the importance of La Llorona to children growing up in South Texas, “If you were a bad little girl la Llorona was going to come and get you. To me she was the central figure in Mexican mythology which empowered me to yell out, to scream out, to speak out, to break our of silence. To me she’s very important” (Interviews/Entrevistas 229). Bravely, Anzaldúa rewrites the myth of La Llorona from being a tool to enforce obedience into a symbol of expanded respect for knowledge. She highlights the role of the curandera and grants the Llorona figure respect, both in the text of the story and in the author’s note at the end of the text. Anzaldúa thus ventures to say, explicitly and implicitly, that curanderas “know many things about healing that Western doctors are just beginning to learn” (Prietita n.p.).

**Conocimiento and Queer Epistemology**

According to Anzaldúa, the quest for knowledge has always been an internal struggle that is played out in the social landscape (Borderlands 87). Anzaldúa seeks to access this knowledge via her body and her lived experience. This queer pursuit challenges Western epistemology and centralizes the quest for knowledge in the brown, marked, bleeding, othered body. She then empowers herself by valorizing that which
makes her different, and uses it as her source of strength. This is a queer search because the bodied source is considered queer in its myriad definitions of different, lesbian/polysexual/auto-erotic, and it is queer because it challenges the status quo. Anzaldúa’s writing exposes institutions of power and works to undermine those institutions. In short, her writing incites revolution.

Intent on overthrowing dualist despotism, Anzaldúa parallels feminist re-visionist epistemology in the protagonists of her literature for children: Prieta and later Prietita are both strong feminist characters. Joaquín, as a feminized male, also assists the author in rewriting Chicano nationalist myths to allow the women (the queer, the curandera) to heal the males and heal their mothers. Anzaldúa extends feminist revisioning to include the power of the imagination and cautions against discounting the subconscious or the mystical. Anzaldúa subscribes to the idea that culture prescribes the way we perceive our reality and empowers herself to rewrite her culture. Reflection on oppression allows Anzaldúa to see the double standard of her oppression and, in a sense, to see through the culture that perpetuates -- if not creates and benefits from -- the oppressive structures in place, to note the constructed nature of that culture.

Relying on the power of individual actions to affect social change, Anzaldúa thus combines lived experience, Indigenous world views/Native science, feminist

213 In his approximation of the sociological imagination, critical self-reflection is necessary for Tamdgidi, as he points out, “In such an alchemical work, the serpent must bite its own tale” (279). “El serpiente que come su cola” is an archival Anzaldúan text that is currently unavailable to researchers until publication plans have been arranged, where she might explore the dangers of such deep critical reflection.

214 According to the butterfly effect, the individual can change the world, just as the beating of a butterfly’s wings alter the planet. Keating takes up this concept in relation to Anzaldúa in “Myth smashers/Myth makers: (Re) Visionary Techniques in the Works of...
revision tenets, spirituality and her theorizations of queerness to develop a queer epistemology. Refining her ideas over time, Anzaldúa introduced the concept of (geographic, psychic, sexual, cultural) Borderlands only to expand upon it with the more encompassing term nepantla. The inhabitants of this liminal space, the new mestizas, likewise evolved into nepantleras and Anzaldúa’s nos/otras concept. The epistemology of these inhabitants was first labeled the New Mestiza Consciousness as outlined in Borderlands, and later developed into conocimiento. Each development of Anzaldúa’s larger queer epistemological project encouraged psychological and spiritual growth and sought to not only rewrite cultural myths, but to rewrite culture.

Diagnosing duality as the root problem, Anzaldúa tackles everything at once. She is not ‘only’ a queer writer, or a ‘women of colors’ writer, or a ‘spiritual writer’; because she refuses fragmentation and dualism, Anzaldúa is all of these labels and more.

Anzaldúa’s success in writing is due to this demand to be wholly herself and not to focus exclusively on one aspect of her character. This method, of course, enraged each of the fields/groups that Anzaldúa (partially) identified with: Chicanos saw her as selling out her race by talking about female sexual desire, lesbian desire, and other ‘private’ matters; women of colors did not understand her decision not to walk out of the National Women’s Studies Association Conference when racial tensions were at their pinnacle (see Chela Sandoval’s “A Report on the 1981 National Women’s Studies Association Conference” in Making Face, Making Soul 55-74 and also mentioned in the Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde” (1993). Likewise, Tamdgidí views the possibility of inner changes effecting the society in Anzaldúa’s sociological imagination: “A radical transformation of an inner habit, as minute as an attitude, feeling, or bias, are deemed to have significant repercussions for larger, global, social processes” (269).
introduction); Chicana lesbian writers, during the historical point when they were fighting for their voices to be heard, felt Anzaldúa to be downplaying her sexuality by not highlighting her ‘lesbianism’ in her writing (see Moraga’s critique of Borderlands discussed in chapter two). And it is perhaps this method, or this nepantlera positionality, that resulted in the communal orphaning of Anzaldúa’s work.

Conocimiento: A ‘Practical’ Application

We must have very concrete, precisely worded intentions of what we want the world to be like, what we want to be like. We have to first put the changes that we want made into words or images. We have to visualize them, write them, communicate them to other people and stick with committing those intentions, those goals, those visions. Before any change can take place you have to say and intend them. It’s like a prayer, you have to commit yourself to your visions. (Interviews/Entrevistas 290)

In much of her later theorizing, Anzaldúa takes on the task of explicating consciousness and shifts of perception. Whereas earlier she had occupied herself with describing the writing process, she amplifies her project to include more than just writing, more than just identity formation: she is taking on knowledge. Here I offer another instance of Anzaldúa’s nepantlera activism that highlights her refusal of dualism by offering a ‘practical’ application of the path of conocimiento. “Let us be the healing of the wound: The Coyolxauhqui imperative-la sombra y el sueño,” published in 2003 is Anzaldúa’s final essay published during her lifetime. Included in the Gloria Anzaldúa

215 “What makes Anzaldúa’s efforts successful is that her imaginative sociological transcending of the self/society dualism is embedded in a relentless and perpetual holistic questioning and transcending/bridging of all other dualisms fragmenting the human liberatory project” (Tamdgidi 267).
Reader, Keating notes that “‘Let us be the healing’ was written for a specific project: a cross-border exploration of 9/11: One Wound for Another/Una herida por otra: Testimonios de latín@s in the U.S. through Cyberspace (11 septiembre 2001-11 marzo 2002), edited by Clara Lomas and Claire Joysmith” (303). Keating continues to observe that “blending fierce anger with sustained optimism, Anzaldúa maintains her faith in the transformative power of art” (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 303). This essay is also a poignant example of the seven stages of conocimiento outlined in Anzaldúa’s 2002 essay “now let us shift”: 1. “el arrebato…rupture, fragmentation…an ending, a beginning.” 2. “nepantla…torn between ways,” 3. “The Coatlicue state…desconocimiento and the cost of knowing,” 4. “the call…el compromiso…the crossing and conversion,” 5. “putting Coyolxauhqui together…new personal and collective ‘stories,’” 6. “the blow up…a clash of realities,” and 7. “Shifting realities…acting out the vision or spiritual activism” (“now let us shift…” 540-78). In the analysis that follows, I show how Anzaldúa employs these seven stages of conocimiento in response to the attacks on the U.S. of September 11, 2001. This is a queer analysis in that I am using Anzaldúaan theory to explicate an Anzaldúaan essay. It is queer in terms of applying a theorist’s theory to the same writer’s work, but it is also queer in that the seven stages of conocimiento are written to explain or perhaps prescribe behavior. The stages, while abstract, are presented in a very concrete manner and constitute more of a meditation on living than high theory. Anzaldúa’s spiritually inflected epistemology teeters on non-dogmatic, perhaps even “New-Age,” religion. Indeed, her essay, “now let us shift…” begins with an offering and ends with “ritual…prayer…blessing…for transformation” (574). Indeed, the conference artwork
Figure 4: Santa Gloria de la Frontera, by Alma Gómez-Frith 2010, Private Collection of Norma E. Cantú, used with permission
selected to represent the 2010 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa conference
features a retablo-like painting of Gloria Anzaldúa by Chicana artist Alma Gómez-Frith
with the inscription “Santa Gloria de la frontera” below the head, perhaps signaling a
admiration of the author that goes beyond literary artistry into the realms of sanctification
and glorification.

The canonization of Gloria Anzaldúa as a literary giant, I believe, should coincide
with that of her canonization as “saint.”216 In viewing Anzaldúa’s epistemology as a
source of belief and instruction on how to live, I understand this glorification of Gloria
Anzaldúa to be an application of her epistemology into an ethics of practice. Anzaldúa
not only laid out the path of conocimiento, but she also modeled its behavior in her life
and in her last published essay, “Let us be the healing of the wound.”

According to Anzaldúa, for conocimiento to be realized, there first “has to come
some kind of opening, some kind of fissure, gate, rajadura—a crack between worlds…the
hole, the interfaces” (Interviews/Entrevistas 266).217 Focusing on interconnectedness of
all people, she enacts political action by offering an alternative to the government’s
official story to the events of September 11, 2001. She labels this necessary, yet painful
stage of conocimiento as “Stage 1: el arrebato…rupture, fragmentation…an ending, a
beginning” (“now let us shift…” 456). “Let us be the healing of the wound” exercises

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216 I include scare quotes on the term saint to distance it from any connotations of
hierarchical organized religion. Based on the parallels of Anzaldúa’s writings and
Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, discussed in chapter one, with the similarities between
Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism and engaged Buddhism, I would argue that “teacher” or
“guru” might be a more appropriate term for the role Anzaldúa performs. These terms,
however, are foreign to the Chicana syncretic tradition, which have rallied around
Anzaldúa’s teachings, especially after her death in 2004.
217 The two times that she was mugged figure prominently as two personal cracks in
Anzaldúa’s reality.
Anzaldúa’s practice of inner change projected outward to effect change in the world. Citing Internet sources, activists, and politically left-leaning magazines, Anzaldúa interrogates President George Bush’s rhetoric for going to war after the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the four hijacked airplanes. Her critique is daring for the time of the publication, but many of the flaws she highlights in Bush’s war plan are, today, common knowledge. Anzaldúa fuses human connectedness to each other and collective responsibility for global events with our shared responsibility for the caretaking of the planet. This is, in effect, a political application of the spiritual activism that she had early outlined in “now let us shift.”

Stage 1: el arrebato…rupture, fragmentation…an ending, a beginning

I Ching: “All movements are accomplished in six stages, and the seventh brings return.” (Borderlands 88)

Just as Borderlands was constructed around a cyclical shape of ending the seventh chapter with a quotation from the first chapter -- “This land was Mexican once/was Indian always/and is. /And will be again” (91) -- Anzaldúa’s epistemological manifesto “now let us shift…” revolves around the seven stages of conocimiento.218 It is fundamental to point out that the seven stages of conocimiento do not follow a linear path to a specific destination. Anzaldúa cautions that “all seven are present within each stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not” (“now let us shift…” 545). She adds that an individual may experience all seven stages within the confines of a day or may dwell in one stage for months, and she adds: “you’re never only in one space, but

218 The number seven is significant in Anzaldúa’s cosmology. She notes that the “the first stages of conocimiento illustrate the four directions (south, west, north, east), the next, below and above, and the seventh, the center. They symbolize los siete “ojos de luz” or seven chakras of the energetic, dreambody, spirit body (counterpart of the physical body), the seven planes of reality” (“now let us shift…” 545).
partially in one, partially in another, with nepantla occurring most often” (“now let us shift…” 545-6). Anzaldúa offers the seven stages of conocimiento as a “mediation on the rites of passage, the transitions of life from birth to death, and all the daily births and deaths in-between” (546). The attacks of 9/11 catapult Anzaldúa into the first stage of conocimiento, “el arrebato…rupture, fragmentation…and ending, a beginning.” She likens the event to a teaching of Carlos Castañeda, whose Don Juan would call such an event “the day the world stopped” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99). While making the connection to Don Juan’s teaching, Anzaldúa modifies the result, clarifying that the world did not, in fact, stop after the attacks of 9/11. Instead, she declares that “our perception of the world, how we relate to it, how we engage with it” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99) cracked. And that after this event, it was impossible not to see the world differently: “we see through its rendijas (holes) to the illusion of consensual reality. The world as we know it ‘ends.’ We experience a radical shift in perception, otra forma de ver” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99). The events of September 11, 2001 exposed a security breach, a hole in the United States’ assumed safety. Importantly, this rupture enacts a fertile space for endings and beginnings. This two-way movement allows for the fragmentation to lead to something new, a third space from which to view the catastrophe of 9/11 and from which to construct a response. This rupture leads to the liminal space of nepantla. The events of 9/11 shatter the belief of national security from foreign attacks, and engender a type of chaos.219

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219 The domestic terrorist enacted by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols in the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, unfortunately did not have such an enormous collective reckoning as the attacks in 2001. See Carol Mason’s work on this event in her forthcoming *Oklahoma: Smearing the Queer in Middle America.*
Stage 2: Nepantla…torn between ways

The 9/11 attacks left the U.S. torn between perceptions of reality. On the one hand, many thought the United States to be an omnipotent superpower in the world immune from nefarious actions of a few individuals and on the other hand, the reality of the 9/11 attacks -- televised for the whole world to witness in real time -- caused a rift in the nation’s psyche. This place of chaos becomes an uncertain space and a site of transition. “In nepantla we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and others have failed living up to idealized goals” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99). Following 9/11, the United States had to collectively take note of its insecurity, of its vulnerability. Anzaldúa argues that this liminal space is ideal for the task of personal and collective self-redefinition, and that nepantleras assist in the transition toward transformation. She labels this transformation, and its process, conocimiento (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99). The space of nepantla is compared to indigenous cultures “which predict that the materialistic present cycle is coming to an end and a more spiritual cycle is commencing” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99). Here Anzaldúa is referring to the Mayan transition from the fifth world to the sixth, a time of collective perceptual shift she had referenced in her Borderlands analysis. Importantly, nepantla can be a personal space of transformation and a collective site of change. Indeed, Anzaldúa recognizes nepantla as the most frequent stage of conocimiento that opens up various opportunities for growth.
Stage 3: Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing

Calling then-President George W. Bush on his knee-jerk retaliatory response to the attacks, Anzaldúa cites the binary dualism of “good versus evil” as the tool wielded by the president to garner support for his “War on Terrorism” and unprovoked attack of Iraq. Writing that “reason and compassion usually prevail” in these situations, Anzaldúa publically states that Bush did not reflect rationally on the situation but instead “engaged the terrorists in a pissing contest...forging a persuasive reactionary nationalistic argument” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 93) that positioned the United States in an “us” versus “them” scenario. This “good versus evil” binary created a smoke screen that obfuscated U.S. foreign policy to the national public and prevented the nation from seeing the situation clearly. Anzaldúa exposes President Bush, less than one year after the 9/11 attacks, for his disregard for humanity both domestically and abroad, and at the same time for his discounting of conservation efforts to preserve the planet. She cites Bush’s withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol that was meant to reduce the globe’s CO2 emissions as one example of his turning a blind eye to pressing issues. Anzaldúa does not limit her condemnation of U.S. policy to the Bush presidency. She states, “But we

220 This stage in Anzaldúa’s queer epistemology focuses on fruitful aspects of depression and darkness. She discusses this state in Borderlands (1987), “Encountering the Medusa” (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 101), “Speaking across the divide” (2003), “Metaphor in the tradition of the shaman”(1990), “Foreword to Cassel’s Encyclopediā” (1996), “Sexuality, Spirituality and the body” (1983), “Llorona Coyolxauhqui” (Gloria Anzaldúa Reader 295) and according to Irene Lara, Coatlicue is connected to Coyolxauhqui “Ella es la luna and she lights the darkness...I call this process ‘Coyolxauhqui consciousness.’ It’s not a consciousness of the awake world, of the sun, of the light. It’s a consciousness of the darkness, the underworld, the depression” (Lara 45).

221 Indeed, Anzaldúa dates this essay “Thur, 07 March 2002 19:00:05.” The inclusion of the time, down to the second, is perhaps due to the location of publication of the essay in cyberspace, or to the news chronicles that similarly marked the moments of the 9/11 airplane impacts.
are now, and have been for decades, the bullies of the planet” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 95). This charge of planetary bullying is documented by a list of incidents of U.S. imperialism around the globe that had resulted in millions of deaths. Bush, himself, is portrayed as a predatory male: “With his war toys he’ll ejaculate bombs into their bodies, disremembering that the US supported Pakistan’s empowering of the Taliban which in turn silenced and veiled its women” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 96). Anzaldúa’s anger, evident in her choice of words, sexualizes Bush’s foreign policy.

The essay does more than rail against the crimes of President Bush and other elected officials. Anzaldúa lists Congresswoman Barbara Lee (representing Berkeley/Oakland) as the sole governmental official she respects. Anzaldúa publicizes Congresswoman Lee’s record: “On September 14 she voted against the bill giving Bush carte blanche to deploy the military against those that our government perceived as responsible for the attacks.” Anzaldúa calls hers a courageous act, one that made Lee the target of hate groups and could have cost her her political career. In nepantlera style, Anzaldúa states that Lee “urged that we step back a moment, think through and understand the implications of our actions, use restraint, and not rush to judgment, a counterattack, or open-ended war” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 94). This is the same type of action Anzaldúa had modeled at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference in 1981.

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222 Many of these instances are supported by Internet sources, possibly due to the nature of the piece being written about/in cyberspace, but also because the government is not forthcoming in releasing statistics that do not reflect favorably on the country.

223 Refer to my discussion of this event in the Introduction to the current analysis.
Anzaldúa then turns the focus of her argument to larger issues of imbalance in terms of race, gender and class. Anzaldúa questions Bush’s practice of racial profiling in the name of rooting out terrorists to make the country ‘safe,’ adding that “poor white women and young Black and Latino men have never been safe in this country—a country that internally colonizes people of color, enforces domestication of women through violence, and continues the slow genocide of Native Americans” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 97). She then offers a searing critique of Bush’s handling of the events of 9/11 by stating that, through the unmeditated reaction to declare war, “Bush and his yes-men dishonored the 2,792 dead and the 300 firefighters and policemen who died saving lives” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 97). Anzaldúa diagnoses the country’s problem as a widespread shying away from our collective shadow that shows the internal fragmentation of our country. Unable to acknowledge our country’s shadow beast, (the aspects of our country that we keep hidden), our government reacted with violence instead of responding with compassion. Anzaldúa counters this violence with a reminder of our interconnectedness:

They refuse el conocimiento (spiritual knowledge) that we’re connected by invisible fibers to everyone on the planet and that each person’s actions impact the rest of the world. Putting gas in our cars connects us to the Middle East. Take a shower squandering water and someone on the planet goes thirsty; waste food and someone starves to death. Though we comprise approximately 4.5% of the people on the planet we consume 82% of its resources. (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 98)

Herein lies Anzaldúa’s ‘practical’ political application of spiritual activism. Through the idea of radical interconnectedness, individual actions affect macro social situations. Therefore, individual reactions to the events of 9/11 will likewise shape the world post-9/11. Anzaldúa maintains that “the dream (el sueño) of what our culture could be—a
model of democracy” is being overtaken by the government (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 98). She maintains that this shock should be harnessed as an opportunity for self-reflection “to confront our desconocimientos, our sombras—the unacceptable attributes and unconscious forces that a person must wrestle with to achieve integration” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 98). Her again, Anzaldúa fuses the personal struggle with the collective one.

Importantly, Anzaldúa does not write Bush off as an outlier nor does she dismiss him as only a predatory male corrupted by power. She views Bush and his circle as an example of “the darkest aspects of our collective psyche, the parts of our culture that act without corazón y sin razón (without compassion or intelligence) and do it with impunity” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 98). Just as the nos/otras dichotomy is false, as there is always some of the other in us and vice versa, Anzaldúa acknowledges, “all of us harbor a Bush-type raptor within our psyches. I know that Bush and his gang are not totally evil or one dimensional” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 98). But granting Bush some nuance does not relieve Anzaldúa of her contempt for his actions: “Our nation is a powerful horse and he is riding it badly” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 99). She includes herself in the group responsible for allowing Bush to come to power, and correspondingly includes herself as responsible for exposing his shortcomings and working toward a more compassionate response to the events of 9/11.
Stage 4: the call...el compromiso...the crossing and conversion

In this fourth stage of conocimiento, Anzaldúa animates a spiritual connection that transcends identity categories. She argues: “if you’re not contained by your race, class, gender, or sexual identity, the body must be more than the categories that mark you” (“now let us shift...” 555). The rupture of perception caused by the attacks of 9/11 opened a crack in reality that allows for alternative perceptions of reality. Noting that reality is not fixed, as evidenced by the fragmentation of that reality by the attacks, Anzaldúa argues that “the life you thought inevitable, unalterable, and fixed in some foundational reality is smoke, a mental construction, fabrication” (“now let us shift...” 558). From this observation, she concludes, “so, you reason, if it’s all made up, you can compose it anew and differently” (“now let us shift...” 558). The realization of the mental construction of reality introduces fluidity to perception, thus granting the ability to the individual to “begin to define [her/his]self in terms of who you are becoming, not who you have been” (“now let us shift...” 556). This rupture allows for self-redefinition and links the individual to the larger category of spiritual connectedness that allows the individual to look around with “awe and wonder” to recognize the “the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings” (“now let us shift...” 558). This spiritual attitude toward

224 This is the stage where the fragmented individual passes from victimhood to empowerment as described earlier in Borderlands: “Su cuerpo es una bocacalle. La mestiza has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads” (80).

225 Anzaldúa discusses the ability to transcend the confines of the physical body in “El Paisano” discussed in chapter two and in an interview where she clearly states “your self extends to the tree. The self does not stop with just you, with your body. The self penetrates other things and they penetrate you” (Interviews/Entrevistas 162).
the world differs dramatically from the “shock and awe” campaign of President Bush in his retaliatory violence.

The call to spiritual connection leads to the swelling emotion of love and compassion “linking you to everyone/everything…this conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing” (“now let us shift…” 558). The conversion happens when “te entregas a tu promesa to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives” (“now let us shift…” 558). Anzaldúa discusses this personal and collective turn to spiritual connection and love following the events of September 11, 2001. She labels the call to be a “psychospiritual/political call” that differs dramatically from Bush’s call to war and violence. Anzaldúa asserts,

Americans in great numbers gathered together in public spaces to pray. We set up peace organizations, vigils, marches, and interfaith prayer meetings. We gave speeches, donated blood, frequented Middle Eastern restaurants, sent email, signed email petitions, connected to activist organizations through the Internet, and made art. (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 100)

This rallying around compassion countered Bush’s acts of violence and signaled, for Anzaldúa, the call to spiritual activism, the commitment to radical spiritual interconnectedness and the conversion to a perception of reality based on love and connection.

Stage 5: Putting Coyolxauhqui Together…new personal and collective “stories”

As she often does, Anzaldúa anchors “Let us be the healing of the wound” by connecting the bodies of the victims of the attacks to the author’s body. These bodies are
in no way separate: “Bodies on fire, bodies falling through the sky, bodies pummeled and crushed by stone and steel, los cuerpos trapped and suffocating became our bodies. As we watched we too fell, todos caímos” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 92).

Reminiscent of global—especially French—solidarity with the United States after the attacks of 9/11, Anzaldúa writes in solidarity with the victims of the attack. On this occasion, Anzaldúa travels from the specific bodies of the victims to collective bodies in solidarity. This is the opposite of the technique used in her previous writing, of starting with her own physical body to describe a communal feeling; here she starts with the collective to point to the specific responsibility of all in crafting a response to 9/11 and to our participation in the collective co-creation of our reality. It is precisely in times of crisis where Anzaldúa sees the greatest room for perception shifts and consciousness change.

Anzaldúa conjures the image of a collective falling in the feeling of helplessness that followed the aftermath of 9/11. She connects this feeling to La Llorona, who was also “lost and alone” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 92), yet she also takes personal responsibility for the events of 9/11. The personal responsibility she feels is identified with her personal shadow and how it relates with collective shadow: “Besides dealing with my own personal shadow, I must contend with the collective shadow in the psyches of my culture and nation—we always inherit the past problems of family, community, and nation.” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 92). She cannot distance herself from society, because she is a part of society: yet despite the loss of life on 9/11, she remains hopeful that this incident can bring about healing. The healing comes in the form of Coyolxauhqui, the moon in dark night that reminds Anzaldúa of the positive
shadow that she has also inherited. The tension between the helplessness and the desire to heal locates Anzaldúa is a state of nepantla.

The liminal state of nepantla allows for the reconstruction of reality via the Coyolxauhqui imperative, the “ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 100). The reconstruction of reality allows for new perceptions of consensual reality and offers the opportunity to create new theories about this reality. As she discussed in the preface to the second edition of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa calls for new theories:

we need teorías that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world, that will explain how and why we relate to certain people in specific ways, that will reflect what goes on between inner, outer, and peripheral ‘I’
’s within a person and between the personal ‘I’s and the collective ‘we’ of our ethnic communities. (*Borderlands*, Preface to the 2nd edition, xxv)

As in the genre of Latin American testimonio, the new theories do not distinguish between personal and collective experience. The interconnectedness of the personal with the collective renders any personal experience partial to the experience of the collective.

Stage 6: the blow up… a clash of realities

The clash in this stage of conocimiento is as easily applied to the actual events of 9/11 as it is to Bush’s handing of the aftermath. Anzaldúa views her role as a witness to the clash: “As a writer one of your tasks is to expose the dualistic nature of the debate” (“now let us shift…” 565). Pointing to Bush’s response to the attacks of 9/11 and his “us

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226 This clash of realities is fictionalized in the following texts: “Reading LP” ([1970s] 2009) “She ate horses” (1990), and “La historia de una marimacha” (1989).
versus them” rhetoric fashioned as “good versus evil,” Anzaldúa persuasively boils the issue down to the dangers of dualistic thinking. She claims that dualistic thinking after the events of 9/11, turned the United States “…into a militarized zone where desconocimiento runs rampant… each camp adopts an ‘us-versus-them’ model that assumes a winner and a loser, a wrong and a right.” She continues to say that this mentality has been “the prevailing resolution paradigm of our times, one we continue using despite the recognition that confrontational tactics rarely settle disputes for the long run” (“now let us shift…” 565-566). With critical distance, Anzaldúa as artist, attempts to step back from the situation and assess it from a different vantage point. She asserts that “what takes a bashing is not so much you but the idea/picture of who you think you are, an illusion you’re hell bent on protecting and preserving at all costs” (“now let us shift…” 566). While the attacks of 9/11 did cause physical and collateral damage to the United States, Anzaldúa astutely notes that the most damage was, perhaps, leveled on the image the United States had of itself. The United States could no longer be seen as the most secure nation, unafraid of terrorist affronts. Then-president Bush, reacted to the security breach by showing excessive amounts of force in an attempt to compensate for the attacks, and in an attempt to deal with the new reality presented to him and the nation that the United States was not immune from terrorist attacks. In this regard, Bush had to realize the fluid nature of the image of the United States and could no longer “overlook the fact that your self-image and history (autohistoria) are not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to the winds” (“now let us shift…” 566). This is true of Bush individually and of the United States collectively. Forcing to view this new interpretation
of reality, Bush emerged as, as Anzaldúa has labeled him, the nation’s “shadow beast” (“Now let us be the healing” 98).

In her reflection on the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, Anzaldúa offers the path of conocimiento, as the path of knowledge to understand how these events affect us individually and as a nation. Anzaldúa also labels the path of desconocimiento, of ignorance, and associates Bush’s actions to this path. While it may seem as though Anzaldúa is introducing a binary opposition (conocimiento versus desconocimiento), I would argue that just as she include more than one dimension to Bush’s character analysis and the shadow-beast part of everyone’s psyche, the introduction of the path of desconocimiento is not diametrically opposed to conocimiento, but rather, desconocimiento is part of conocimiento. Just as everyone may harbor a “Bush-type raptor within our psyches” (“Let us be the Healing” 98), so too, must we all realize that we all suffer from ignorance. The artist’s job is to make us aware of that “Bush-type raptor” or that desconocimiento within us, so that with awareness, we can take proactive steps to understand, and perhaps overcome the ignorance. Anzaldúa articulates conocimiento as the more difficult path of the two, assuring her readers that conocimiento “leads to awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, and courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways that have the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 100). This motivation toward connection and compassion is the underlying base that necessitates the awareness of desconocimiento and our personal and collective shadow-beasts.

With a turn toward connection and compassion, Anzaldúa urges us to forget the ego, and to “see beyond what divides us to what connects us, encouraging us to think on
the level on planetary connectedness. (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101). With this framework of planetary connectedness, the exposure and connection of Bush’s environmental and foreign policy record seems all the more heinous: “A calamity of the magnitude of 9/11 can compel us to think not in terms of ‘my’ country or ‘your’ nation but ‘our’ planet” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101). Embracing ideas of interconnectivity speaks to the power of individual and collective consciousness: “Though only a small percent of the world’s six billion have achieved a high level of awareness, the collective consciousness of these people has the power to counterbalance the negativity of the rest of humanity” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101).

Anzaldúa tied her spiritual beliefs of connectedness to her scientific study of quantum physics, and in echoing the idea behind the butterfly effect, that proclaims that the flapping of one butterfly’s wings affects the whole planet, Anzaldúa concludes: “Ultimately each of us has the potential to change the sentience of the world” (101). Echoing her prior statement in Borderlands, “I change myself, I change the world,” (70), Anzaldúa links self-knowledge and growth to the development to the collective conscious of the planet. Connectionist thinking allows Anzaldúa to expose the systems of dualism at work in society and to expose those systems for the pain they cause. Exploring the clash of realities in the events after 9/11, Anzaldúa offers herself as a nepantlera to guide us to a new understanding of individual and collective self, for calling attention to the clash, brings with it new perspectives and shifts our conceptions of reality. As she stated in 1987, “every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a travesía, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again... knowledge makes me more
aware, it makes me more conscious” (Borderlands 48). And by exploring this epistemological process, Anzaldúa makes her readers more conscious as well.

**Stage 7: shifting realities…acting out the vision or spiritual activism**

It is precisely during these in-between times that we must create the dream (el sueño) of the sixth world…May we do work that matters. Vale la pena, it’s worth the pain. ("Let us be the healing of the wound” 102)

The ability to shift realities is a nepantlera strategy and this ability, when explained to others affords them to possibility to shift their conceptions of reality as well. In addition to seeing through the confusion, the nepantlera reminds us that the “the aim of conflict is peace, … [and] proposes spiritual techniques (mindfulness, openness, receptivity) along with activist tactics” to help heal the wound (“now let us shift…” 568).

In her writing on the events of 9/11, Anzaldúa brings the reader’s attention back to the expression of common humanity of the people who volunteered in the cleanup of Ground Zero and who help financially through donations. By foregrounding the coming-together of individuals after the attacks, Anzaldúa encourages her readers to see how “devastating events can help us overcome our desconocimientos” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101). The process of exposing and overcoming desconocimientos leads to conocimiento, a deep awareness. Her essay “Let us be the Healing” exemplifies a merging of traditional activist tactics and spiritual techniques. This is her idea of spiritual activism, a new tool and practice that aims to effect a change, a shift. For Anzaldúa, “spirit-in-the-world becomes consciousness, and we become conscious of the spirit in the world. The healing of our wounds results in transformation and transformation results in
the healing of our wounds” (italics in original “Let us be the healing of the wound” 100).

Spiritual activism encourages us to imagine our communities differently and to not be locked in to an “us versus them” mentality. The power of the imagination is coupled with the power of dreaming. Anzaldúa argues that we can change the world by “dreaming it passionately via all our senses, and willing it into creation” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101). The practice of gradually changing ourselves and our perception of reality, will “enable us to extend our hand to others con el corazón con razón en la mano” and spread conocimiento (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101). The practice of spiritual activism will empower the practitioner and will ultimately allow us, in Anzaldúa’s view, “to organize, achieve justice, and begin to heal the world” (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 101). Anzaldúa’s manifesto of reclaiming the spiritual and harnessing the power of the imagination is a call to action:

Levántate, rise up in testimony. Let’s being by admitting that as a nation we’re killing the dream of this country (a true democracy) by making war and depriving many of life and basic human rights. Let’s acknowledge the harm we’ve done, the need to be accountable. Let’s stop giving energy to only one side of our instinctual nature—negative consciousness. When we own our shadow we allow the breath of healing to enter our lives. Let’s look at these events as catalysts that allow us to reframe global disasters, prompt us into re-mapping our priorities, figuring our exactly what we believe in, what our lives mean, and what our purpose is as individuals, as a nation, and as world citizens. Let’s call on our inner resources to help us in times of rising and falling, peace and war, compassion and violence. Let’s have compassion for all those who suffer from violence. Let’s use internal and external conflicts and wounds to enter the soul. (“Let us be the healing of the wound” 102)

Fundamentally, this call to action asks us to be the healing of the myriad wounds we suffer from individually and collectively.
Anzaldúa’s queer epistemology interrogates the mental processes of her seven stages of conocimiento in an effort to empower her readers and encourage them to participate in the healing of the many wounds they suffer from. As I have shown in this chapter, Anzaldúa challenges Western epistemology and diagnoses its inherent dualism as the core injury to our individual and collective psyches. Focusing on the raising of consciousness, a tool utilized in the 1970s and 1980s feminist circles, Anzaldúa describes in writing, her path toward new knowledge. She labels this new knowledge conocimiento, a Spanish word for knowledge, yet expands upon the definition of knowledge to include both the path to and the attainment of knowledge. She uses the Spanish word to disrupt common connotations of the English world “knowledge” and separate it from its Western epistemological roots. Using the Spanish word for her concept allows her readers to view it anew and allows for new expanded definitions of the same. She presents fictionalized accounts of this new form of knowledge in her writing, especially her writing for children in an effort to work through her ideas and also to expose her intellectual project to her readers. She explores the malleability of language and culture through her nos/otras concept and looks to the imagination to construct her reality differently. By exposing her journey of knowledge, Anzaldúa shows how shifts of perception can change reality. Additionally, she offers spiritual activism as a way to infuse this new knowledge with a spirit of planetary interconnectedness. She presents her epistemological journey to her readers via her writing and offers her work as a meditation or prescription of behavior: Anzaldúa’s queer epistemology challenges Western notions of knowledge acquisition by questing the production of that knowledge and exposing the constructed nature of knowledge that is in essence, a fabrication. With this new
perception, Anzaldúa encourages the production of new knowledge based on connectionist politics and spiritually inclined worldviews to ultimately offer her readers an ethics of practice for changing the world.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have sought to show the importance of the under-recognized contributions of Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s life and work. I have presented new and emerging critical lenses through which to interrogate Anzaldúa’s work and have included in-depth literary analysis of many published and unpublished Anzaldúan texts. In an effort to go beyond her seminal work, "Borderlands/La Frontera," I have included pre- and post-Borderlands writings to highlight both the visionary aspects of her early work and to trace the development of her theories post-Borderlands. In effect, I have attempted to widen academic interests in Anzaldúa by referring to "Borderlands," but by focusing my attention on her other writings. To foreground Anzaldúa’s artistic range, I have included analysis on a wide array of the literary genres practiced and invented. I have also attempted to show how engagement with Anzaldúa’s work has been limited to her 1987 "Borderlands," and thus, only provides a glimpse into her life’s work. In the process, I have intended to show the depth and complexities of Anzaldúa intellectual and spiritual growth and how she expresses and reflects upon experiences in her life in her writing. In this regard, the works I have analyzed speak to the breadth and depth of Anzaldúa’s contribution. Yet this analysis is in no way exhaustive of Anzaldúa’s oeuvre. Because Anzaldúa’s work in Borderlands has contributed to so many academic fields, I argue that she has not been fully engaged with by any one camp. The present analysis
wishes to squarely engage with Anzaldúa’s life and writing in regards to her contributions to spirituality, queer theory and epistemology.

The first chapter of this project took as its focus Anzaldúa’s early writings to uncover and highlight the parallels between Anzaldúa’s life and shamanism. By showing the similarities between the two, Anzaldúa’s intention of using her writing to heal, or to make “healing trabajos” becomes apparent. The healing comes in the form of El Mundo Zurdo that is later theorized as the path of conocimiento. Exploring Anzaldúa’s writing style alongside her relationship with diabetes shows interesting connections between a diabetic’s fear of amputation and Anzaldúa’s theory of re-memberment, illustrated by her idea of “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together.” The process of rememberment serves to reunite fragmented parts of the self that have been disjoined by societal restrictions and prejudice. Likewise, a diabetic’s fear of blindness parallels Anzaldúa’s affinity for the night. She describes the darkness as a time to allow her imagination to roam freely and from an early age associated telling stories with the night. Careful to include flying, and the acquisition of new knowledge as reward for the writer who plunges into the darkness of night, to excavate the trauma of past wounds in order to express them artistically, parallels shamanic abilities to commune with the lower and upper realms. Thus, comparing Anzaldúa’s writing process and her struggles with diabetes to the life and work of a shaman introduces a new theoretical lens from which to view Anzaldúa’s writings. This new perspective validates Anzaldúa’s spiritual inclinations and presents a fuller picture of her writing projects.

The second chapter of analysis looks at Anzaldúa as an unrecognized precursor to queer theory and focuses on her pre-Borderlands writings to show how she was (and
continues to be) instrumental in queer theorizing. Expanding definitions of queerness to include more than just homosexuality, Anzaldúa marks a turn from Lesbian and Gay Studies to queer theorizing. She furthers this move by employing a fluid and, indeed, expansive view of queerness. In this regard, Anzaldúa is more inclusive than her contemporary mainstream queer counterparts, yet has been unrecognized for her contributions. Theorizing queerly and writing as a queer artist, Anzaldúa incorporates issues of gender and sexuality throughout her texts and pushes the limits of contemporary theorizing by including polysexuality, autoeroticism and sexual attraction to nature in her texts. Noting the importance of reflexivity to queer theorizing, Anzaldúa offers useful analytical tools in her complicated relationship to identity labels. She further queers mestizaje, by expanding her definition beyond biological limitations. I argue that she further queers queer theory by including discussions of spirituality as another type of queerness. In effect, Anzaldúa urges the academy to grant queer theory its full radical potential and not be limited or contained by anyone or any boundary.

The third chapter encourages us to take our understanding of social constructionism to a whole new level; pointing not only to the ways in which society dictates behavior based on binary opposites, but also to the power of language to limit our perception of reality. Taking deconstruction further to the point of reconstruction, Anzaldúa offers a holistic, connectionist world-view that advocates a relational model of identity construction and negotiation. This spirituality-inflected view of identity, begs us to consider the insights Anzaldúa garnered from her research into alternative spiritualities, the occult, and other “demonized” forms of knowledge. She combines this spirituality with the impetus for social action exemplified by her ideas of spiritual activism. In this
process, Anzaldúa exemplifies a connectionist worldview that operates on relational, as opposed to oppositional or fragmentary models of existence. Anzaldúa introduces these concepts and later outlines this philosophy in her post-*Borderlands* writings. I argue that this is a queer epistemological project as it challenges Western philosophical underpinnings and expands our ideas of the constructed nature of consensual reality.

Ultimately, Anzaldúa shows the inefficacy of boundaries to the common goal of knowledge and understanding. Throughout her writing and as modeled in her life, Anzaldúa consistently breaks down disciplinary boundaries, boundaries between personal and collective, and between the imaginal and spiritual, to model for her readers a way to not only read differently, but also a new method of relating to ourselves and others. Consequently, Anzaldúa models a path to live differently and to change the world.

In compiling the present analysis, I have realized that Anzaldúa’s simple and clear writing style is anything but simple. Her writings and theoretical contributions are as complex as any “high theory” and should be given their theoretical due in the academy. Fusing the personal with the fictional asks us to question objectivity and further more, challenges us to change our world and ourselves. Her goals are radical and revolutionary. By refusing categorization both personally and literarily, Anzaldúa shows how the self cannot be contained and how we need to change the mentality that wishes to reduce the individual to a group of labels. This refusal and her contribution of a spiritual-inclined relational identity offer a new form of interaction that addresses self and others holistically.
Mine is but one contribution to the growing field of Anzaldúan Studies. There are many individuals who are actively working and publishing on Anzaldúa’s work and calling attention to her importance to a number of academic fields. In addition to the publication of the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009), AnaLouise Keating also teaches a graduate seminar on Gloria Anzaldúa\textsuperscript{227} at Texas Women’s University. As Trustee to the Anzaldúa Collection, Keating may also be preparing an anthology of Anzaldúa’s contributions to queer theory.\textsuperscript{228} Norma Cantú, founder of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa, recently edited a special editions of the feminist Journal *Signs*, focusing on expanding Anzaldúa’s international significance by highlighting scholars outside of the United States who are exploring Anzaldúa’s many theories in their own geographical situations.\textsuperscript{229}

The field of Anzaldúan Studies is rapidly increasing, both in the number of scholars from different disciplines that are taking notice of her work and within the scope of inquiry to go beyond study of *Borderlands/La Frontera* and to address her spirituality as well as other understudied aspects of her life and work. There are now prizes honoring Anzaldúa, which contribute to the growth of Anzaldúa’s legacy. The National Women’s

\textsuperscript{227} Keating is not the only scholar who teaches this seminar. WHO ELSE?

\textsuperscript{228} This hypothesis is based on the number of Anzaldúan unpublished texts dealing with issues of gender and sexuality in the Anzaldúa archive that are currently closed to researchers until plans for publication are finalized.

Studies Association hosts an annual Gloria E. Anzaldúa Book Prize,\textsuperscript{230} to honor Anzaldúa’s work with the NWSA and to recognize groundbreaking feminist scholarship, the American Studies Association offers The Gloria E. Anzaldúa Award for Independent Scholars, Contingent or Community College Faculty,\textsuperscript{231} highlighting the independent nature of Anzaldúa’s career and research, and the Macondo Gloria Anzaldúa Milagro Award\textsuperscript{232} recognizes the need for spiritual healing among writers and artists. These prizes bolster recognition of Anzaldúa’s contributions to the various fields of study to which her life and work contributed.

I offer the present analysis to the growing field of Anzaldúaan Studies in an effort to diversify the aspects of her life and writing addressed in academic scholarship. By offering close readings of Anzaldúaan texts, I hope to show the literary artistry behind the texts as well as how that artistry works to convey Anzaldúa’s message. Anzaldúa, in addition to her many identity labels, was also a scholar and I believe she should be

\textsuperscript{230} “The prize honors Glória Anzaldúa, a valued and long-active member of the National Women’s Studies Association,” and “includes $1,000, membership in NWSA and recognition for groundbreaking scholarship in women’s studies that makes significant multicultural feminist contributions to women of color/transnational scholarship.” <<http://www.nwsa.org/content.asp?contentid=16>>

\textsuperscript{231} Established in 2008 and “hosted by the American Studies Association, this award honors Anzaldua’s [sic] outstanding career as an independent scholar and her labor as contingent faculty, along with her groundbreaking contributions to scholarship on women of color and to queer theory.”

http://www.thesa.net/prizes_and_grants/page/anzaldua_award_for_independent_scholars/

\textsuperscript{232} Founded in 2006, “Named in honor of our departed visionary, the Gloria Anzaldúa Milagro Award has been established by the Macondo Foundation to recognize the role of community in taking care of our own and of the importance of taking time out to heal ourselves. The Gloria Anzaldúa Milagro Award is annually awarded to one or more writers/artists. The award consists of a two-week residency at the Macondo residency house, Casa Azul in San Antonio, Texas.”

<http://www.macondofoundation.org/programs_gloria.html>
credited for her scholarly interventions. In an effort to view Anzaldúa more holistically, I have traced Anzaldúa’s intellectual trajectory alongside of her life events, as I believe Anzaldúa did not separate her life from her writing. Removing this externally imposed border, is one step toward deconstructing other borders that intend to limit our understanding.
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Asheville Queer Studies Conference March 29-April 2, 2011 <<
http://www2.unca.edu/queer/>>


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---, presenter, “Patlache Amoxtli: Anzaldúa, Codices, and Indigenous Queer Identities” 2009 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa Conference

---, moderator “Young Scholars and Atravesados Negotiating the Academic Landscape through Practices through the Body and Theories of the Flesh.” 2010 Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa conference


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CURRICULUM VITA

Elizabeth (Betsy) Dahms

EDUCATION:
2007-2009 M.A. Hispanic Studies, University of Kentucky
1999-2003 B.A. Spanish, Centre College, Danville, Kentucky

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:
2012 (Spring), Visiting Assistant Professor of Spanish, Centre College, Danville, Kentucky
  Second semester (SPA 120) Spanish courses (with Community-Based learning component)
2007 – 2011, Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky
  • Spanish 101: Introduction to Spanish
  • SPA 102: Spoken Approach: A continuation of SPA 101
  • SPA 103: Intermediate Spanish
  • SPA 101/102 Labs (Course leader for SPA 101/102 Labs for two semesters): Laboratory to accompany first and second semester Spanish
  • SPA 201: Spoken Approach, third semester Spanish
  • SPA 211: Spanish Conversation
  • GWS 300 Introduction to Masculinities, self-designed course under the guidance of Dr. Susan Bordo and Dr. Cristina Alcalde

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE:
2011, August-present, Research Assistant to Dr. Carol Mason, University of Kentucky
Responsible for editing drafts, locating and ordering sources, reading and summarizing materials. Assist Dr. Mason in completing manuscript for *Oklahoma: Smearing the Queer-as-Terrorist in Middle America* (working title, forthcoming from SUNY Press)

**AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION:**

- Chican@/Latin@ Literature
- 20th-21st century Latin American Literature
- Masculinities Studies
- Queer Theory

**AWARDS:**

2012, March, Winner of the 9th Annual Feministas Unidas Graduate Student Essay Prize Competition

2012 February, Nominated for The Catharine Stimpson Prize *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*

2011 May, Bonnie Jean Cox Graduate Student Research Grant, Gender and Women’s Studies, University of Kentucky

2011 April, University of Kentucky Latin American Studies Travel Grant

2011 April, University of Kentucky Graduate School Dissertation Enhancement Award

2010 December, University of Kentucky Woman’s Club Endowed Fellowship

2010 March, Bonnie Jean Cox Graduate Student Research Grant, Gender and Women’s Studies, University of Kentucky

2009 October, Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference Leonor A. Ulloa Scholarship (2010 Madrid, Spain)

2009 April, Teacher Who Made a Difference Award, University of Kentucky

**SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS:**


---, "Pussy for Life: Adherence and Deviance from the Dominican Masculine Code in Junot Díaz’s *Drown*” (forthcoming in the *MIFLC Review* [Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference Journal])

---, “Staging Gender Trouble: Sabina Berman’s ‘The Mustache.’” *Disclosure*, the University of Kentucky’s Social Theory Journal, April, 2011.


**SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS:**

Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference, September 29-October 1, 2011
Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama
“Shamanic Urgency and Two-Way Movement in the Works of Gloria Anzaldúa”

Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, April 14-16, 2011
University of Kentucky, Lexington Kentucky
Panel organizer and moderator: “Anzaldúaian Thought and Queer Theory: A Dialogue”

University of North Carolina Queer Studies Conference, March 31-April 2, 2011
University of Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina
“Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism: Queer Agent for Social Change”

University of Texas, San Antonio, Texas
Panel moderator

Vanderbilt Graduate Student Conference: Bodies and Oddities, October 1-2, 2010
Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee
“Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism: Performing Radically Queer Queer Theory.”

University of Kentucky Latin American Studies Symposium, February 25-26, 2010,
University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky
“Self-destructive Embodiment of the joto body in Rigoberto González’s ‘The Abortionist’s Lover.’”

Mid-America Conference on Hispanic Literature (MACHL), November 5-7, 2009  
University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas  
“Es mucho hombre esta mujer:” A Queer Reading of Teresa in Sab.”

Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference (MIFLC), October 8-10, 2009  
Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina  
“Pussy for Life: Adherence and Deviance from the Dominican Masculine Code in Junot Díaz’s Drown.”

The International Conference on the life and work of Gloria Anzaldúa, May 16-17, 2009  
University of Texas, San Antonio, Texas  
“Queer Performativity in Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera.”

University of Kentucky Graduate Student Congress, April 3, 2009  
University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky  
“Staging Gender Trouble: Sabina Berman’s ‘The Mustache’”

INVITED LECTURES:

October 24, 2011 (with Mahan Ellison) “An Insider’s Guide to Graduate Student Funding.” University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky for Dr. Ana Rueda’s Intro to Hispanic Studies SPA 782 course.

February 24, 2011 “Contested Territories: Gloria Anzaldúa’s ‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’ and the Politics of Language in Latino Literature” Centre College, Danville, Kentucky for Dr. Mary Daniels’ Latino Literature course

February 28, 2011 “Anzaldúa’s ‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’ as Theoretical Framework for Reading Latino Poetry” University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky for Dr. K.J. Rawson’s English 401 course.

FILM PRESENTATIONS:

October 25, 2011 “Raising Victor Vargas: Negotiating Dominican-American Masculinities.” Hispanic Graduate Student Association (HIGSA), Cine Club, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky

March 10, 2010 “Set if Off: An example of Female Masculinity.” Gender and Women’s Studies Spring Film Series, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2012-present Member, Editorial Review Board for the MLA-indexed, peer reviewed journal *Label Me Latin* @ <<http://labelmelatin.com>>

2009-2011 Assistant Director, Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, University of Kentucky

Maintain conference webpage, online abstract system. Responsible for organizational logistics for all areas of international conference that hosts 800 scholars at the University of Kentucky.

2008 Middlebury College, Guadalajara, Mexico

Summer Spanish Language Program

2003-2007 Spanish Language Assistant, Centre College

Coordinate and maintain volunteer opportunities in the Danville area for Spanish students to interact with the Hispanic community. Conduct conversation sessions. Organize events and schedule speakers to further inform students of issues pertaining to the Hispanic community. Serve as Centre ambassador in Mérida to conduct interviews for a Yucatan Mayan instructor and establish groundwork for language course.

2004-2007 Director, Centro Latino

Establish Danville’s only free resource center for Latinos. Assist Latinos in accessing social services. Responsible for day-to-day operations. Schedule volunteers. Organize community-wide events. Maintain partnerships with social service agencies and Latino community. Extensive grant writing with over $95,000 in awards.

2002 Centre College, Quito, Ecuador

Conduct collaborative research with Dr. Daniels on immigrant prison population at El Inca Women’ s Prison in Quito, Ecuador.

2001 Centre College, Merida, Mexico

Extensive studies in Spanish language and culture in a home-stay environment, which included travel to Cuba.

1999-2003 Service Learning Coordinator, Centre College

Serve as liaison between college Faculty and students and members of the Hispanic community to create mutually beneficial partnerships. Contacts include Boyle County/Danville Schools, North Point Training Facility, Danville Adult Education, as well as various churches and individuals.
1998 Youth for Understanding, Caracas, Venezuela

Language and culture acquisition as an exchange student.

LANGUAGES:

Spanish (near native), Italian and French (reading knowledge)

SERVICE:

2008-2011 Vice President of GWS Graduate Student Union, University of Kentucky
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