

“There’s another way of looking at reality. There are other ways of writing. There are other ways of thinking. There are other sexualities. Other philosophies.”

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2000b, 229)

## THE DECOLONIAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF SHIFTING: Writing Encounters in the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Archive

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**Abstract:** *This article seeks to expand our understanding of the philosophical contributions of Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004) to decolonial feminism by analyzing the interconnections between her theory of writing and her broader phenomenology by focusing on her concepts of shifting, nepantla, and conocimiento. Analysis of archival and published texts written or revised in the last decade of her life suggests that, as she developed her ideas on the relationship between writing, consciousness and social change, Anzaldúa enacted and conceptualized a practice of shifting based on phenomenological exploration, which complicate her theory of writing as well as her overall feminist, decolonial thought. This article shows how several key texts insist on providing blueprints for liberatory, relational meaning-making practices, for the exploration of diverse forms of consciousness, and for the production new forms of transformative theories. I specifically analyze Anzaldúa’s suggested methodology of writing and place it in conversation with those texts in which she addresses phenomenological issues, such as consciousness, the habitation of the psychic space of nepantla, and her path of conocimiento. These theoretical explorations are discussed also in conversation with contemporary Latina, feminist, and decolonial thinkers, as well as with some traditional, early-20th century phenomenologists. Such transdisciplinary reading reveals that Anzaldúa’s deployment and elaboration of theories of consciousness, in synchronicity with a specific writing theory and practice characterized by shifting, were aimed at countering established philosophy, feminist theory, and other scholarly fields to develop an alternative phenomenology for effecting queer, feminist decolonial transformation. Methodologically, this article also offers “reflective reading” as a mode of engagement with hybrid theoretical texts, as we continue to work on decolonizing the academy and its disciplines—including philosophy and literary theory—from intersectional queer, feminist, and decolonizing standpoints.*

*After years* of encounters with Gloria E. Anzaldúa's vast archive—both through her published work and her unpublished texts held at the Nettie Lee Benson Collection at the University of Texas at Austin<sup>1</sup>—I became increasingly aware of the need to reconsider her theory of writing as a key component of her philosophical legacy and, more specifically, of her decolonial theory. Anzaldúa wrote consistently and extensively about the purpose, process, and methods of writing and about its transformational, queering, and decolonizing potential. Throughout her career she also connects notions of writing to shamanism, changes in consciousness, and shape shifting, and in her later work, to the intricate phenomenological notion of *conocimiento*. As she develops a unique praxis and theory of writing (especially through *autohistoriateoría*) she emphasizes that, notwithstanding the 'outwardness' of her queer, feminist decolonial project, change will materialize only if we transform our consciousness and our relationship to textuality and meaning-making in order to re-frame our positionings, our allegiances, and our actions.

It has been noted that the focus on relationality and re-tribalization in the Anzaldúan texts of the late 1990s and early 2000s marks a re-orientation of her work away from identity politics and towards more coalitional interconnections. In their introduction to *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed our Own* (2011), editors AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López argue that those later works propose a politics of "affinity" (14), or a "politics of interconnectivity" (12).<sup>2</sup> While *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) or *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987) claimed certain social positionalities such as the *new mestiza*, the feminist of color, or the Chicana lesbian, Anzaldúa's later writings attempt to formulate theories in which personal and collective shifts in consciousness and relationality are

privileged. Indeed, texts such as “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces,” (2002), Anzaldúa’s dissertation/book project posthumously published as *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), the e-mail dialogue titled “Speaking across the Divide,”<sup>3</sup> or her unpublished “Writing Guide,”<sup>4</sup> insist on proposing a theory of consciousness and textuality that may effect collective transformation based on (queer feminist decolonial) relationality. With this, Anzaldúa theorizes a new form of *intentionality*, a term that I use as Merleau-Ponty defined it—as “the invisible thread that connects humans to their surroundings meaningfully, whether they are conscious of that connection or not” (Freeman and Vagle 2009, 3; Vagle 2014, 27).

While not drawing a stark contrast between earlier and later texts in the Anzaldúan archive, in this article I re-engage texts from the 1990s and early 2000s to pay attention to how the relational and *intentional* dimensions of Anzaldúa’s writing praxis and theory hold implications that are philosophically and politically relevant to queer feminist decolonial projects. I notice how closely she observes our orientation towards, and relationship to, all kinds of phenomena—natural, psychological, supernatural, racial, sexual, creative, and other—and how writing is theorized as a personal and public act of particular transformative potential. I also note similarities arising between the content of her reflections and that of thinkers who have engaged the phenomenological tradition, especially phenomenologists of race, sexuality, or perception, whenever it allows me to draw insights into questions regarding orientation, consciousness, or intentionality. New critical issues, then, arise, such as how Anzaldúa’s texts consistently make connections between the exploration of consciousness and a particular understanding of the writing process; how her embodied, shifting compositional aesthetics incorporates relational concerns; or how writing is a form of meaning-making (intentionality) central to her queer, feminist decolonial project. I

will suggest that her emphasis on “radical interconnectedness,” in the words of Keating and Gonzalez-López (2011, 12)—rather than a theoretical re-orientation towards the final decade of her life—marks the affirmation of a sustained theoretical interest signaling the furtherance of a decolonial phenomenology developed around the key concept of *conocimiento*, which proposes the exploration of different forms of intentionality, and captured in the interrelated notions of *nepantla* or *la facultad*. These ideas take shape in her writing through the methodology of *shifting*, which in turn allows for new meaning-making practices to emerge.

### Phenomenological Inclinations

Sara Ahmed has suggested that phenomenology is useful in queer studies because it allows us to theorize—among other things—lived experience in the body, as well as “the intentionality of consciousness [and] the significance of nearness” (Ahmed 2006, 2).<sup>5</sup> Adopting such a lens in (re)reading the Anzaldúa archive also helps us better understand its seemingly less political aspects, such as her exploration of multiple forms of consciousness (spirituality, the dream world, the imaginal, the individual and collective unconscious, etc.), which are part and parcel of her theory of *conocimiento* and the acts and methods of writing. Not coincidentally, Latina decolonial feminist philosophers Linda M. Alcoff, María Lugones, Mariana Ortega, and Jacqueline Martinez have noted Anzaldúa’s overlapping thematic concerns with those of traditional phenomenologists and/or with existentialist and pre-existentialist philosophers. In “The Unassimilated Theorist,” Alcoff describes how Anzaldúa’s method for theorizing racial identity through a personal voice makes specific contributions to women-of-color ontological—and partly epistemological—thought in a manner that resembles Wittgenstein’s attention to the soul (Alcoff 2006, 259).<sup>6</sup> Lugones has also furthered the inquiry into Anzaldúa *ontology* by analyzing how *Borderlands/La frontera* advances

a brand of “oppression theory” that offers a queer, mestiza framework for interrogating the concept of *being* and proposes the decolonial notion of the “Self-in-between, the border Self” (1991, 36). Mariana Ortega similarly delves into discussing the ontological import of Anzaldúa’s new mestiza in *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (2015), connecting it to Heidegger’s concept of the Dasein, a productive parallel.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, Martínez’s essay, “Culture, Communication, and Latina Feminist Philosophy,” engages key aspects of Anzaldúa’s phenomenology of writing by offering reflections on her theory of communication as “interrelated with history and culture” (2014, 231). As these authors suggest, establishing a dialogue between Anzaldúa’s theoretical investigations and certain conventional branches of philosophy, such as ontology or epistemology, is productive and invites further philosophical readings of her expansive work.

Anzaldúa’s philosophical interests, however, extend beyond these areas of inquiry. As AnaLouise Keating notes in her introduction to the posthumously published *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), those areas include epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, “twenty-first century continental philosophy and feminist thought (especially neo-materialisms, object oriented ontology, and debates concerning the so-called linguistic turn” (Keating 2015, x). While omitting phenomenology as part of Anzaldúa’s significant legacy,<sup>8</sup> Keating points towards the complexity of Anzaldúa as a philosopher. Interestingly, her persistent theoretical search at the intersection of writing, composition, and consciousness—alongside her critique of established, dominant ways of doing theory—connects with contemporary phenomenological concerns and even resembles explorations in content and genre deployed by early phenomenologists and existential philosophers such as Heidegger (1975), Husserl (1970), Sartre (1969), Camus (1989), and Simone de Beauvoir (2011). Moreover, her focus on race and decoloniality may remind us of

the concerns and methods of Frantz Fanon's (1986), and her emphasis on embodied positionality and sexuality may be reminiscent of the work of other early phenomenologists of the body including Simone de Beauvoir, Edith Stein (1989), and Merleau-Ponty (2012). Similar to Anzaldúa's, their interests included corporeality and perceptual consciousness in relation to social concepts such as sexuality (de Beauvoir), relationality (Stein), and freedom, intentionality, and expression (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).<sup>9</sup> And, similarly, Anzaldúa also searched for new forms of writing and ways to "do theory" free from the yoke of preconceived ideas, imposed methods, or conventional forms of philosophical discussion.<sup>10</sup> In drawing this a-historical parallel, the purpose is not to align Anzaldúa's intersectional decolonial theory and aesthetic with a Western-inspired disciplinary tradition. Rather, I propose a productive, transdisciplinary lens, as the nuanced terminology and conceptual frameworks of phenomenology may broaden our study of Anzaldúa as a thinker. I trust it will help us better understand how her theories of writing, consciousness, and decoloniality are interconnected in her later work.

Anzaldúa is certainly not a conventional philosopher or a traditional phenomenologist. As numerous decolonial theorists recognize, her legacy in the field of post-colonial/decolonial studies, unlike that of most phenomenologists, is foundational. For Emma Pérez, Anzaldúa's literature is key in the creation of a Chicana feminist 'decolonial imaginary,' as it privileges marginalized genealogies, bringing forth decolonizing forms of knowledge (1999, 2005).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Walter D. Mignolo acknowledges Anzaldúa's vast contributions to "decolonizing and queering epistemology" through her powerful work in the "cross-fertilization of decolonial thinking and queer theory" (2012, 42-3). María Lugones, as previously noted, discusses her influence in decolonial ontology through the notion of "border self" as a form of decolonizing subjectivity (1991), while also noting her contribution

to developing Latina decolonial feminism through theories of erotics and relationality that generate a “strongly infrapolitical sense of agency” (2012, 72). While these and other authors<sup>12</sup> highlight the uniqueness of her theories, which emerge at the intersection of feminist, queer, and decolonial thought and are foundational to 21st-century queer feminist decoloniality, the significance of her decolonial *phenomenological* project is yet to be clearly described and thoroughly examined.

Building on prior philosophical readings, my phenomenological study focuses on the Anzaldúan proposal for transformational forms of communication and engages her writing as a phenomenological encounter in itself.

### **Archival Encounters**

My approach to Anzaldúa’s published and unpublished texts has unfolded as a series of personal meaning-making moments and is encouraged by her reiterated call for engaging nepantlera, queer, and feminist theorists, and decolonial artists and writers.<sup>13</sup> As she develops a complex theory of writing, Anzaldúa urges us to interact with texts and text-making in new, transformative ways. Anzaldúa’s unpublished writing guide, her notes, her book/dissertation, autohistoriateorías, letters, and interviews, all compel readers, critics, theorists, and writers to re-orient ourselves when approaching the phenomena of reading and writing. This invitation recurs as she investigates the decolonizing impact of transforming consciousness, communication, and forms of relationality throughout her career.

These invitations lead me to an approach to the archive—its theories and textures—with the awareness that a new mode of reading and writing is necessary. As a result, I have read Anzaldúa “reflectively,” as Rita Felski (2009) and others would have it,<sup>14</sup> without occluding my own subjectivity. Invoking

Felski, I acknowledge the “power of [my] attachments” and allow myself to see texts as opportunities to explore and cultivate relationships (2009, 34).<sup>15</sup> In my encounters in the archive, I inevitably noticed that certain texts matter more to me because of my training, experience, and positionality, which informed the affective dimensions of my encounter as “modes of critical thought are also forms of orientation toward the world, shaped by sensibility, attitude, and affective style” (Felski 2011, 219). As a decolonial reader and thinker, I am drawn to her commitment, and the expansiveness, complexity, and inclusiveness of her theoretical and political investigations. As a feminist, gendered, and gender variant writer of scholarly and creative texts, I notice that I am attracted to Anzaldúa’s persistent explorations of new forms and methods of writing, relating, and identifying. As a critic, I exercise caution lest I incur in the ‘glorification of Gloria,’ or of any particular author. I also take stock of other meaning-making filters, aware that they carry specific legacies of a culturally hybrid, non-citizen woman working in the U.S. academy, who was first socialized in the capital city of a former colonizing power and fascist nation. These intellectual, ideological, and affective experiences shape my encounter with the Anzaldúan archive and with the page here, as I write this article on her phenomenology of writing,<sup>16</sup> while keeping in mind her proposal for a *nos/otras* vision and her interest in exploring and inhabiting the uncharted and disorienting territories of *nepantla*.<sup>17</sup>

Encountered at different moments of my life and in disparate spaces, many archival and published texts written by Anzaldúa in the 1980s conjoin issues of individual and collective consciousness with writing and intersectional social change. I have re-read texts that explicitly link the concepts of consciousness, writing, and decolonial transformation, such as “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” (1981), chapter 6 of *Borderlands/La frontera*, (“Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black



Ink,” 1987), her lecture “Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness,” (penned in 1986),<sup>18</sup> or “Unfinished Notes on a Writing Process” (written in the 1980s and last modified in 1990, unpublished until 2014).<sup>19</sup> *Borderlands/La frontera* also highlights the import of identifying and developing queer and racialized forms of *awareness* (mestiza consciousness) in the process of decolonizing physical, social, and psychic locations (i.e. *la frontera/* borderlands). I found that these early phenomenological concerns are elaborated further as Anzaldúa develops a theory of *conocimiento*, which appears in texts from the 1990s and onward. The new theoretical exploration relies heavily on coalitional notions such as *nos/otras* and *nepantlera* to fathom new, more inclusive decolonial forms of consciousness, as well as on the exploration of awareness-in-relation through physical and non-physical perception. I noticed that the notion of *conocimiento* underscores relationality and the need to investigate multiple modes consciousness, including what Anzaldúa calls the *imaginal*, the dream, the mythical and the spiritual worlds. The essay “now... let us shift,” in particular, included in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), but also the (numerous) versions of other chapters of this manuscript,<sup>20</sup> offer nuanced examples of this expansion of Anzaldúan thought. In these and other texts written or revised in the late 1990s and early 2000s, she builds on—and moves beyond<sup>21</sup>—earlier ideas of subjectivity to create a layered philosophical system in which notions of consciousness and relationality start to take prominence over issues of the definition of the self and its identities.<sup>22</sup> Rather than focusing on *being*, Anzaldúa seems interested in conceptualizing *relations* and *meaning-making*. Increasingly, she offers linkages between the questions of writing and reading and the exploration of consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Her reflections on communication, thus, acquire a rich *phenomenological* depth as a philosophy of writing and decolonial change.

Rather than a contrast between identitarian and post-identitarian writings—or politics—in the Anzaldúan archive, then, the *shift* that I have observed

taking place in her work can be identified as a deepening of an existing inclination towards phenomenological concerns, with later texts expanding her philosophy of being as a philosophy of being-in-the-world, and her phenomenology of writing enriching her long-standing explorations of writing and consciousness. In the sections below, I analyze the transdisciplinary proposal for a decolonial form of meaning-making relationality in several archival and published texts, in which access to multiple forms of consciousness and new creative and communicative methods are discussed. I pay particular attention to Anzaldúa's proposal for what I term *methodology of shifting* and focus on the development of her theory of writing as a material, embodied form of relationality. Traversing textual sites spanning her published and unpublished production allows me to punctuate instances in which her phenomenological theories emerge or are articulated more clearly or complexly. Further, as I revisit specific texts concerned with the writing process, consciousness, and *conocimiento*—among other concepts—I am able to describe Anzaldúa's phenomenology of writing not only as central to her decolonial philosophy, but also as a proposal for an embodied feminist and queering decolonial praxis today.

### **Writing and the Path of Conocimiento**

While exploring Anzaldúa's physical archive in Austin, the numerous versions of her autohistorioteorías, writing guides, notes, and published and unpublished texts, each new folder reminded me of how writing was, for her, about embodiment and formal/material experimentation as much as it was about theorizing. Her search for new *composturas*<sup>24</sup> felt like a series of physical, mental, and spiritual exercises, as a struggle to frame, compose and think holistically—with honesty and purpose—to queer modes of expression that may convey particular forms of consciousness and a decolonial imaginary. Interestingly, her theory of consciousness seems to take sharper shape as she discusses the phenomenon of writing. For instance, the posthumously published lecture, "Creativity and Switching Modes of

Consciousness” (1986, published in 2009<sup>25</sup>), “Unfinished Notes on a Writing Process” (written throughout the 1980s, first published in 2014<sup>26</sup>), and the versions of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (written throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, published 2015) address the linkages between writing, consciousness, and social transformation.

Maria de Guzman captures the complexity Anzaldúa’s compositional search when she notes that her formal explorations are “never divorced from a vertical exploration of the psyche nor from a horizontal movement out into the world of social relations” (2011, 212). Anzaldúa’s descriptions of her own transformative, embodied experiences of writing are, moreover, useful for us readers and writers exploring her queering and decolonizing phenomenology. With the acknowledgement that her theory of writing is also never separate from a theory of reading, the sub-sections below lay out how a phenomenology focusing on the relevance of shifting orientations and of transformative meaning-making encounters challenges the heteronormative normative logic of coloniality.

### **The Path of Conocimiento as Phenomenological Theory**

Among the concepts that best capture Anzaldúa’s theoretical search at the intersection of writing/composition and phenomenology, the notion of *conocimiento* is particularly productive, as it integrates ideas of both consciousness and of communication. *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*—a true treatise on the phenomenology of writing—elaborates this concept at greatest length. As in other post-*Borderlands* texts, the volume rejects the centrality of social identity as a fruitful category for social transformation and disinvests from relying on specific identities, which can “become a cage you reinforce and double-lock yourself into” (138). Instead, *conocimiento* is presented as a liberatory path consisting of a “deep awareness,” a “searching,

inquiring, and healing consciousness[.]” which is intimately connected to writing (17). In an intentional blurring of authorial identity, Anzaldúa refers of herself (and other writers) simultaneously as *you*<sup>27</sup>, signaling the intrinsic relationality of writing, and enacting the idea of the habitation of an in-between subjectivity, which challenges the limits between I and others, and performs a move away from the self-centered, fixed-identity life writing. The volume thus enacts writing as a concrete path of *conocimiento*, which encourages readers to adopt new positionalities from which to transform the way we think about writing and consciousness.

Two chapters of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* methodically explore the connections between consciousness and writing, as they describe the seven stages of *conocimiento* in relation to creative and compositional processes. Chapter 5, “Putting Coyolxauqui Together: a Creative Process,” and chapter 6, “now let us shift...*conocimiento*...inner work, public acts,” establish links between the phenomenology of experience and writing. Here, *conocimiento* is connected to other key phenomenological concepts—*la facultad*, *la naguala*, and the Coyolxauqui imperative—all of which are included in her theory of consciousness and writing. Chapter 5 offers a reflection (and enactment) of the interrelated processes of traversing modes of consciousness and creativity. Invoking the decapitated Aztec figure of Coyolxauhqui, “the moon goddess, a warrior woman,” Anzaldúa enacts a writing experience in which both a sense of the dismembered self-in-relation and of writing are re-membered, put together as an “organized whole” (2015, 107). The different drafts of a text are seen as stages in the desired process of re-composition and range—in her words, from a “grotesque,” to a “less malformed,” to a graceful text, as revisions ensue (107). Importantly, the uneasy compositional assemblage—the destruction and re-construction process—is accompanied by “profound shifts in consciousness” as the writer inhabits a transitional space—*nepantla*. These

modes of awareness involve rational consciousness, “imaginal consciousness,” and “the dreaming naguala,” among other stages (108).

Chapter 6 elaborates on the metaphor of la naguala as a central figure connected, precisely, to our capacity to shift, relate, and re-assemble from multiple positions. In a note, Anzaldúa explains:

[T]he feminine form of nagual, the Mexican indigenous capacity some people (such as shamans) have of shape shifting—becoming an animal, a place, or thing by inhabiting that thing or by shifting into the perspective of their animal companion. I have extended the term to include an aspect of the self that is unknown to the conscious self [...] a creative, more dreamlike consciousness able to make broader associations and connections than waking consciousness. (237)

Thus, the polysemic symbol suggests shifting in consciousness, body, and orientation and enables non-conscious forms of awareness. Activating la naguala means to be able to both alter positionality, shape, and orientation, and to experience multiple forms of consciousness. It is therefore a key instrument in the relational, meaning-making process of *conocimiento* as it helps bring together multiple sources of information:

Information your sense organs register and your rational mind organizes coupled with imaginal knowings derived from viewing life through the third eye, the reptilian eye looking inward and outward simultaneously, along with the perceptions of the shape- shifting naguala, the perceiver of shifts, results in *conocimiento* [...] (reflective consciousness). (120)

La naguala is a central figure specifically in two of the seven stages of Anzaldúa's path of *conocimiento*. After being thrust into the disorienting space of *nepantla* by a moment of crisis (first stage), la naguala facilitates the writer's connection with "unconscious and invisible forces," which allow her to perceive material and spiritual worlds through a new healing perspective.<sup>28</sup> Later on, in the seventh stage of the path ("spiritual activism") la naguala enables a sense of interconnectivity, "to relate to others not as parts, problems, or useful commodities, but from a connectivist view," which allows the writer to accommodate the other's perspective to her vision (150). Experiencing these forms of relational consciousness not only enables the expansion of individual consciousness, but also our sense of connection with different realities, which in turn effect more complex and inclusive forms of awareness and lead to transformation (150).

The organizing principle of *conocimiento* in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* is thus a polyvalent concept. The description and theorization of its 'path' suggests that it does not refer solely to knowledge (or a knowledge system), nor just to personal growth, but, rather to a form of relational awareness with meaning-making implications. Beyond the "state of mental and emotional alertness" to which it alludes, *conocimiento* is a theory for "lucid living," according to Anzaldúa (2015, 198). It involves inhabiting multiple forms of consciousness, but also multiple realities in which the sensual, corporeal awareness and the imaginal and rational minds are present and connected. Although referred to as a path, the process and theory of *conocimiento* do not prescribe an avenue for individual psychological development. even though it relates to sources and concepts used in psychology, including imaginal psychologists (and anthropologists) such as Carlos Castaneda, Robert Bosnak, and Carl Jung.<sup>29</sup> The path is non-linear, descriptive, and relational. It is recursive and involves personal intuition and experience, but also social (inter)action and political praxis. It is both personal

and interpersonal, both material and non-material, individual and collective.<sup>30</sup> As Anzaldúa notes, the process “pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift” (19). Not only does it lead the writer (the *you* of the text) to orient herself in relation to others and to material and non-material realities *differently*, but it also prompts a type of action involving a laborious decolonizing journey of personal and social implications. Conocimiento is, thus, both a phenomenological theory and a methodology capturing Anzaldúa’s practice and philosophy of consciousness and intentionality.

Through the path of *conocimiento*, then, Anzaldúa deploys what Walter Dignolo identifies as a decolonial “transformation of the classic philosophical questions” characterized by “a re-orientation from Being to Doing” (2012, 19). It is a conceptual shift performed by other decolonial thinkers, as noted by Dignolo, through which notions of subjectivity are reframed in the context of coloniality (2012). Relatedly, Anzaldúa underscores the notion of interconnectedness in the context of coloniality in a manner that can be likened to the theories of Dignolo himself, but are especially comparable to those of Frantz Fanon. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres notes, Fanon’s anticolonial stance significantly shifted existential philosophy from a focus on ontology to attending to issues of relationality:

[I]f Dussel spells out the historical dimension of the coloniality of Being, Fanon deploys the existential expressions of coloniality in relation to the colonial experience in its racial and, to some extent as well, its gendered dimensions. And if Levinas’s point of departure is the anarchic moment of the constitution of subjectivity in its encounter with the Other, Fanon concentrates his attention in the trauma of the encounter with the imperial and racist Other” (2007, 242-243).

As does Fanon, Anzaldúa re-orientes her philosophy towards critical concepts that may transform theory for those and on those violently gendered and racialized. Her theory of *conocimiento* (missing in Maldonado's overview) provides us with a queer, Chicana feminist lens through which colonial, racist, and heteronormative structures are challenged and the "ways set up by those who benefit from such constructions" can be undone (2015, 120). Her theory is more than a critical lens and inundates the realm of epistemology. Although her references are often non-Western (Chicana, Mexican, Latin American, Latina, people of color writers and thinkers), and Anzaldúa suggests particular genealogies, her project does not end with the recognition of a certain epistemological lineage. Hers is also a theory of creativity and composition, and thus, a theory of (decolonial) *doing*, involving the re-creation and story-telling of both testimonial and imaginal realities. Further, her embodied writing process—especially her writing of *autohistoriateoría*—can be read as "corpo-politics" or a "political biography" (Mignolo 2012, 29), which is offered not only as an alternative form of knowledge, but also as a transformative technology for alternative *meaning-making* practices—a central focus of her phenomenology. It is in this *doing* via writing—and other forms of communication—that the author's own phenomenological experience is key, including her complex encounter with the words and the page. Thus, if, as Mignolo suggests (quoting Partha Chatterjee), "we have to decolonize being and to do so we have to start decolonizing knowledge" (32), Anzaldúa seems to suggest that the pathway to decolonizing *both being and knowledge* lies in transforming precisely *how* we engage relational doing through communication with the *different* other, including the others in ourselves.

Anzaldúa's philosophical inquiry, thus, deepens our thinking about consciousness with reflections on the role of writing as a phenomenological, interpersonal experience. By continually offering her own writing as an



embodied investigation into the experiential processes involved in the queer woman of color encounter with the world and others, Anzaldúa's phenomenological trail in the archive emerges as intimate space in which multiple forms of reality emerge in the path of *conocimiento*. The inclinations towards phenomenology there can be characterized as what María Lugones terms "turns inward," or shifts of colonized gendered feminism towards *infrapolitics*.<sup>31</sup> As *infrapolitics*, Anzaldúa's path involves noticing forms of awareness, health, orientation, and positions in relation to the multiple internal and external realities with which the colonized and racially gendered are in touch. This consciousness building also entails shifting or decolonizing our intentionality or meaning-making processes, which take place—at least partially—through the embodied experience writing.

### **The Methodology of Shifting**

In Anzaldúa's later texts, the intertwining of concrete enactment and theoretical notions on writing as a meaning-making process brings methodological issues to the fore. A multitude of unpublished texts housed at the Benson Collection cast light onto her phenomenological encounter with the page as an embodied creative process. Many of them provide a window into her approach to the moment of writing, recurrent manuscript revisions, concerns over her health, or her attention to method and compositional detail. Other texts include detailed instructions for guiding the writing practice, for queering and decolonizing the process, for staying along the healing path of *conocimiento*. These writings also reveal her intention to encourage others to engage in embodied, liberatory encounters with textuality, as she would in the writing workshops that she offered throughout her life.

One such text is Anzaldúa's unpublished *Writing Guide*. Spanning several archive folders and subfolders, the *Writing Guide* is comprised of documents

such as, “‘Notes,’ 2001 November 22 (55.5);” “‘Autohistorias as Process Writing,’ 1997 January 29 (55.8);” “‘Compositioning: Theories of Art,’ 2000 August 11 (55. 9);” “‘Conocimiento’ manuscript,’ 2001 January 21 (55. 10);” and the undated pages of “‘Nepantla: Theories of Composition’ (60.20).” A thorough analysis of the *Writing Guide* would be the matter of another essay, but it is worth noting now that many of its parts propose specific instructions to engage the writing of self-referential fiction and non-fiction as acts of both personal healing and social transformation. The concrete prompts offered in the 27-page document “Conocimiento,” for instance, explore linkages between the kinesthetic aspects of writing and consciousness, relationships between the body, creative process and output; between physical and psychological perception of multiple realities; and between a spiritual consciousness and the sentient body.<sup>32</sup> Starting with a breathing meditation and other timed physical and mental activities (exercise, staring at nature, imagining, or reading poetry), continuing with detailed note-taking and narrative writing prompts, and ending with the poem “Bleeding,” the “Conocimiento” manuscript connects aesthetic issues with Anzaldúa’s phenomenology by conceptualizing writing as deeply personal, multidimensional, embodied, meaning-making work. Further, as does the rest of the *Writing Guide*, it reveals her interest in developing a practical phenomenology and a philosophically coherent method of writing for other queer, Chicana, Latina and women of color writers that may further feminist, queer decolonizing visions of reality.

In addition, in a practical phenomenology of sorts, Anzaldúa seems interested in elaborating the notion of “shifting” as a central concept referring to a beneficial and necessary capacity for women of color and others to survive and heal in a colonized environment and as a writing method. As explained in “Unfinished Notes on A Writing Process,”<sup>33</sup> the capacity to “traffic between

worlds” underlies the purpose and method of writing, understood as an act of bridging, birthing, and feeding (2014, 4). Writers are identified as “people who use their intuition and imagination” (5), as vessels for whom “the land is the rational mode of thinking, the ocean is the unconsciousness [...], and the shore is the interface or border that connects the two” (2). As part of this theory of the phenomenology of writing, in essays such as “Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness,”<sup>34</sup> Anzaldúa enumerates forms of awareness involved in shifting: “the rational, reasoning mode, which is to me connected with the external reality, with the world we inhabit right now; and other modes of consciousness connected with the world of imagination, the world of fantasy, and the world of images” (103). This ability to perceive multiple forms of reality, *la facultad*, is first experienced by Anzaldúa as a painful perception of realities beyond the rational<sup>35</sup>, which later allows her to realize that one of her “functions [as a writer] is to go in and out of various worlds” (105), to be a channel (the body) through which the non-logical worlds may be transformed into “concrete universes” (104). The capacity to *shift* between these forms of awareness is presented as a highly valuable, transformative skill. Writers, artists, and “creative scientists” (and perhaps those who will read the *Writing Guide*) are precisely those who “traffic back and forth between these worlds [...], switching between the upper, or external, reality and the underworld, the world of the soul and its images” (103).

But shifting for Anzaldúa is not only a metaphor and theoretical concept. It is also a compositional method involving textual fragmentation and re-positioning, the actual shuffling of the text, so as not to let the writing settle too quickly:

This is my process: I write all the chapters at the same time and I bring them up through the second draft, the third draft all together. I don't

have just one finished thing because I don't know where things are going to go. [...] All the pieces have to be on the table and I'm adding and subtracting pieces and I'm *shifting* [emphasis added] them around. (Anzaldúa 2000d, 175)

The textu[r]al result is one of palpable gestures in both Anzaldúa's published and unpublished texts, a sense of discontinuity and integration, or what Jane Hedley called a "nepantlist poetics" (1996). Embodied engagements such as repeated revisions appear in the archived files and are obvious even in some of her most revised and polished autohistoriateorías such as *Borderlands/La frontera*<sup>36</sup> or *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*. Beyond her own writing, Anzaldúa's *methodology of shifting* is also visible in co-edited and multi-authored volumes such as *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), *Making Face, Making Soul* (1999), or *this bridge we call home* (2002).<sup>37</sup> New mestizas and nepantleras create volumes and texts in which a decolonizing discourse involves re-constituting collective projects and sexually, culturally, racially, and generationally disparate coalitions. Both in individual or collective volumes, discontinuities enact not only the capacity to shift, but also relational, coalitional thought, integration and re-membling embodied in the intertextual dialogue—a theory-in-dialogue.

Inevitably, as I considered the key principles of this *methodology of shifting* throughout the Anzaldúan archive, I was reminded of basic concepts connecting her suggestions on writing with her larger phenomenological theory. Of course, the physical concreteness of the praxis of *shifting* appears intimately related to a concept such as *la facultad*, which implies the capacity to shift, but also, importantly, to the concept of *nepantla*. As it is well known, Anzaldúa insists on an aesthetic that exhibits and explores the *in-between*. The cracks, the borderlands, *nepantla*<sup>38</sup> become visible in between textural shifts,

which are often uncomfortable, transitional spaces of inquiry, re-orientation, and transformation. In such in-between locations, the writer interfaces and moves through a number of realities, their margins and personal shifts—all perceived through her body and via multiple forms of awareness. From there, she composes and plays with the shape and content of the writing. Inhabiting these generative spaces is presented as both an inevitable and a privileged experience for queer and women of color writers, and as a productive element of the *methodology of shifting*. Rhetoric and writing method, thus, rather than concede to an irredeemable dismemberment, offer the means to accomplish a utopian endeavor: the personal and collective effort at re-membering differently. Such vision is theorized and practiced from the phenomenological space of nepantla.

### **Writing from Nepantla, a Decolonial Intentionality**

The preface of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* opens with a description of the impulse and purpose of writing and a definition of what Anzaldúa terms “the Coyolxauhqui imperative:”

Writing is a process of discovery and perception that produces knowledge and conocimiento (insight). I am often driven by the impulse to write something down, by the desire and urgency to communicate, to make meaning, to make sense of things [...]. I call this impulse the Coyolxauhqui imperative”: a struggle to reconstruct oneself and healing the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que rechazan pedazos de nuestras almas.” (2015, 1).

Later on, in chapter 4 (“Nos/Otras, nepantleras and new tribalism”), Anzaldúa elaborates her concept of conocimiento as a path that traverses

forms of inner consciousness and connects through the (likely public) act of writing, upending established categories, belief systems, identities, and power structures in a collective plane, thanks to the work of nepantleras:

As intermediaries between various mundos, las nepantleras “speak in tongues” —grasp the thoughts, emotions, languages, and perspectives associated with varying individual and cultural positions. [...] They trouble the nos/otras division, questioning the subject’s privilege, confronting our own personal desconocimientos, and challenging the other’s marginal status. Las nepantleras recognize that we’re all complicit in the existing power structures, that we must deal with conflictive as well as connectionist relations within and among various groups. (82-3)

Thus, Anzaldúa’s impulse and commitment to writing from nepantla—along with that of other nepantleras—imply a commitment to relationality and to inhabiting the personal as well as the public, collective social spaces of accepted colonial positionality. Driven by the Coyolxauhqui imperative, she travels through those realities; the queer, the woman of color, and the decolonial writer each inhabit different modes of consciousness, the differential space of nepantla, which is also the geographical and social space that Mignolo terms *exteriority*, or the implied, real, or pre-supposed margins of colonial heteronormative whiteness.<sup>39</sup> Because of this *exterior* engagement, Anzaldúa insists, nepantlera writing can effect a shift in discourse and perspective, impacting multiple levels of consciousness, forms of meaning-making, and subjectivity in the public sphere.

As praxis, writing from nepantla concretizes the path of conocimiento in its various dimensions. The related compositional method of shifting

generates liberating ways of making meaning through purposeful shifts in consciousness, coalitional interconnectedness, and embodied communicative practices. As ‘inner work,’ the motions, dislocations, and re-orientations of consciousness (the intimate activation of *la facultad*) associated with the habitation of *nepantla* usher a transformative access to new perspectives. And as a (potentially) ‘public act,’ writing engages—and can transform—the (colonized, gendered, racialized) outer world. Significantly, Anzaldúa’s ‘inner work’ is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s and Husserl’s notion of “operative intentionality”—a “pre-predicative” process, or “the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape” (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxxii). Anzaldúa’s operative intentionality focuses on the non-discursive experiences of gendered, racialized, colonized women, and exhorts us to explore multiple forms consciousness, including the physical, imaginal, subconscious, and spiritual in order to understand the sense that we make in our interaction with the world. Secondly, her relational theory of writing and communication (her notion of ‘public act’) can be likened to Merleau-Ponty’s and Husserl’s ‘act intentionality,’ which has to do with our “voluntary decisions, [...] the unique formula of behavior towards others,” something that we display and shows a “certain manner of articulating the world” (Merleau-Ponty lxxxii). Both Anzaldúa’s ‘public acts’ and Merleau-Ponty’s ‘act intentionality’ account for the meaning-making processes that shape our interactions with the external world and imply a discursive understanding of relationality. Writing from *nepantla* and practicing Anzaldúa’s methodology of shifting becomes, thus, a multilayered act of (decolonial) intentionality. As a relational engagement, such writing enacts a meaning-making process of social implications, with the compositional method of shifting allowing for new, collective decolonial intentional practices. Such phenomenology of writing, thus, proposes not a unitary decolonial articulation of the world, but

a new, transformative strategy for positioning ourselves in relation to others, and for making meaning in the context of normative coloniality. It constitutes the bridge that connects the ‘inner work’ of shifting with the ‘public act’ of articulating liberatory, decolonial interpretive visions.

In *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), Sara Ahmed recalls Iris Marion Young’s notion of “inhibited intentionality,” (1990) referring to the restrictive ways in which girls and women can “learn” to make sense of the world as a result of their gendered bodily experience. The logic here is that the process of gendering “teaches women” not to inhabit their bodies fully, to “shrink” to a smaller presence, lest the specter of gender-based violence or aggression materialize (2017, 24-5). Conversely, Anzaldúa’s methodology of shifting integrates the search and the tension stemming from inhabiting Mignolo’s *exteriority* in the world and the internal cracks in the body and moving planes of *nepantla*. Both kinds of habitation are equally important in this intentionality in order to heal and to transform established categories, such as those of gender, race, and sexuality, which reflect what Lugones calls the ‘coloniality of gender’ (2012, 74).<sup>40</sup> Anzaldúa’s phenomenology of writing and its embodied intentionality call for a collective resistance to these categories and their oppressive erasures in all areas of life. As a meaning-making endeavor, writing from *nepantla* enables the possibility of new, decolonizing interpretations of experience contra the restrictive and restricted ways in which women, especially queer and racialized women in colonial settings, are ‘taught’ to understand our realities.

Anzaldúa’s edited anthologies and her autohistoriateorías, offer textuality as an embodiment of inner experiences of brokenness and fragmentation; their compositional method attends to disruption, but also to the need to shift and the desires of anchoring and visioning, which writing can provide—even if temporarily. Anzaldúa’s methodology of shifting from *nepantla* provides,



thus, not only a new mode of doing theory, but also a non-conventional logic, a new intentionality to make sense of the colonial world. It compels nepantleras to not only inhabit our bodies and consciousness fully in new ways, but also to bring our varying forms of consciousness and experiences of in-betweenness to the space of writing. It calls forth the queer occupation of such space in relation and in dialogue.

### **Concluding Note**

Anzaldúa's theoretical explorations in selected texts of the 1990s and 2000s offer a phenomenological theory of writing which, while connected to earlier notions of resistant subjectivity, deepens and complicates our understanding of her legacy and of the scope of her philosophical endeavor. I have read these explorations as part of her larger project in phenomenological theory, especially as articulated in her later theory of *conocimiento* since, as noted, the allegory of the *path* establishes key interconnections between consciousness, intentionality, and communication as areas of engagement leading to transformation. It also conceptualizes writing as a core practice in the processes of decolonizing consciousness and upending normative colonizing discourses by taking us beyond questions of being, subjectivity, and identity to focus on issues of relationality, meaning-making, and doing.

Anzaldúa's phenomenology of writing, with its reliance on the transformational potential of language and proposal for new forms of intentionality, constitutes, then, a core component of her decolonizing project. Numerous published and unpublished texts in her archive investigate how explorations of consciousness and concrete communicative methods provide a foundation to further individual and collective queer, feminist decolonizing work. Anzaldúa's own compositional work and embodied aesthetics challenge both literary and theoretical norms by displaying an always shifting,

relational logic and meaning-making practice. Her multilayered process of writing and composition produced new genres and volumes of palpable resistance to heteronormative, colonial categories, including brief and long autohistoriateorías and coalitional, multi-voiced edited anthologies. Her oeuvre embodies decolonial writing as the locus of both the interiority and exteriority of an emancipatory process, with multilayered descriptions and enactments of the path of *conocimiento* becoming key elements in such process. Further, by foregrounding (and enacting) the *methodology of shifting* as a relational, corporeal form of textuality, she offers a pivotal practical phenomenology as a key contribution to queer feminist decolonial philosophy of the late 20th century.

Today, Anzaldúa's later writings offer a generative communicative method and a phenomenology of writing serving both as a roadmap and a framework for queer feminist decolonial thinking and praxis. Coupled with her investigations in diverse philosophical terrains, her shifts are a compelling reminder of an expansive, complex theoretical project, which continues to challenge conventional notions of doing philosophy or cultural studies. As I approached her archive to consider her contribution to decolonial theory in the 21st century, my only—albeit ambitious—*suspicion* was that her phenomenological explorations (particularly in the area of writing) might be one of the greatest—and most overlooked—gifts to today's queer feminist decolonial thinking and writing. Her proposal for decolonizing forms of orientation and intentionality precedes and participates in a major shift in turn-of-the-century feminist queer philosophy and constitutes one of the most robust contributions to transnational decolonial theory from feminist queer perspectives. I hope that my partial reading of her archive will prompt new readings and writing by queer, feminist, decolonial, and other theorists. I also hope that these reflections will incite others to discuss the phenomenology

of writing as an endeavor in Latinx decolonial literature, as we adopt new approaches to textuality and new writing methods that may continue to challenge established academic norms and fields.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Support for this research project has been provided by The Nettie Lee Benson Library of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin and the PSC-CUNY Research Award Program of the City University of New York.

<sup>2</sup> See also Keating (2015), as well as essays included in Part V of *Bridging*, titled “Todas somos nos/otras: Toward a ‘politics of openness’” (Keating and González-López 2011), Lugones (2005), and Zaytoun (2005), among other reflections on Anzaldúa’s expanded reflections on the self and toward relationality.

<sup>3</sup> As noted in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, this email exchange between Anzaldúa and her friend Inés Hernández-Ávila took place in 2002 and was later published (in a slightly different version) in the fall-winter 2003 issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (Anzaldúa 2009b, 282).

<sup>4</sup> Significantly, and as discussed below in this essay, Anzaldúa’s unpublished “Writing Guide,” including texts dated between 1996 and 2004, focuses not only on the craft and process of writing non-fiction, fiction, and poetry, but also on theories of art, the artist and her community, and meditation and forms on consciousness, among other themes.

<sup>5</sup> While Ahmed focuses primarily on the phenomenological concept of “orientation” applied to queer studies in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), she also takes on the task—as Anzaldúa does—to inquire about critical orientations within the field of philosophy and feminist theory.

<sup>6</sup> Although in an earlier, influential essay Alcoff discusses Fanon’s work and the phenomenology of racial embodiment; unfortunately, she does not include references to Anzaldúa here (1999).

<sup>7</sup> In spite of phenomenology being featured in the title, Ortega (2016) focuses on the ontic and ontological as she analyzes Anzaldúa’s new mestiza consciousness and what she calls “the multiplicitous self” (33-40). She also connects some of Anzaldúa’s later texts to her own feminist “phenomenology of world-traveling” and proposal of “critical world-traveling” (130-135). Ortega does not focus, however, on Anzaldúa’s theories, writing, communication, relatedness, intentionality, nor does she offer a study of a distinct Anzaldúan phenomenology.

<sup>8</sup> For critical discussions on Anzaldúan aesthetics and/or relationality see, among others, Garza (2003), DeGuzmán (2011), Teresa A. Martínez (2005), Vivancos (2013), Barnard (1997), Hedley (1996), Temperance (2009), Keating and González-López (2011). Aesthetics, communication, and relationality are certainly taken into account in these interpretive works. However, the ways in which her work integrates a theory of writing, consciousness, and intentionality as parts of her full-fledged, complex phenomenology is not discussed.

<sup>9</sup> Part One of Merleau-Ponty's (2012) *Phenomenology of Perception* ("The Body," 69-205) includes sections with titles such as "The Body as a Sexed Being" and "The Body as Expression and Speech." Overlapping concerns are also present in other sections throughout the book, such as "The Perceived World" (209-384) or "Freedom" (458-483).

<sup>10</sup> For Anzaldúa, this often involved a rejection—in both method and concern—of mainstream and scholarly feminist, male-centered Chicano analyses, Western normative modernist conceptions of subjectivity, and general normative approaches to the multiple realities we inhabit.

<sup>11</sup> Although occasionally Anzaldúa referred to her own times as a 'postcolonial' era, she often writes about her work as being 'decolonizing' (see, for instance, her 1993 interview with Emily Evans in *Interviews/Entrevistas* 2000). I agree with Emma Perez in situating her work as an essential part of 'decolonial' feminism and as foundational in the creation of a Chicana 'decolonial' imaginary, which she defines as "the time lag between the colonial and postcolonial" (Perez 1991, 7). Anzaldúa's thought is also recognized as decolonial in the works of Sonia Saldivar-Hull (1991), Walter Dignolo (2000, 2012), Debra Castillo (2006), Benay Blend (2006), María Lugones (2012), Chandra Mohanty (1991), and among other decolonial thinkers and critics.

<sup>12</sup> See also Saldivar (2007), Quintana (2001) and Torres (1991), for instance.

<sup>13</sup> For a full discussion of the role of art, writing, and nepantlera identity, see chapter 4 of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, "Geographies of Selves –Reimagining Identity: Nos/Otras (Us/Other), las Nepantleras, and the New Tribalism" (2015, 65-94).

<sup>14</sup> It is also worth noting Eve Sedgwick's notion of 'reparative reading' offered in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, and Performativity* (2003) as a similar critique of literary criticism guided by dualistic thinking, Foucauldian suspicion or paranoia.

<sup>15</sup> Felski proposes "reflective reading" also as an alternative method to the "hermeneutics of suspicion," in order to avoid viewing ourselves as critics in an adversarial relationship with literary texts (see Felski 2009 and 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Although not discussing their encounter as phenomenological other Latina, feminist, decolonial, queer, critics and thinkers have engaged Anzaldúa theoretically from a personal standpoint. Many have noted how her work has contributed not only complex terminology and innovative forms to approach writing to their work, but also significant productive notions of ongoing currency, and inspiration to conduct their own work with the awareness of dimensions beyond intellectual engagement. See for instance Chela Sandoval (2000), Norma Alarcón (2013), Norma Cantú (2011), Lourdes Torres (1991), Linda M. Alcoff (2006), María Lugones (1991 and 2005), Ortega (2016), Keating (2005, 2011, 2015), and many others who contributed personal narratives to the edited volumes *EntreMundos/ Among Worlds* (Keating 2005), *Bridging: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa* (Keating and González López 2011), and *El Mundo Zurdo* issues.

<sup>17</sup> "Las nepantleras are spiritual activists engaged in the struggle for social, economic, and political justice, while working on spiritual transformation of selfhoods" (Anzaldúa 2015, 83).

<sup>18</sup> "Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness," was first delivered as a lecture at Vermont

College in 1986, then revised and later published in Keating's edited text *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009). It is one of Anzaldúa's brief autohistoriateoría pieces that remained unpublished during her life.

<sup>19</sup> "Unfinished Notes" is a collection of brief fragments written by Anzaldúa in the 1980s, ceded by the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Trust and selected by AnaLouise Keating for publication for the first time in *Hostos Review/Revista Hostosiana* (2014). It consists of a selection of entries in Anzaldúa's "Writing Notas," in which she reflects on her creative process. As noted by Keating in her own notes on the published text, these notes were penned in the 1980s, last modified in 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Chapter 5 and chapter 6 of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015, "Putting Coyolxauhqui Together," "now... let us shift...," respectively) particularly contribute to Anzaldúa evolving theory of interconnectivity grounded in the personal, embodied exploration of multiple forms of reality.

<sup>21</sup> In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), Anzaldúa proposes a "new tribalism," which will work precisely "to create new 'stories' of identity and culture" and rethink "our narratives of history, ancestry, and even of reality itself" (85).

<sup>22</sup> However, trying to maintain an identity is now sometimes equated to a cage, to holding on to stories about the self which are "outmoded beliefs of who we are" (Anzaldúa 2015, 136) and subjectivity matters as long as it is considered in-relation and in contact with others and to flexible ways of understanding reality.

<sup>23</sup> As I discuss in a separate forthcoming essay, Anzaldúa shows a keen interest in developing a phenomenology of reading, which is inextricably linked to her theories on writing. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, this dimension of her phenomenology cannot be included in this piece and will appear as an upcoming 'part two' to this article.

<sup>24</sup> In an interview with Andrea Lundsford in *Interviews/Entrevistas* (2000e), Anzaldúa defines compostura as the act of "seaming together fragments to make a garment which you wear, which represents you, your identity, and reality in the world" (256).

<sup>25</sup> *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, (2009a, 103-10).

<sup>26</sup> See *Hostos Review* 11, (2014, 2-5).

<sup>27</sup> This is consistent with Anzaldúa's effort to decenter our sense of identity as a key part of the decolonizing process: "you'll have to give up partial organizations of self, erroneous bits of knowledge, outmoded beliefs of who you are, your comfortable identities (your story of self, tu autohistoria)" (2015, 137).

<sup>28</sup> This third stage in the path of conocimiento, the Coatlicue state, conceptualized by Anzaldúa over the decades, includes the painful recognition of our ordinariness, self-doubt, self-absorption, and feelings of helplessness as "you [...] retreat from the world, withdraw from your body, losing kinesthetic consciousness" (2015, 129).

<sup>29</sup> Beyond the issue of veracity and believability that may be attributed to some of Anzaldúa's sources such as Carlos Castaneda, Robert Bosnak, or Carl Jung, what matters is if we apply a

phenomenological lens to understand her emphasis on shifting or changing positions (“our stance”) results in clarity. Her point is that rather than testifying about one experience, we should attempt to experience many positions and engage others in multiple realities and forms of consciousness, including “the perceptual” and “the imaginal” (Light in the Dark 2015, 34). The purpose of this engagement with *ensoñaciones* and other modes of consciousness is to engage in creative work in order to heal and be re-shaped. For Anzaldúa, dreams are another dimension of consciousness and also another “form of experience” (35).

<sup>30</sup> As Kelli Zaytoun (2005) notes, in relating individual consciousness to social consciousness, Anzaldúa offers “important innovations” to constructive developmental psychology and goes well beyond the prescriptiveness of its theory by enabling us to imagine new personal processes “emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually” (154-5).

<sup>31</sup> According to Lugones, the turn seeks to show “the power of groups, enclaves, and communities of the oppressed constituting both resistant meaning and each other” (2012, 76).

<sup>32</sup> Its sections are as diverse in content as the subtitles suggest: “Autohistoria: Creating a Table of Contents in your Life,” “Relaxation Meditation,” “Short Story Narrative,” or “Living’ in Your Body: Heightening your Senses Meditation.”

<sup>33</sup> See note #19.

<sup>34</sup> See note #18.

<sup>35</sup> She narrates how experiencing *la facultad* provokes an intense desire to explore other worlds through reading, painting and writing in the author until she becomes “very adept at switching from one mode of consciousness to the other” (2009a 104).

<sup>36</sup> In *Borderlands/La frontera*, variations in form and content have been often noted. They range from autobiographical storytelling and reflections, poetry, historical revision, critical thinking on racial oppression and justice, identity, or knowledge, the (de)colonial borderlands, sexual orientation, culture, and the multi-forms of in-betweenness. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, variations in form and content and their integration are as palpable as content, tone, authorial voice and orientation also shift as Anzaldúa works her way through describing and theorizing her path of *conocimiento* through a *methodology of shifting*.

<sup>37</sup> In discussing the rationale for thematic and compositional *shifts* in *Making Face/Making Soul*, for instance, Anzaldúa notes that the “fragmented and interrupted dialogue” responds to a need to enact a new *method* for writing *theory*, one grounded in the idea that “[o]ur strength lies in *shifting* perspectives, in our capacity to *shift*[emphasis added]” (1999, xxvii).

<sup>38</sup> As Anzaldúa explains in a 1983 interview with Christine Weiland, she begins to use the term *nepantla* instead of *borderlands* in the 1980s “to expand the psychic and emotional borderlands,” to make more obvious the linkages with “the spirit world [...] world after death, to psychic spaces” and because it, therefore “has a more spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous resonance” (Anzaldúa 2000b, 176).

<sup>39</sup> Mignolo defines exteriority as “the dwelling place of the world population who do not belong

to the house of civilization;” the space of those “dwelling in the borders traced by the colonial difference from where border and queer thinking are already engaged in decolonizing epistemology and engaging decolonial epistemologies” (2012, 26).

<sup>40</sup> As Lugones notes, “the normativity that tied gender and civilization together” involved the “erasure of community, of ecological practices, knowledges of planting, and the cosmos, and not only in changing and controlling reproductive and sexual practices” (2012,74).

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