

GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA'S "ART AS A MODE OF RESEARCH": APPLICATIONS
IN FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODS AND FEMINIST RHETORIC

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DEDICATION

For Gloria E. Anzaldúa and other women-of-color artists and scholars who have inspired my research and encouraged my re-birth as an artist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Halfway through my dissertating journey I had dreams that featured Gloria Anzaldúa and others involved in my dissertation project. In one dream, I was walking in the desert and came upon a tall, solitary rockface. Nestled into the rock was a tunnel lined with an organic intestinal-looking membrane. I felt compelled to enter the tunnel. The opening was large enough for me to squeeze through; however, I didn't relish the idea of moving through the confining space. Nevertheless, I slid my body feet-first in and gently maneuvered myself through.

Arriving at the tunnel's other side, I discovered a tranquil spot with lush grasses and a shimmering lake. Meeting me at the end of my journey, as if expecting me, stood AnaLouise Keating. As she walked me around the space, I felt this was a sanctuary for intellectuals, but not in the traditional sense. These scholars and educators could access an inner knowing that added a metaphysical quality to their knowledge.

I begin with this story because my dream voyage calls me to remember with gratitude those who have supported me in my academic journey and meet me on the other side as I complete my doctoral degree.

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Conrad: thank you for your amazing presence in my life; you keep me grounded so that this dissertation occupied part of my life but not my whole life. Lastly, but in many ways first, I am grateful for my family (Mom, Dad, Sister, Auntie, and Gma), who in conscious and unconscious ways fostered my creativity, informed my work ethic, and shaped me as a person.

ABSTRACT

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GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA'S "ART AS A MODE OF RESEARCH": APPLICATIONS IN FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODS AND FEMINIST RHETORIC

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My dissertation explores how Gloria E. Anzaldúa's theories of creativity inform social-justice efforts, contribute to feminist research in feminist rhetoric, and operate as a tool to analyze her sketches. Despite Anzaldúa's visual art training and prevalent use of images in her writing, few scholars have analyzed her artwork or her writings on creativity. Drawing on unpublished manuscripts and sketches in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, my project explores two questions. In my first question—How do Anzaldúa's theories of creativity inform social-justice work?—I examine her writings on creativity that contribute to social-justice work. My second question—How do Anzaldúa's theories of creativity contribute to feminist research?—applies Anzaldúa's theories of creativity to feminist research in feminist rhetoric. Specifically, I expand three feminist research practices (reflexivity, flexibility, and a dialogic process) and develop an additional research practice (recursion). Blending these feminist research practices with textual analysis, I analyze Anzaldúa's archived sketches to identify new connections among her theories on creativity, *conocimiento*, *nepantla*, and shamanism.

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CHAPTER I

“ART IS A MOVEMENT TO TRANSFORM SOCIETY”: EXPLORATIONS OF SOCIAL-JUSTICE WORK IN ANZALDÚA’S THEORIES OF CREATIVITY

Art is a struggle between the personal voice and language, with its apparatuses of culture and ideologies, and art mediums with their genre laws—the human voice trying to outshout a roaring waterfall. Art is a sneak attack while the giant sleeps, a sleight of hands when the giant is awake [;] moving so quickly [,] they can do their deed before the giant swats them. Our survival depends on being creative.

Gloria Anzaldúa, “Haciendo caras, una entrada”

Gloria Anzaldúa asserts in her unpublished 2002 manuscript “Nepantla, Creative Acts of Vision,” quoted in my dissertation title, “art is a mode of research,” indicating that through creativity we discover new information about our lives and those of others. Indeed, creativity—expressed through visual and written works—operates as a powerful lens to view, experience, and contribute to the world. As indicated in my chapter epigraph, the introduction to her edited anthology *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990), Anzaldúa also posits that creativity can serve as a survival tactic for those who experience various oppressions, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and/or classism. Despite the social institution(s), or “giant,” responsible for perpetuating social inequality, creativity functions as a stealthy and effective tool to challenge systems of privilege and oppression. From my perspective as a visual artist, I understand creativity to be a problem-solving drive that brings forth new and subversive solutions. I read Anzaldúa’s

theories of creativity as taking us a step further to imagine inner and social change (*Light* 44). As my chapter title highlights, Anzaldúa believed that “[a]rt is a movement to transform society by virtue of the information that comes through art” (“Entre Américas” 12). In sum, Anzaldúa’s theories of creativity offer a conceptual framework for fashioning a more equitable society.

As I examine in the following pages, Anzaldúa’s theories of creativity emerge in both her written work and her sketches and doodles. Although not typically acknowledged, Anzaldúa was a trained visual artist.¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, given that she placed equal focus on Art and English in her undergraduate education, images play a vital role in her theorizing. Anzaldúa conceptualized her theories through images that inspired both her creative and academic writing. Likewise, in her public lectures she regularly drew upon her artistic abilities by using glifos and sketches to communicate and clarify her ideas to her audience.² Ranging from quick doodles to illustrate an idea to complex drawings that interweave several theoretical threads, Anzaldúa’s artwork plays an integral part in her theory-making process. Take for instance *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, which contains several of Anzaldúa’s creative and academic writings from multiple points in her writing career, includes a section devoted to her sketches, indicating that her artwork and her written work hold equal importance. Because

¹ In an interview Linda Smuckler Anzaldúa recalls her early artwork that focused on large-scale oil paintings but also extended to sculpture and design (“Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Body: An Interview with Linda Smuckler” 91).

² Anzaldúa often included what she termed “pictograms” or “glifos” to illustrate her talks (qtd. in Keating, “Part Three” 217).

Anzaldúa developed and communicated her ideas through sketches, her visual images can complicate and enrich our understanding of her theories. Visual and written work express ideas differently; each can articulate ideas in ways the other may not. Said differently, to more fully understand Anzaldúa's written theories, we must examine her sketches and writings simultaneously.

Indeed, Anzaldúa's sketches offer a significant contribution to academic scholarship, especially for scholars who hope to obtain a deeper, more complex understanding of her theories. We can recognize Anzaldúa's drive to visually express ideas in her archived collection of sketches and doodles. Located at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers', 125 linear feet of material encompasses Anzaldúa's entire life and, according to AnaLouise Keating, "represents her final, and most complex, text" ("Archival Alchemy" 160).³ Indeed, this "text" comprises a large collection of unpublished materials (that outnumber her published writings) and a variety of works (e.g., notes, essay drafts and revisions, artwork, and audio recordings). As Suzanne Bost commented, the archived materials' richness "knocks the presumed author of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* off her axis and replaces her with an Anzaldúa whose work ranges across many media, shape-shifting as much as her characters who oscillate

³ Keating notes that "[p]erhaps because she had such a profound sense of her vocation," Anzaldúa played an instrumental role in forming her archive ("Archival Alchemy" 161). Anzaldúa would carefully save and store writing materials and personal memorabilia (e.g., notes, journals, drafts, letters, interviews, artworks, and photographs) (161).

between human and animal, male and female, alien and ghost” (615). Anzaldúa’s multifaceted, archived work offers exciting possibilities for scholars to further develop research on Anzaldúan theorizing and make this information available in spaces outside the archive. Of the multiple journeys one can take through her archives, I am most interested in examining Anzaldúa’s drawings and offering these contributions to Anzaldúan scholarship, both to call greater attention to Anzaldúa as an artist and to more fully comprehend how she understood herself, her work, and her vision for social change. Such a project remains necessary because, despite the prevalence of images in her work, few scholars have analyzed Anzaldúa’s writings on creativity and even fewer have discussed her visual artwork.

Contributing to research that views Anzaldúa’s creativity as part of her social-justice lens, I explore two questions that position Anzaldúan creativity as a bridge between women’s and gender studies (WGS) and other academic fields whose collaborative research can support equity-building for marginalized groups. I ask:

- 1) How do Anzaldúa’s theories of creativity inform social-justice work?
- 2) How does Anzaldúa’s articulation of creativity contribute to feminist research?

To explore the first question, I examine Anzaldúa’s writings on creativity as discussed in her archived notes and essays, published texts, and interviews.⁴ By outlining

⁴ These works include: *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, “Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman,” “Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera,” and “Haciendo caras, una entrada,” the unpublished essays “On the Process of Feminist Image Making” (1982) and “Nepantla, Creative Acts of Vision” (2002); and interviews with AnaLouise Keating, Linda Smuckler, and Christine Weiland found in *Interviews/ Entrevistas*.

Anzaldúa's theories of creativity, I explore several issues Anzaldúa addresses through creative means, such as sexism, racism, colonialism, and assimilation. To address my second question, I apply Anzaldúa's theories of creativity to feminist rhetoric research to strengthen the field's research practices and engagement with Anzaldúan theory.

In the remainder of this chapter, I contextualize my project and build a foundation to address my research questions. First, I highlight Anzaldúa's life as a visual artist. Second, I briefly outline how Anzaldúa's discusses creativity and how her theories of *conocimiento*, *nepantla*, and shamanism contribute to her conception of creativity. Third, I discuss feminist rhetoric's engagement with Anzaldúa's writings. Because this field combines feminist research methods with historiographic approaches to gather and analyze women's rhetoric, Anzaldúa's theories of creativity can expand existing research methods' scope and practice. Finally, I conclude with my chapter summary.

Anzaldúa the Visual Artist

Anzaldúa's love of art ran throughout her life and work. From her early childhood, Anzaldúa expressed a great interest in art. Coming from a family of storytellers, she heard stories at a young age and associated storytelling with visual art: "I connect the visual with the word" (*Interviews* 23). For example, Anzaldúa loved to sketch, practiced leathercrafting, and created stories in her mind (*Interviews* 22-23). She processed her emotions and feelings of difference through art.⁵ "Being different was

⁵ In her interview with Linda Smuckler, Anzaldúa notes that some of her feelings of difference stemmed from several experiences, including: a biological condition that caused menstruation at the age of three months, her early childhood years spent living in a rural ranch settlement, her love of reading and visual art, and her connection to animals (*Interviews* 23).

really right for being an artist or writer,” and Anzaldúa used artmaking and storytelling to deal “with all levels of reality besides the physical, concrete level” (*Interviews* 23). Early in her life she learned to use her imagination, through images and words, to explore and create other worlds.

Anzaldúa became a trained and practicing artist during her time as an undergraduate. She completed a bachelor’s degree in Art and English and minored in secondary education. Early in her career, she taught art and created large-scale oil paintings.⁶ In addition to her love for visual art, Anzaldúa also shared a passion for writing. However, given financial and time constraints, there came a point when she had to decide between visual art and writing. Anzaldúa chose to become a writer; however, she did not forego studio art altogether (*Interviews* 236). Throughout her career, Anzaldúa created sketches and, as noted above, often used her art to illustrate her talks and explain her theories. In an interview with Linda Smuckler, Anzaldúa states, “My subconscious was communicating through my painting, but I wanted to articulate the ideas” (“Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Body” 91); I read Anzaldúa’s impulse to write not as subtracting visual art in processing thought, but rather as pairing artistic and written work to clarify her ideas.

In addition to evoking images in her writing, Anzaldúa fostered her connection to visual art through friendships and collaborative projects with other artists. She wrote

⁶ Anzaldúa relates that in college her painting process was unique. Since her family was poor, she could not afford oil paints and she made her own frames. In addition, Anzaldúa would put modeling clay on her painting to make them three-dimensional (“Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Body” 91).

exhibition catalogues for fellow Frontera artists' work; for example, "Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera" was initially published in the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art's catalogue for *La Frontera/The Border: Art about the Mexico/United States Border Experience* (1993) and "Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing" was written for Liliana Wilson's 2002 exhibition at Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio. In 1995, Anzaldúa was awarded an artist residency at Villa Montalvo and worked in collaboration with Christina Luna, Liliana Wilson-Gréz, Santa Barraza, and Isabel Juarez Espinoza to explore creative expressions of nepantla, "el espacio en medio, the in-between state of being" ("Entre Américas" 4). Their project resulted in the exhibition *Entre Américas: El Taller Nepantlas* that was co-hosted by Villa Montalvo and MACLA ("Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino American") San José Center for Latino Arts.⁷ Through these collaborations, Anzaldúa learned from other artists' visual expressions of cultural experience and further developed her own visual and written theorizing.

Indeed, as a writer and scholar, Anzaldúa often relied on images to process and convey her ideas. In her teaching and speaking gigs a quick sketch could capture a concept and easily communicate these ideas to her audience. Kamala Platt recalls that when Anzaldúa visited University of Texas at Austin, "she would draw Trojan Horses on the black board, and talk of peaceable, creative interventions" (174). By taking a well-known image, such as the Trojan horse, Anzaldúa builds on and transforms her

⁷ For more information please see Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers archive: Box 127 Folder 2 and 3.

audiences' knowledge that the horse initiates war to posit less oppositional and peaceful tactics for institutional change.⁸ Anzaldúa conceptualized her theories and shared them with others through images and, oftentimes, audiences viewed her sketches as inviting. Graciela Sánchez recalls that “with the overhead and doodles, insights and stories, [Anzaldúa] welcomed us into her current writings and shared her incredible insight” (11). This interaction between Anzaldúa and her audience, facilitated by her doodles, underscores how we need to study Anzaldúa's images alongside her theories.

Anzaldúa typically incorporated a quick sketch alongside her signature during book signings (see fig. 1). The intimate relationship she created between her signature and doodles indicates the value she places on expressing identity through images. Amelia M. L. Montes recalls that Anzaldúa would create one of her favorite doodles, the “plasmagormic” figure—an amorphous being with undulating lines for the head, body, and arms—alongside her signature (63).⁹ Montes comments on the relation between the image and signature: “I thought it was interesting that in each drawing, her signature moved into and out of the figure, giving this plasmagormic character a fluidity of movement” (63). Montes locates connections between Anzaldúa's drawings and fluid identity; changing form can create new meaning and knowledge (63-64). If images can produce and share new knowledge, then examining theories of creativity can help us

⁸ Anzaldúa developed and shared her concept of her Trojan horse, or “Trojan Burra,” in an interview with Andrea Lunsford. Referring to Western knowledge that influences academic disciplines, such as rhetoric and composition, Anzaldúa views institutions as walled in a city that must be altered from the inside (*Interviews* 261-262).

⁹ This term was given to Montes by fiction writer Emma Pérez (63).

better understand how and to what extent images invoke individual and collective change.

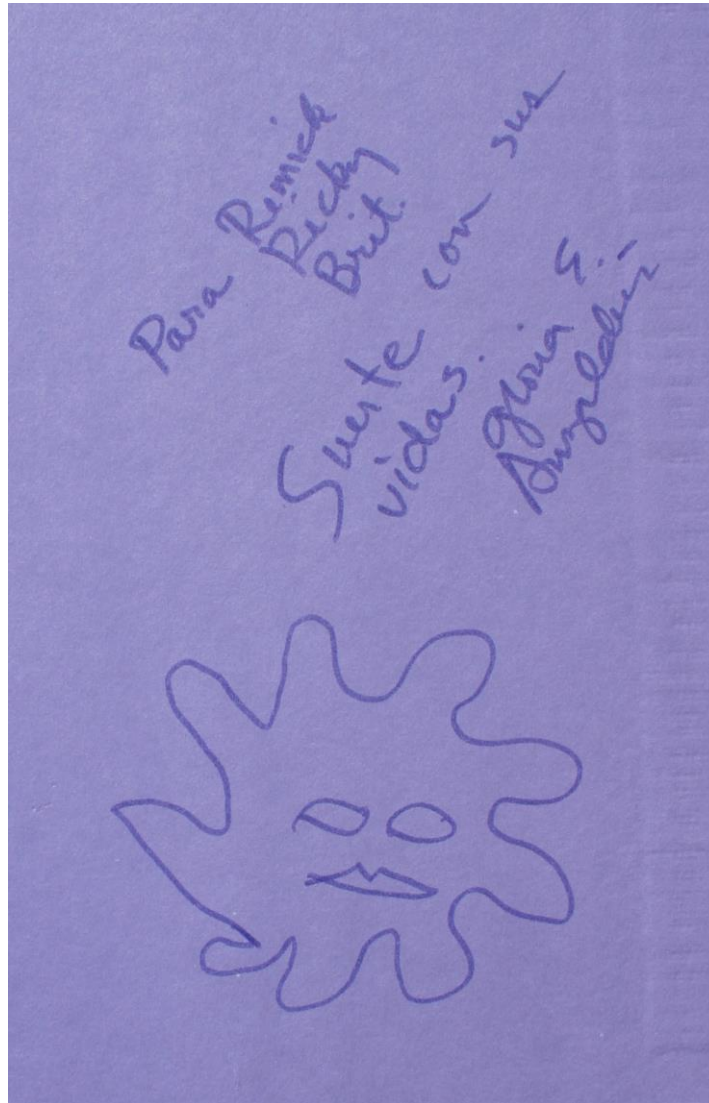


Fig. 1. Gloria Anzaldúa, Photograph of Signature. Undated. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

Anzaldúa's Theories of Creativity

Recalling the chapter's epigraph, artists employ image-making to illustrate complex social issues. Anzaldúa's sketch titled "Sleeping Giant," which captures creativity's intricacy and the "giant's" enormity, demonstrates this point (see fig. 2). Created between the years 1976-1984 (preserved as a photocopy), several large geometric shapes with detailed patterning construct this abstract drawing. The larger shapes' arrangement evokes the impression of a bed and blankets consistent with the title's reference to slumber. On the left, rests a recumbent P-shaped head traced with concentric lines congregating in the middle to form what appears to be an eye. From the top of the head grows a mass of hair-like lines that end in curls clustering at the crown and cascading to the floor. Near the bottom, two claw-like hands emerge, the left hand containing five fingers while the right boasts an impressive total of seven finger-like lines. On the right side of the page, two curls of perhaps smoke or impressions of activity rise from a blanket. Anzaldúa created the coupled streams of air with different effects: on the right, the air spirals upward in looped lines as if a top has just traced its curling movements, while on the left, the air coalesces in stippled dots resembling a condensed cloud of tiny insects. Through form and content, Anzaldúa's "Sleeping Giant" illustrates creativity's complexity and the vast cultural norms these acts seek to disrupt.

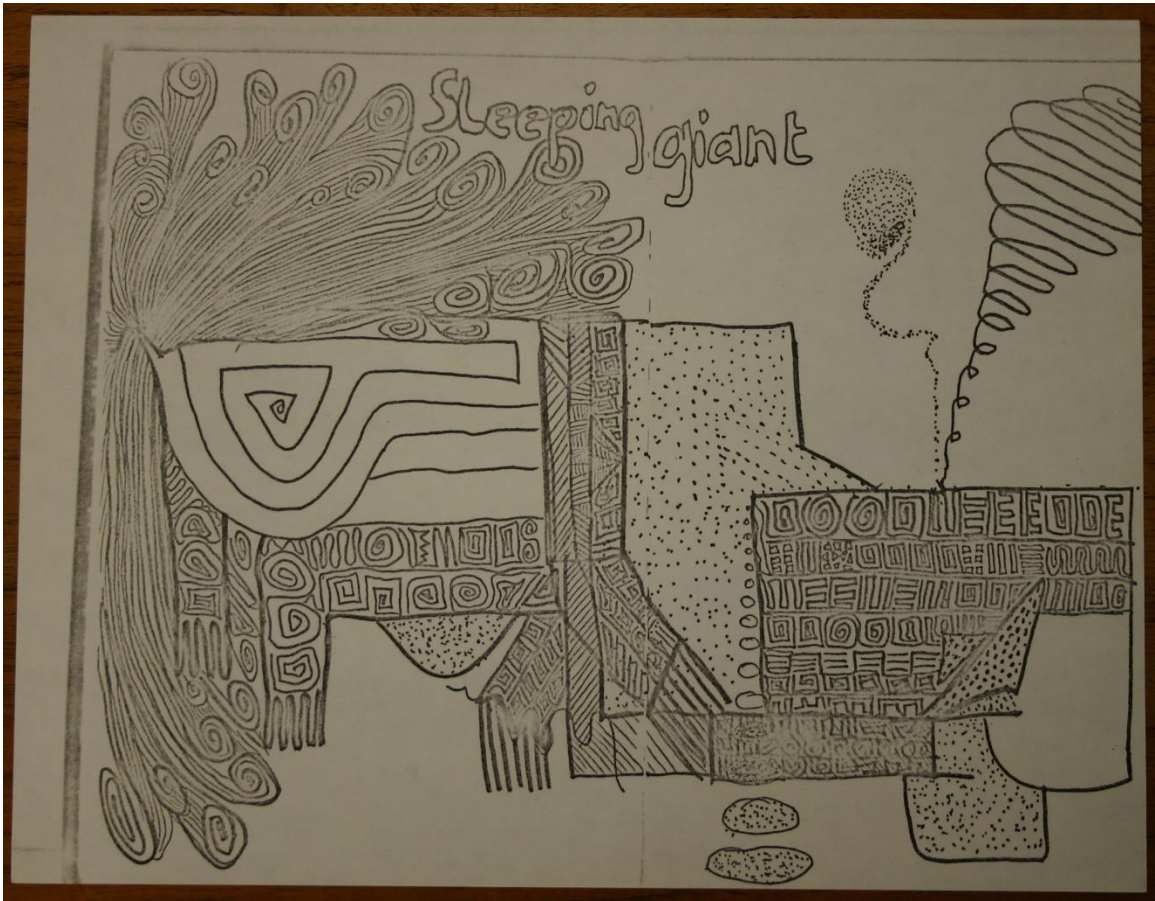


Fig. 2. Gloria Anzaldúa, “Sleeping Giant,” 1976-1984. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust.

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By crafting images, artists can choose to analyze an issue and present alternative solutions to social problems.¹⁰ For example, Anzaldúa’s creative writings and images address hegemonic discourses that silence marginalized voices and limit identity categories. In “Haciendo caras, una entrada” she critiques institutions, such as the academy, that recycle “a rhetoric that presents its conjectures as universal truths while

¹⁰ For example, in *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, Anzaldúa posits that artists can use image-making practices and creativity in decolonization projects (44).

concealing its patriarchal privilege and posture. It is a rhetoric riddled with ideologies of Racism which hush our voices so that we cannot articulate our victimization” (133). Facing racism and sexism, Anzaldúa adopts creative practices not only to avoid erasure, but also to revise culture. Through written and visual works, artists re-center marginalized positions and open spaces for multiple voices.

A tool for re-imagining the world, Anzaldúa’s theories of creativity offer WGS and feminist scholarship additional approaches to social-justice work. Remarking on the connection between creative and feminist theories in her unpublished 1982 essay “On the Process of Feminist Image Making,” Anzaldúa notes that “[t]he chief contribution of image-making to the growth of feminist consciousness is in facilitating change” (15). Supporting feminist movements through creative efforts can build recognition and respect for women’s voices. Elaborating further, she asserts, “if feminism is about making an integrated whole woman then image-making and visualization becomes a political necessity” (14). Imagination serves as a tool for defining self and envisioning feminist projects. Indeed, Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity crosses multiple consciousness levels and works to secure links between personal and political awareness.

According to Anzaldúa, to create a more equitable world we must imagine it first. She defines imagination as a “creative energy,” whereby “[y]ou create using your imagination” (Writing Notes C-28). Change demands imagination; in fact, “[w]ithout imagination, transformation is not possible” (*Light* 44). To create new ideas, artists shift between multiple levels of consciousness in the image-making process. Individuals

possess different levels of consciousness, including an outer reality (e.g., the rational mind and physical realm) and an inner world (e.g., daydreaming and fantasy realm), and artists are particularly adept in traveling between these spaces (“Creativity” 103).

Creative individuals traverse both worlds to give sense and meaning to experiences.

“Nothing is separate,” Anzaldúa asserts, “[dreams and imaginings] all filter through from one world to another, from one mode of consciousness to another” (106). Said differently, creativity weaves together alternative perspectives from multiple levels of consciousness.

While theories of creativity articulate image-making’s uses and impact, the creative process outlines the journey to access images and manifest these ideas. In “On the Process of Feminist Image Making,” Anzaldúa explicates how she accesses mental pictures in three steps; each step deepens her connection to the image (e.g., a serpent). She reflected on the serpent’s meaning because the image occurred frequently in her work (4). In the first stage, she witnesses the live snake in its environment, as if watching a film. Following these observations, she delves further into the image in the second step to experience the snake’s surroundings through her other senses. She may hear, smell, or feel this space. She states, “I am there in the desert. My ears hear the wind on dry sand, my feet sink into the sand” (4). The third and “scarier” step pushes the sensory experience even further as Anzaldúa merges with the image. In a “transference of consciousness,” she becomes the image (4). No longer inhabiting her human body, she becomes the serpent: “I have no feet. The lizard crosses my path a few inches from my

head” (4). To summarize, in the first stage, Anzaldúa taps into her sight sense to view the snake in the desert. In the second stage, she draws on her other faculties to feel and smell the wind; however, her viewpoint remained external to the snake. Finally, in the third stage, her astral body transfers consciousness into the snake. Therefore, to create images we must be willing to explore multiple perception levels and experience images through our emotions and senses.

Anzaldúan Theorizing

To further develop an understanding of Anzaldúan creativity, my project draws on Anzaldúa’s theories of *conocimiento*, *nepantla*, and shamanism. These theories emphasize multiple consciousness levels and images’ power. In the pages to follow, I locate characteristics of *conocimiento*, *nepantla*, and shamanism that further develop Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity. By working across several Anzaldúan theories, I aim to explore different links between creativity and social change, which I then apply in the following chapters.

Conocimiento

Traveling between multiple levels of consciousness closely intertwines with Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento*, a seven-stage nonlinear process of knowledge production and transformation. Like theories of creativity that involve movement between the inner and outer worlds, *conocimiento* outlines a recursive movement: We contemplate new insights internally, externally practice these ideas through interactions with others, ruminate on others’ reactions, and, based on this information, put new ideas

into practice. Often repeated, this practice does not necessarily follow a linear path. Conocimiento's knowledge-production process mirrors creativity's image-making process. Anzaldúa makes this association in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, linking the artistic drive with conocimiento, a deep awareness and knowing that forms a "relationship between self-knowledge and creative work" (40). Self-knowledge requires creative endeavors, and artworks encapsulate knowledge. Scholars identify connections between creativity, imagination, and knowledge creation by noting that conocimiento is "profoundly relational, and enable[ing] those who enact it to make connections among apparently disparate events, persons, experiences, and realities" (Keating, "Introduction" 8); useful in connecting individual and collective consciousness (Zaytoun, "New Pathways" 154); and operates "as a mode of consciousness that recognizes connections and commonalities while clearly acknowledging differences without, however, privileging either" (Levine 182). Indeed, by linking knowledge-making and imagination, Anzaldúa's theories of creativity can connect the self and others as we locate common goals and build coalitions.

Anzaldúa's theories of conocimiento and creativity emphasize the relation between images and emotions. In fact, feelings and senses facilitate knowledge development and, oftentimes, Anzaldúa pairs these emotions with images. In "now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts," she describes the seven stages and uses imagery to convey each phase's the strong emotional component. In the first phase, "el arrebató...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning," Anzaldúa used el

arrebato image, the earthquake, to signify the shocking upheaval produced through a major event or situation (122). This impactful force shifts us into stage two, “nepantla...torn between two ways.” In nepantla—“suspended between shifts ... split between before and after”—we feel caught up in remolinos (whirlwinds) that pull us in different directions (122). The strain of nepantla gives way to the third stage, “the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing,” a dark space of depression and descomociminetos (“willful unawareness”) where we retreat to the “womb cave, a stone repelling light” when the new truths are too much to bear (130). After incubating in the Coatlicue state, “the call...el compromise...the crossing and conversion” pushes us into stage four, a call to action, and presents “otro puente” (another bridge) to travel towards transformation (136). Knowing the road that lies ahead, in stage five, “putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective ‘stories’,” we begin piecing together a new identity like an “artist scripting the new story of this house/self/identity/essay under construction” (143). In stage six, “the blow-up...a clash of realities,” we present our reconstructed selves to the world but become disappointed by others who do not share these new perspectives. The friction can force us to become a nepantlera, a person who mediates the divide between conflicting ideas and locates commonalities among the differences (148-49). Transformed by these struggles, we enter stage seven, “shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism,” a space where we can develop holistic connections between ourselves and others through compassion and both/and thinking (151). Anzaldúa emphasizes conocimiento’s non-linear aspect; we

may oscillate between stages or revisit previous states (nepantla is the most frequently occurring space). Infused with intense emotion and imagery, *conocimiento* captures a difficult, ongoing, and recursive process. Nevertheless, this transformative path formulates new knowledge and interconnectivity with others.

Nepantla

While playing an integral role in *conocimiento*, nepantla also operates independently as a space that bridges multiple parts of the self, including varying levels of consciousness. Anzaldúa employs nepantla, a Náhuatl term that means an in-between space or “tierra entre medio” to theorize different mental states that “question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (“(Un)natural bridges” 243, 248).¹¹ In her 1991 interview with Keating, Anzaldúa discusses nepantla as an extension of her borderlands theory, part of creativity, a function of identity creation, and an aspect of the mind (*Interviews* 176). I am particularly interested in nepantla as an inner liminal space in which we simultaneously hold new and old ideas and practices. We can apply creativity to negotiate opposing perspectives; for example, when old and new knowledge clash. Artists often occupy nepantla: “The nepantla state is a natural state for artists, most specifically for the mestizo border artists who partake of the traditions of two or more worlds and who may be binational” (*Light* 57). Using creativity, we can connect ideas that social norms separate and, as a result, disrupt the status quo. Take for example, the divides that may exist

¹¹ In an interview with Karin Ikas, Anzaldúa also defines nepantla as the Nahuatl term for what is located between two bodies of water or a space between two worlds (*Borderlands* 276).

within the academy—between disciplines and within a discipline—that, when dissolved through creative approaches, can encourage academic growth. Applying nepantla to writing instruction, Eve Wiederhold notes that “nepantla refuses the categories that conventionally carve up language study into poetic, rhetoric, public, private, artistic, practical, sublime, and mundane” (117). Refusing to maintain strict boundaries between writing genres makes it possible to develop connections between multiple creative writing forms and “opens up a space in which to listen for the not-yet said, the not-yet imagined” (117). As a result, students pay more attention to writing and its institutional function. In sum, theories of nepantla and creativity generate innovative solutions by transforming ideas inside and outside the academy.

Nepantla is a difficult space to occupy because our emotions become heightened. If, “[w]hen in nepantla you act, think and feel in extremes,” which influences how we produce ideas, then understanding emotions’ impact on the imagination can inform theories of creativity (“Nepantla, Creative Acts” 1). Intense feelings can make both nepantla and creativity a challenging process. Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar punctuates these difficulties: “Accepting nepantla is not easy; it begins with a change in one’s own consciousness and identity, and spreads out from there, affecting everything and everyone around us” (230). Keating also notes the significant emotional pain and locational shift in nepantla. She asserts that nepantla’s “loosening of previously restrictive labels, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and new opportunities for change; we acquire additional, potentially transformative perspectives,

different ways to understand ourselves and our worlds” (“Risking the Vision” 143).

Applied to theories of creativity, feelings and the changes evoked through processing emotion enrich the image-making process.

Shamanism

Accessing images through our subconscious to address social problems resonates with Anzaldúa’s theory of shamanism. Traditionally, a shaman preserves their community’s health and cultural history. Anzaldúa reflected on a shaman’s role, which brought together artistic practice and everyday life, in several of her works.¹² She views shamans as able to shift their awareness to the subconscious world and access healing images (*Light* 32). Image-laden metaphors can hold damaging or healing properties.

Erika Aigner-Varoz notes how, “Anzaldúa strips away the surface metaphors that camouflage the ‘wounds,’ the underlying conceptual metaphors, in order to redeem and claim voice, instinct, intellect, and sexuality” (60). By imagining new metaphors, we can transform our inner perspectives and interactions with the outer world (Anzaldúa, “Metaphors” 122). For example, negative metaphors, like racial and/or gendered stereotypes, hurt women of colors.¹³ However, positive metaphors, such as respectful and agentic images of women of colors, work to counter racism and sexism.

¹² See, for example, Anzaldúa’s discussion in *Borderlands/La Frontera* of “the ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanic” (88) and her later understanding of *Borderlands* as a product of her own shamanic practice of mediating past and present cultural identity through her writing (“Metaphors” 121).

¹³ I use the plural form to indicate diversity within the group.

Indeed, the images we construct for and of ourselves can impact physical and mental health. Realizing that her negative thoughts produce destructive effects, Anzaldúa reveals: “As true with all humans, the working of my imagination acted upon my own body. Images communicated with tissues, organs, and cell to effect change” (“Metaphors” 121). In other words, images impact the body and these effects can cause harm or healing. Keating underscores images’ restorative property in her theory of “poet-shamanic aesthetics” (“Speculative Realism” 51). According to Keating a “[p]oet-shamanic aesthetics represents an entirely embodied and potentially transformative intertwining of language, physiology/matter, and world” (51). Said differently, writing and words materialize and produce effects. Furthermore, images affect not only the artist but the audience as well. Anzaldúa employed metaphors to reshape her subconscious and her reader’s subconscious alike (Aigner-Varoz 49). “If we’ve done our job well,” Anzaldúa asserts, “[artists] may give others access to a language and images with which they can articulate/express pain, confusion, joy, and other experiences thus far experienced only on an inarticulated emotional level” (“Metaphors” 122). Image-making and creativity give form and meaning to emotions that assist with inner healing and transformation.

Feminist Rhetoric’s Engagement with Anzaldúa’s Writings

I envision my research as contributing to feminist rhetoric’s project to expand the rhetorical canon to include marginalized voices. Rhetoric’s focus on persuasion and the dynamics between the orator and audience calls attention to whose voices receive

consideration. The field conceptualizes the rhetor and audience based on several assumptions: the rhetor is understood to be autonomous, male-identified, and addressing a (predominately) male audience (Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford 412). Challenging these assumptions becomes necessary since “[t]hose who did not fit this pattern—women, people of color, poorly educated workers, those judged to be overly emotional or unstable—those people stood outside the rhetorical situation, for they were considered neither capable of nor in need of remembering and inventing arguments” (412). Seeking out methods to validate disenfranchised voices—particularly women’s voices—feminist rhetoric adopts theoretical frameworks that aim to shift the field’s focus to the rhetorical margins.

In the mid-1990’s feminist rhetoric scholars began drawing on Anzaldúa’s writings to inform their rhetorical analyses.¹⁴ Anzaldúan theorizing and rhetorical style offer the field a new lens to view women’s voices situated within the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, class, and geographical space. In one of the first articles to apply Anzaldúan theorizing to feminist rhetoric, “Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism,” Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford draw from Anzaldúa’s borderland theory to open spaces for multiple voices. In

¹⁴ Some early examples include: Margarita Cota-Cárdenas’ “The Faith of Activists: Barrios, Cities, and the Chicana Feminist Response” (1994), Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford’s ““Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism” (1995), Julia M. Allen and Lester Faigley’s “Discursive Strategies for Social Change: An Alternative Rhetoric of Argument” (1995), Ian Barnard’s “Gloria Anzaldúa’s Queer Mestisaje” (1997), and Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez’s “On Home Ground: Politics, Location, and the Construction of Identity in Four American Women’s Autobiographies” (1997).

Borderlands/ La Frontera,¹⁵ Anzaldúa develops her borderland theory, a blurred space comprising geographical, cultural, and emotional divides within and around the U.S./Mexico border. Building on Anzaldúa's call to examine the knowledge and experiences created in these border spaces, Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford posited that by crossing disciplinary borders between feminist theory and rhetoric we can locate erased women rhetors (404). By coupling feminism with rhetorical studies, researchers expand the field's boundaries by introducing new queries, theories, and methodologies (Addison 138). Indeed, in challenging a narrow framework that privileges certain rhetors (i.e., male) and rhetorical forms (i.e., speeches and essays), feminist rhetoric can recover women's rhetoric (e.g., letters, diaries, and fiction) excluded from traditionally defined written communication. The border-crossing metaphor operates as "a trope for hybrid identities and as a descriptor for genre blending and poly-vocality" (Hesford and Schell 461).¹⁶ Extending rhetoric's boundaries to overlap with feminism creates opportunity for a range of perspectives and voices.

Composition studies equally benefits from Anzaldúa's writings. Andrea Lunsford, a well-known rhetoric and composition scholar and one of the first rhetoric scholars to bring Anzaldúa's writings into the field, has written several works that apply Anzaldúan

¹⁵ Feminist rhetoric's focus on *Borderlands/ La Frontera* is reflected in several anthologies that include excerpts from her text. For example, please see: Patricia Bizzel and Bruce Hersberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (1990), Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffins' *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* (1999), Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald's *Available Means: An Anthology of Women Rhetoric(s)* (2001), and Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffins' *Reading in Feminist Rhetorical Theory* (2006).

¹⁶ Nedra Reynolds also adopts the metaphor of a borderland in her discussion of writing pedagogy in *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*.

theorizing to rhetoric and composition.¹⁷ In a 1996 interview, Lunsford asked Anzaldúa how composition courses can bring awareness to a text's multiplicity to foster students' voices and challenge English-language privilege. Citing a textbook project she was working on at the time, Anzaldúa posits that alternative writing forms can create different rhetorical styles while still critiquing rhetoric's Western framework ("Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric" 261). For example, Anzaldúa used code-switching (alternating between English, Spanish, and Nahuatl) and blended academic and literary writing styles to challenge the privileged single author and drawing attention to the process, rather than the product, in writing (Lunsford, "Embracing Borderlands" 185). Emphasizing process highlights creativity and invites self-reflection. Anzaldúa compares writing to a "kind of dismembering of everything I'm feeling—taking it apart to examine and then reconstituting or recomposing it again but in a new way" (qtd. in "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric" 257).¹⁸ Writing, as a creative act, involves feelings and self-awareness; therefore, analyzing a text's complexity help us to understand rhetoric as multifaceted, emotion-laden, and self-reflective.

Anzaldúa's writing can assist in re-envisioning teaching rhetoric and composition because she communicates effectively through alternative writing forms. For example, Lunsford's later writings draw influence from Anzaldúa's writing style and mestiza

¹⁷ See for example: "Embracing Borderlands: Gloria Anzaldúa and Writing Studies," "Toward A Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality," and "Toward A Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition, Postcoloniality, and the Spiritual. An Interview with Andrea Lunsford (1996)."

¹⁸ In the interview Anzaldúa compares the writing process to the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui who was thrown down the temple stairs by her brother Huitzilopochtli resulting in her dismemberment ("Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric" 257).

theory—one who negotiates geographical, cultural, and emotional borderlands and adopts a pluralistic personality. Lunsford views Anzaldúa's style and practice as "a rich mixture of genres—she shifts from poetry to reportorial prose to autobiographical stream of consciousness to incantatory mythic chants to sketches and graphs, and back again— weaving images and words from her multiple selves and from many others into a kind of tapestry or patchwork quilt of language" (35). Here Lunsford noted how Anzaldúa's multilayered writing moves beyond the written word to include visual images. In "Toward A Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality," Lunsford synthesizes Anzaldúa's mestiza theory and writing practice to develop what she terms a "mestiza rhetoric" that fosters nonbinary identity and multiple writing strategies. Through a mestiza rhetoric, scholars adopt both/and perspectives that expand teaching and research in the humanities (35). Similar to a mestiza consciousness, a mestiza rhetoric challenges disciplinary norms to break down binaries that limits rhetoric.

To date, most of rhetoric scholars only engage with Anzaldúa's writings on the borderlands and mestiza consciousness. Undoubtedly Lunsford's and others' applications (discussed in chapter 3) of Anzaldúan theorizing in feminist rhetoric provide valuable contributions to the field. Her theories of la mestiza and borderlands challenge the homogenous rhetorical situation by refusing rigid and exclusionary boundaries. Feminist rhetoric adopts these theories to note the multiplicities embedded in both the rhetor and rhetorical product. Alongside examining Anzaldúa's theories of the borderland and mestiza consciousness, investigating her lesser explored theories, such as *conocimiento*,

nepantla, and shamanism, can further enrich feminist rhetoric. Applying several Anzaldúan theories to feminist rhetoric research enriches rhetoric and WGS because her creativity-inflected theories can assist with the project to recover and (re)value women's voices present in visual and written work. Specifically, Anzaldúa's sketches and writings can provide two contributions. First, her published and unpublished writings and artwork complexify feminist rhetoric's understanding of Anzaldúa as a rhetor. Second, her image-making concept and lesser discussed sketches legitimize rhetorical products that lie beyond the traditional boundaries of rhetoric. Third, Anzaldúa's understudied theories of creativity can provide a new lens to analyze rhetoric existing outside the rhetorical canon and in doing so work to subvert traditional systems that privilege and rank subjectivity.

Positioning Myself in the Research

Prior to my study of Anzaldúa's artwork and creative process, I had discovered several connections to Anzaldúa's theories that informed my self-identity and research. As a bi-racial woman I was born into an in-between space, and I relate to many Anzaldúan theories that involve liminal spaces (e.g., mestiza consciousness and nepantla). However, as a middle-class, heterosexual, Japanese American/white, monolingual individual I have different experiences than those Anzaldúa draws on to construct many of her theories. Nevertheless, as I came to know her as a visual artist, I could connect my background as a painter with Anzaldúa's art and concepts of creativity. This connection inspires my research and pushes me to explore alternative perspectives in my academic and artistic work.

Anzaldúa's creative process impacts my own understanding of creativity and how images impact reality. Anzaldúa's influence on my creative process comes through in changes I have made to my image-making process. As a trained studio artist, my prior creation procedure followed a formulaic plan: I photographed the subject, digitally-manipulated the images, then painted the digital-studies. My process enabled me to produce several paintings, but my need to follow a plan conflicted with my desire to reflect my growing critical social consciousness and restricted my ability to create. I was blocked and remained unable to work for several years. However, in analyzing Anzaldúa's drawings and theories of creativity I felt compelled to return to painting. Inspired by Anzaldúa's image-making process I am more flexible, patient, and open-minded. Thus, my paintings focus on the knowledge produced through emotions and the subconscious much in the same way Anzaldúa evokes theories through her own creative process.

Chapter Organization

This dissertation was conceived in the traditional research manuscript format. Each chapter takes us through my research process (literature review, methodology, analysis, and conclusion) to draw attention to Anzaldúa as a visual artist and build our understanding of how her theories of creativity and artwork support WGS, feminist rhetoric, and feminist research. In the following chapters, I examine Anzaldúa's theories of creativity, place these theories into conversation with feminist rhetoric research practices, and apply these methods to analyze Anzaldúa's sketches. Each chapter title

begins with an Anzaldúan statement about creativity that highlights aspects of her theory of creativity and captures the chapter's focus. In chapter two, I explore my first research question—How do Anzaldúa's theories of creativity inform social-justice work?—by first investigating Anzaldúa's theory of desconocimientos as an obstacle to social justice and how she employs creativity to address ignorance. I explore how Anzaldúa uses creative and academic writing to challenge desconocimientos and two related issues: privileged knowledge-production forms and narrow identity categories. I pinpoint how Anzaldúa uses creativity and imagination to bring awareness to each issue and work towards transformation.

I establish the parameters surrounding Anzaldúa's theories of creativity to apply these traits to feminist rhetoric research methods. In chapter three, I transition to my second research question: How do Anzaldúa's theories of creativity contribute to feminist research? As mentioned above, for the past twenty years, feminist rhetoric scholars have examined Anzaldúa's writing; however, scholars typically limit their focus to a handful of theories and texts. Examining Anzaldúa's theory of creativity in feminist rhetoric can offer new understandings of her written and visual rhetoric. After analyzing the well-known feminist research practices of reflexivity, flexibility, and a dialogic lens, I further develop their creative components by introducing Anzaldúa's theories of creativity, image-making, and imagination. Drawing on Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento*, I propose a fourth research practice: recursion. Applying Anzaldúa's theories to feminist rhetoric research methods can further the field's goal to recognize marginalized voices.

Building on an Anzaldúan-influenced feminist research approach, I use these methods to analyze Anzaldúa's sketches in chapter four. In combination with the practices of reflexivity, flexibility, dialogic process, and recursion, I employ textual analysis to investigate the information embedded in her artwork. By viewing Anzaldúa's sketches as texts, I can discuss how images help us understand her written theories. In chapter five, I expand on the idea that Anzaldúa's artwork communicates theory and facilitates inner transformation and knowledge exchange by locating three bridges: academic connections, theoretical connections, and artist-audience connections. I conclude with suggestions for future research of Anzaldúa's archived artwork and writings on creativity.

CHAPTER II

“THINK IN IMAGES”: AN EXAMINATION OF CREATIVITY IN THE WRITINGS OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA

“Creativity” means to bring forth, to manifest, to cause to come into existence. It may be something tangible or it may be an idea. Create something new or put apparently unrelated things together.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Writing Notes C - 28

Art is a movement to transform society by virtue of the information that comes through art.

Gloria Anzaldúa, “Entre Américas: El Taller”

Creativity, for Gloria Anzaldúa, evokes transformative images and thoughts. As my chapter title that borrows from Anzaldúa’s statement—“think in images”— suggests, art and ideas weave into one another (*Light* 25). In my first epigraph, drawn from her unpublished Writing Notes C (1997), Anzaldúa echoes conventional definitions that describe creativity as the capability to devise original ideas.¹⁹ However, as my second epigraph, taken from her 1997 unpublished artist statement, indicates, Anzaldúa extends her definition of creativity to posit art’s transformative powers. Anzaldúa develops her theory of creativity, which assisted her in crafting artistic works that operate as instruments for social change. As such, creativity can address oppressive systems, such as colonialism, imperialism, and white-, male-, heterosexual-, and upper-middle class

¹⁹ Anzaldúa further develops this theory of creativity in her unpublished 2002 essay “Nepantla, Creative Acts of Vision.”

privilege, which operate on divisive frameworks and inhibit community-building among differing groups.

Anzaldúa discusses social divides that draw lines separating “us” from “them,” in her theory of “desconocimientos,” a term she coins to describe knowledge gaps that can, at times, be intentional. A form of ignorance, desconocimientos, prevents us from working to rectify social ills, such as systems of privilege and inequality. Indeed, contributing to the division between people, desconocimientos inhibits us from even *recognizing* that these conditions exist (*Light* 20). Because desconocimientos includes characteristics like “ignorance, frustrations, tendencies toward self-destructiveness, feelings of betrayal and powerlessness, and poverty of spirit and imagination,” these blank spots impoverish not only our relationship with others but also with ourselves (*Light* 154). Remaining ignorant to other people’s marginalization prevents us from working collectively to address oppression.

In an individualistic Western climate, where we do not see the commonalities between ourselves and others, we feel less motivated to work across divides. However, Anzaldúa asserted that fragmented groups need to move past divisive mentalities to achieve cooperative social transformation. She states: “Isn’t an enemy not another person but the ignorance, fear, hate (los desconocimientos) that diminish us? When our ‘enemies’ become conscious of their desconocimientos and act on that awareness, they may become our ‘allies’” (*Light* 93). By locating the problem in a lack of awareness

instead of the individual person, Anzaldúa shifts the dialogue. Therefore, how might we raise awareness?

In her writing, Anzaldúa relies on her imagination and creativity to elevate awareness, which challenges desconocimientos.²⁰ By crafting images that offer alternatives to Western divisive frameworks, she confronted related types of ignorance (e.g., us/them attitudes, gender and racial stereotypes, and cultural appropriation).²¹ The topic of creativity runs throughout Anzaldúa's writing career and features as a key component in several theories.²² For example, Anzaldúa speaks to the relation between creativity and knowledge creation, stating that "[a]rt is an exchange of energy and conocimientos (knowledge and insights)" ("Speaking Across" 292). Creative works produce knowledge that can shift perspectives and may make others recognize their knowledge gaps. By employing creativity and imagination, an artist creates images that push us to reconsider social norms and personal truths.

While desconocimientos indicates the gaps in our knowledge, conocimiento specifies how to fill these blank spots with new understandings. Anzaldúa describes conocimiento as an epistemological framework, consisting of seven nonlinear stages, that

²⁰ Anzaldúa notes other ways people become enlightened and move past their desconocimientos. Catastrophes, like natural disasters and terrorist attacks such as 9/11, can evoke compassion that helps people partly overcome divisive attitudes (*Light* 20). However, during non-catastrophic times, creativity remains a reliable tool to address ever-present problems such as sexism, racism, and homophobia.

²¹ I liken Anzaldúa's theory of desconocimientos to her understanding of "illness" that AnaLouise Keating discusses as broadly defined and includes: "[E]ffects of racism, sexism, and other destructive beliefs, practices, epistemologies, and states of being that occur at interlocking/overlapping individual and systematic levels" ("Speculative" 53).

²² See for example, Anzaldúa's writings that explore creativity and imagination, such as "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," "Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness," "Haciendo caras, una entrada," "Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing," and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*.

can lead us on the path to self and social transformation (*Light* 117). While we might feel compelled to place these two theories in a binary (i.e., we experience ignorance due to desconocimientos or become enlightened through conocimiento), each process exists within the other simultaneously. We all experience holes in our understanding (desconocimientos), and through knowledge creation (conocimiento) and creativity we can begin to fill in these gaps. As a “heightened consciousness or awareness,” conocimiento “stirs the artist to take action [and] propels her toward the act of making. This conocimiento initiates the relationship between self-knowledge and creative work” (*Light* 40). Thinking creatively, we imagine new possibilities that can move us through the path of conocimiento. Traveling (and cycling back) through the stages of conocimiento synchronizes knowledge-making and creativity to produce powerful artwork.

In this chapter I explore the question—How does Anzaldúa articulate creativity as a tool for social-justice work?—by investigating a variety of Anzaldúa’s creative works that challenge desconocimientos and its products (e.g., privileging certain knowledge frameworks and narrow identity categories). I discuss a handful of issues Anzaldúa addresses through creative means; however, I do not view these problems as more important than other social ills that she tackles in her writing (e.g., homophobia, classism, and the dismissal of spirituality). Rather, my examination operates as a jumping-off point for future applications of Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity. First, I discuss binary thinking that influences divisive perspectives (i.e., mind/body and imaginary/real world

dichotomies).²³ I highlight how Anzaldúa moves away from either/or thinking by using images to subvert hierarchical binaries. Second, I examine gaps in knowledge related to identity-based issues and associated problems (i.e., colonialism and assimilation). Emphasizing creativity's role in exposing and remedying ignorance, I foreground Anzaldúa transformative metaphors that bring awareness to and address binary thinking and identity categories.

My efforts to situate Anzaldúa's theory of creativity as a tool to address privileged and problematic Western perspectives complement WGS's efforts to establish equity for disempowered groups. By foregrounding marginalized voices, we can better recognize alternative viewpoints and ideas for social development. Indeed, my choice to examine Anzaldúa's unpublished writings and artwork contributes to WGS' aim to highlight women of colors' scholarly contributions in developing disciplinary and community engagement.²⁴ Furthermore, this chapter builds a foundation for my subsequent chapters that interface creativity with feminist rhetoric research practices and analyze Anzaldúa's sketches.

²³ Certainly, several academic fields critique binary thinking, for example: WGS, ethnic studies, post-colonial studies, and Queer studies. However, to focus my attention on the connections Anzaldúa draws between divisive structures and creativity to address these issues, I focus on Anzaldúa's writing and scholars' writing on Anzaldúan theorizing.

²⁴ For example, in "Gloria Anzaldúa, Nuestra Gloria, Nuestra Heroína Fronteriza / Our Glory(a), Our Borderlands Heroine: An Art Exhibit at Anzaldúa's Alma Mater, The University of Texas–Pan American" Alvarez et al. describe an art exhibition created for the final project from a course on Gloria Anzaldúa at Texas-Pan American. The exhibition, which featured writings, books, and sketches by Anzaldúa, introduced the surrounding community to Anzaldúa's theories.

Binary Thinking

Binaries construct divisions between two ideas or sets of people, and oftentimes these divisions operate on a hierarchical arrangement so that one half of the binary is more valued than the other. Organizing one group above the other constructs and preserves privilege and marginalization.²⁵ As several scholars have noted, Anzaldúa often challenges these forms of binary thinking by proposing creativity as a tool to heal divisions.²⁶ Monica Torres, for example, examines Anzaldúa's theory of *la mestiza* as an alternative epistemological stance to binary thinking, locating instances where Anzaldúa questions the prevalent dichotomies that structure and limit people's lives. Torres notes:

In *Borderlands* Anzaldúa explicitly names perhaps the most significant binary at the heart of Western knowledge systems: subject/object. Throughout *Borderlands* and in *Interviews/Entrevistas*, she outlines other dichotomies that attempt to trap us in this Manichean structure: art/everyday life, white people/people of color, mind/body, heterosexual/homosexual, secular/sacred, theory/autobiography. She does more than name the problem. She aggressively resists this epistemological directive. (198)

²⁵ For example, Anzaldúa critiques globalization and mass consumerism that place emphasis on money and power, allowing a systematic and justified "sliding scale of human worth use to keep humankind divided. It condones the mind theft, spirit murder, exploitation, and genocide de los otros. We are collectively conditioned not to know that every comfort of our lives is acquired with the blood of conquered, subjugated, enslaved, or exterminated people, an exploitation that continues today" (*Light* 118). The chasm between the cause (e.g., consumerism) and effect (e.g., mistreatment and underpayment of Global South workers), thus, sustains the existence of both conditions.

²⁶ For additional discussions please see: Norma Alarcón's "Anzaldúan Textualities: A Hermeneutic of the Self and the Coyolxauhqui Imperative," Jay Dolmage's "Metis, Mêtis, Mestiza, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions," and AnaLouise Keating's "Introduction: shifting worlds, una entrada."

Here, Torres makes two points relevant to my discussion: First, she lists several dichotomies that Anzaldúa consistently challenges; and second, she notes Anzaldúa's efforts to form resistance strategies. Like Torres, I find Anzaldúa's writings on binary thinking to be illuminating and subversive. Furthermore, I extend Torres' point by positing that Anzaldúa not only cites the numerous divides that hinder coalition work between differing groups, but she also positions creativity as a bridge that can carry us across the split.

Dichotomies' hierarchical arrangements impose oppressive structures, and Anzaldúa critiques these unequal power relations in her writings and drawings. For example, in an interview with Jamie Lee Evans, Anzaldúa comments on the oppressor/oppressed ranking imposed on marginalized groups and uses imagery to illuminate otherwise invisible oppression. Inspired by the Spanish phrase "pisan la sombra," stepping on another's shadow, Anzaldúa depicts the

[I]mage of the shadow and who's stepping on the shadow [...] This is the body of the person and when somebody is stepping on your shadow [...] they're stepping on your face but they're doing it in a covert way. They're putting you down and walking on you without acknowledging they're doing it, and you sometimes are buying into it. (*Interviews* 200)

The image contrasts the power difference between the disembodied shadow and the oppressor's body. Just as stepping on a shadow may go unnoticed, Anzaldúa uses the imagery to discuss the invisible ways racism and sexism operate to disempower and

subordinate women of colors in coalition work. Through imagery, Anzaldúa spotlights the disproportionate power dynamics resulting from racial and gender divides.

When we form identity-based communities based on existing relations and established differences (“We are X because we are not Y”), dominant groups secure themselves in the center and, consequently, sideline (or “Other”) non-dominant groups. Anzaldúa’s theory of *nos/otras* challenges “Otherness” by revealing interconnectivity between people from apparently disparate groups.²⁷ Individuals possess complex identities and simultaneously occupy privileged and marginalized positions (e.g., a heterosexual, middle-class woman of color has heterosexual and class privilege but remains subject to racism and sexism). To articulate this and other complex theories, Anzaldúa created sketches that offer additional insight. For example, she characterizes *nos/otras* in a simple line drawing that features a figure whose lower half ends in tangled lines and orb-like shapes. This multiple-legged figure’s defiant mass illustrates the way her theory of *nos/otras* “disrupt[s] neat [identity] categories” and conveys individuals’ fluid identities (*Light* 80). In sum, Anzaldúa effectively employs both written and visual theory to dismantle social divides.²⁸

²⁷ Anzaldúa derived her theory of *nos/otras* from the Spanish word “nosotras” that combines both “nos” (us) and “otras” (others) (*Light* 79).

²⁸ I also make a connection between the *nos/otras* drawing and her critique of identity labels in “La Prieta.” Anzaldúa refuses to be caged into one identity, stating “[t]hink 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. [...] Only your labels split me” (46).

Anzaldúa also infuses creativity into her theory of nepantla, a liminal space in which we negotiate conflicting information and feelings. She articulates nepantla as

[A] space where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven't got into the new identity yet and haven't let the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition...It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that Nepantla because you are in the midst of transformation. (qtd. in Ikas 276)

Despite the difficulties represented by this internal state of consciousness, nepantla holds potential for inner change and new knowledge. Moreover, creativity can help us work through nepantla. Anzaldúa makes this connection in “Border Arte: Nepantla, el lugar de la frontera,” an essay that puts into conversation her visit to the Denver Museum of Natural History’s Mesoamerican culture and art exhibition with border artists’ experiences and aesthetics. Coming upon the statue of el dios murciélago, the bat god, she “makes[s] an instantaneous association of the bat man with the nepantla stage of border artists—the dark cave of creativity where they hang upside-down, turning the self upside down in order to see from another point of view, one that brings a new state of understanding” (*Light* 62). Creativity enables artists to see from an alternative, upside-down perspective and prompts new ways to make sense of the world. An alternative creative perspective can prompt a move away from simple dichotomies, locating complex interstices between a binary.

Mind/Body Split

Anzaldúa consistently used creativity to trouble divisive thinking, such as the mind/body split, in her writings. Generated by Cartesian thinking, the mind/body binary positions only the mind as the sole source of knowledge production and dismisses embodiment. However, Anzaldúa challenges this perspective by positioning the body as a site of knowledge creation and creativity.²⁹ In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she theorizes embodied knowing and challenges Western epistemologies that dismiss information obtained through the body. Reflecting on her religious upbringing, Anzaldúa notes:

The Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of life and of the body; they encourage a split between the body and spirit and totally ignore the soul; they encourage us to kill off parts of ourselves. We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does 'real' events.
(59-60)

Here, Anzaldúa contests religious dogma that disparages the body (often associated with women) by highlighting the body's keen awareness. Our bodies respond to both internal

²⁹ Other scholars also explore Anzaldúa's discussion of the body as a knowledge source. See, for example: Cordelia E. Barrera's "An Ecology of Healing: An Anzaldúan Reading of Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*," Jay Dolmage's "Metis, Métis, Mestiza, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions," and Laura Pérez's "The Performance of Spirituality and Visionary Politics in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa."

(i.e., imagination) and external (i.e., outer world) influences and work with the mind and spirit to form a whole person.

Anzaldúa's writings on the body underscore embodiment as a knowledge-making source. Her textual imagery shifts bodily representations from a fleshy vessel for the mind to a knowledge-creation vehicle in itself capable of problem solving. George Hartley explores this idea and discusses Anzaldúa's writing on "rajada" (open wound) and matriz (womb) that operates as metaphors for colonialism's damages and the need for healing from colonization. Examining the poem "Matriz sin tumba o 'el baño de la basure ajena,'" included in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Hartley notes how Anzaldúa "struggle[s] against the mainstream patriarchal Anglo-American conversion of the mestiza's womb/matrix (in all its implications) into mere trash" in order to transform this womb into a center of creativity that heal psychic and physical wounds (41-42). Hartley reads Anzaldúa's description of the womb—a place of conception, growth, and nurturing—as a creative source, which heals injuries and births new approaches to old problems such as divisive mentalities. Extending Hartley's discussion, I posit that Anzaldúa's visual and written images on embodiment help us understand the interdependent relation between the body and mind. Anzaldúa rejects literary depictions of the body as unintelligent material by positioning materiality as creative and equal to the mind.

Anzaldúa's writings on creativity articulate the body's and mind's exchange of ideas and actions. AnaLouise Keating explores how Anzaldúa's articulates a bridge

between the imagination and physical world. Keating's "poet-shamanic aesthetics" theory blends Anzaldúa's theory of shamanism with Indigenous participatory language theories to "represent an entirely embodied and potentially transformative intertwining of language, physiology/matter, and world" ("Speculative" 51). Through a poet-shamanic aesthetic, writing becomes transformational in two ways: 1) emotions work to physically heal the writer; and 2) the writer's inner transformation affects their interactions with the outside world.³⁰ Because written images can prompt internal and external change, metaphors' material effect calls into question the supposed irreconcilable separation between the internal and external world.

Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* strengthens the link between the body and mind and supports the concept that the body can produce creativity. Stressing the connection between creativity, knowledge production, and embodiment, Anzaldúa states that *conocimiento* can be accessed through "creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (*the body, too, is a form as well as a site of creativity*)" (*Light* 119, emphasis added). What does it mean to describe the body as a "form as well as a site of creativity"? Anzaldúa's description of the body as a "site" and "form" of creativity indicates that the body facilitates and produces creative work. As a creativity site, our bodies can make art (e.g., the dancer's body or the artist's hand that pushes the pen or paintbrush). The

³⁰ I find Keating's use of the term aesthetic useful in discussing the social implications of Anzaldúa's use of metaphors. In Anzaldúa's 2000 unpublished essay "Proving Ground: Theorizing Ethnic Art-Making," she first defines aesthetics as the philosophical study and evaluation of beauty and art, then specifies that her writings operate as a counter-aesthetic and "politically committed critical lens" ("Proving" 2-3).

metaphysical and spiritual implications make the body as a form of creativity challenging to articulate concretely. If, as Anzaldúa suggests, the images in our minds can produce physical healing effects, then our bodies can also be a creative product (*Interviews* 251).³¹ Creativity gives us new insight into our bodies; through making art we come to better understand our bodies and embodied knowledge. Thus, creative perspectives can revalue the worth placed on embodied knowledge and give credence to groups associated with the body (i.e., women).

Imaginary/External Reality Dichotomy

Like the body/mind split, the external “real” world becomes separated from the internal imagination world. Placing a high epistemological value on the external world lessens or, worse yet, dismisses creativity’s value. Anzaldúa uses the term “ensueños” to describe fantasies and dreams that bridge the imagination and reality. The concept of “un sueño que se hace realidad” (a dream that comes true) dissolves the inner and outer worlds’ hierarchical ranking:

A type of creative fantasy, ensueños are simply another reality. The reasoning mind’s reality is not higher than the imagination’s. I am interested in the place/space (nepantla) where realities interact and imaginative shifts happen.

Some images stimulate changes; certain images change the image that live within a person’s psyche, altering the stories that live within rather than trying to ‘fix’

³¹ In an interview with Andrea Lunsford, Anzaldúa connects creativity and healing, stating “[o]ften our stories, ideas, and art enact psychological healing, healing that’s much like that performed by traditional shamans” (*Interviews* 251).

the person that ‘houses’ these images. The creative process is an agency of transformation. (*Light* 35)

Here Anzaldúa posits that internal and external reality hold equal epistemological weight, and by removing the division between the two realms we can arrive at more complex understandings of the world. Furthermore, the creative process may bridge the internal and external realms and facilitate transformative knowledge creation.

Anzaldúa encourages us to engage in creative practices that prompt movement between multiple consciousness levels to problem-solve and support healing and often engaged in such practices herself. She would often light incense and meditate in front of her altars to evoke mental pictures. By meditating on an image, she could connect to the image through all five senses and, at times, place herself in the image’s body (“On the Process” 4). For example, Anzaldúa often connected to a serpent image; in her early poem “Reincarnation,” she draws on the metaphor of a snake shedding its skin to represent her constant change and transformation (21). Reptiles’ sloughed off outer layer can be likened to humans’ old identity or “skin,” which we shed when the husk been outgrown. Developing this notion further in an interview, Anzaldúa links the new rattle on a rattlesnake tail to identity: “[T]he skin is retained and it becomes another rattle. And that means that the ‘me’s’ that I used to be are still in there somewhere” (Reuman and Anzaldúa 18). Just as the snake repeats the renewal process, humans must shift to adapt and survive in society. In this instance, Anzaldúa uses creativity to move between

consciousness levels and extend the image of a snake shedding its skin to conceptualize inner transformation.

Creativity enables fluid movement between multiple levels of consciousness and, if harnessed, can address other problematic divisions. For example, Anzaldúa suggests that we can use subconscious images that encourage interconnectivity, rather than divisive concepts, which perpetuate conflict and violence. She notes that people's actions after national trauma, such as the 9-11 terrorist attacks, can be more important than the initiating event. She asserts that "[e]n estos tiempos of loss, fear, and confusion the human race must delve into its cenotes (wells) of collective wisdom, both ancient and modern. [...] In addition to community building, we can transform our world by imagining it differently, dreaming it passionately via all our senses, and willing it into creation" (*Light* 20).³² Creativity can alter damaging narratives (e.g., us/them perspectives) and work to heal these divides; rather than reacting in ways that perpetuate the problem, creativity helps us adopt transformative action.

On an individual level, creativity cultivates empowerment and mindfulness. For example, if *desconocimientos* includes an ignorance of the connection we have with others and a lack of self-knowledge, then images can be used to prompt self-awareness.³³

³² Anzaldúa defines *el cenote* as "the subterranean psychic norias or reserves containing our depth consciousness and ancestral knowledges [...] El cenote contains knowledge that comes from the generations of ancestors that live within us and permeate every cell in our bodies" ("Speaking Across" 291).

³³ In what Keating terms, "intellectual humility," Anzaldúa acknowledges her own *desconocimientos* and desires to address the gaps in her knowledge (57). For further reading see Anzaldúa's essays "Speaking Across the Divide" and "Border Arte: *Nepantla el Lugar de la Frontera*."

Discussing how wounds can prompt *conocimiento*, inner healing, and transformation, Anzaldúa reflects on how we deal with emotional pain. She stated that:

Excessive dwelling on your wounds means leaving your body to live in your thoughts where you reenact your past hurts, a form of *desconocimientos* that gives energy to the past where it's held ransom. As victim you don't have to take responsibility for making changes. But the cost of your victimhood is that nothing in your life changes, especially not your attitudes and beliefs. (*Light* 153)

We cannot remain chained to a victimhood mentality because this mental and emotional space offers no room for healing and growth. By adopting positive images (e.g., seeing oneself as empowered), Anzaldúa posits that “we can also change ourselves” (“Metaphors” 122). In “Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman,” she argues that replacing hurtful images with empowering ones can bring about inner change (122). She asserts that “most importantly, we can share ourselves through metaphor—attempt to put, in words, the flow of some of our internal pictures, sounds, sensations, and feelings” (122). Furthermore, by sharing empowering images the writer can heal both themselves and the reader: “[A]s the reader reads the pages these ‘metaphors’ will be ‘activated’ and live in her” (122). The exchange between writer and reader can produce change and indicates the transparency between the internal and external world.

Identity Issues

Social location often operates within divisive structures and marginalizes people based on narrow identity categories. Conventional identity markers, such as race, gender,

and class, often exist in a hierarchical binary (e.g., white/ “Other,” male/female, upper-middle class/lower class) that privileges the dominant group.³⁴ Social narratives place people into limiting identity categories (i.e., we become defined by only one part of our identity); moreover, depending on what box we find ourselves in, non-dominant groups (e.g. women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities) become vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Desconocimientos maintains fixed and biologically-determined identity concepts, which prevent people from comprehending identity categories as fluid and socially constructed. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa comments on identity (re)formation’s continual process: “Identity is relational. Who and what we are depends on those surrounding us, a mix of our interactions with our alrededores/environments, with new and old narratives. Identity is multilayered, stretching in all directions, from past to present, vertical and horizontally, chronologically and spatially” (*Light* 69). Here, she points to the multiple factors that shape identity.³⁵ If we cast identity as multifaceted and unfixed, then it becomes difficult to maintain narrow categories.

With a creativity-influenced perspective, we can claim authorship and alter our identity. Anzaldúa posits that through creative works, such as writing (and I would add

³⁴Anzaldúa began critiquing identity labels early in her writings. In “La Prieta” she likens the multiplicity of her identity to “a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds, [she is] Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria, the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses” (45).

³⁵ Other scholars also note the ways Anzaldúa (re)theorizes identity. See, for example: AnaLouise Keating’s “Introduction: Reading Gloria Anzaldúa, Reading Ourselves....” and “(De)Centering the Margins?: Identity Politics and Tactical (Re)Naming” and Diane Fowlkes’ “Moving from Feminist Identity Politics To Coalition Politics Through a Feminist Materialist Standpoint of Intersubjectivity in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.”

visual art), artists can first understand their identity as constructed through social narratives, then rewrite these stories to reform or transform their identity (*Light* 6-7). In addition, identity transformation differs depending on artists' social identities. In "Haciendo caras, una entrada," Anzaldúa asserts that women-of-colors artists exist within the intersections of gender and race and, thus, must employ creative tools to address sexism and racism simultaneously. Anzaldúa explains that "[b]y sending our voices, visuals, and visions outward into the world, [women-of-color artists] alter the walls and make them a framework for new windows and doors," indicating that women of colors use their imaginations to construct new self-images, rather than allow society to prescribe identity images for them ("Haciendo" 135). Indeed, the walls that box women of colors into certain categories (e.g., gender and racial stereotypes) can be exposed and replaced with new representations that serve empowering, rather than subjugating, purposes.

Anzaldúa engages creativity through metaphor to revise people's attitudes about themselves and others. A metaphor works to reveal an issue, such as prejudice and marginalization, and develop resistance strategies. Erika Aigner-Varoz makes a similar point as she examines Anzaldúa's metaphors in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. According to Aigner-Varoz, "Anzaldúa strips away the surface metaphors that camouflage the 'wounds,' the underlying conceptual metaphors, in order to redeem and reclaim voice, instinct, intellect, and sexuality" (60). A metaphor comprises multiple layers that rest on core issues. For example, Anzaldúa's metaphors based on Mesoamerican and Mexican myths address underlying social issues, such as sexism, colonialism, and homophobia.

Anzaldúa recasts la Llorona—the wailing ghost-woman who seeks her lost children—as a metaphor for female agency and creative inspiration, thus shifting negative stereotypes placed on Chicana and Latina women. Turning la Llorona’s image, meant to embody society’s fears of women, on its head, Anzaldúa subverts this negative narrative by proffering an empowered ghost woman.³⁶ She identifies the “wounds” that inhibit agency (e.g., la Llorona represents “bad” women) and imagined alternative images (e.g., la Llorona embodies women’s voices).

Colonizing Narratives

Colonizing narratives, which operate from white supremacy and Western knowledge frameworks, marginalize non-dominant groups. Within these structures, difference threatens white male power and thus must be ignored or erased. In “En Rapport, In Opposition,” Anzaldúa challenges a white, Western framework that perpetuates binary systems. Summing up these narratives and their effects, she states that “[a]s long as we see the world and our experiences through white eyes—in a dominant subordinate way—we’re trapped in the tar and pitch of the old manipulative and strive-for-power ways” (114). Anzaldúa criticizes oppositional thinking that prevents coalition building. A singular perspective built on privileging one group locks people into oppressive systems and silences marginalized voices.

While colonization can operate through external actions (e.g., the genocide of Indigenous groups and theft of Indigenous land, knowledge, and practices), Anzaldúa

³⁶ In another example, Anzaldúa’s children’s book, *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita Y La Llorona*, casts la Llorona as a helpful and compassionate being.

also expresses concern over internal colonialism. Defining internal colonialism as a psychological abuse or “taking over” by the hegemonic mindset (*Interviews* 184); she uses creativity to address these issues.³⁷ Creativity can call forth images that both define the problem, such as internal colonialism, and imagine healing methods. Anzaldúa reflects on her reactions to internal exploitations, stating that

After a racial or gendering wounding, something breaks down; you fall to pieces (you’re dismembered). You can’t swallow your anger or grief. You struggle to redeem yourself but you can never live up to the white dominant ideal you’ve been forced to internalize. Caught in the sticky morass of chaos, unresolved discordance prevents you from pulling yourself together. (*Light* 87)

Racist and sexist violence supported by colonialist narratives inflict harm on people of colors and prevent emotional healing. To begin the reassembling process, we can use creativity to regain more control over our lives.

A fractured sense of self relates to Anzaldúa’s articulation of Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess, often depicted in her disassembled state held within a sphere. The creative process Anzaldúa associates with Coyolxauhqui—reassembling herself in new ways—illuminates creativity’s arduous and, at times, painful aspects. While noting the decolonizing themes in Anzaldúa’s writings, Norma Alarcón remarks on Anzaldúa’s metaphors, in particular Coyolxauhqui, to address the wounds caused by colonization. According to Alarcón, in Anzaldúa’s work, Coyolxauhqui operates metaphorically:

³⁷ Anzaldúa also makes connections between internal colonialism and media such as TV and the internet (*Light* 119, *Interviews* 216).

“[Resisting] the epistemological methodologies of white Western rationality, [Anzaldúa] wants to give coherence and order to the chaos on her own terms, constructing her own universe, her own concept-metaphors (epistemologies)” (197).³⁸ From this perspective, Coyolxauhqui represents the damages inflicted on colonized peoples and, through reassembly, the potential for agency. Creativity can intervene in colonizing narratives by offering methods to question Western thought’s so-called absolute nature and bolster Indigenous knowledge frameworks.

Anzaldúa critiques Western institutions for commonly presenting Indigenous cultures as mere artifacts or curiosities to predominately white, upper-middle class audiences. Placing Indigenous aesthetic and utilitarian work within an exhibition case materializes the distinction between dominant and “Othered” groups. In addition, removing these pieces from their cultural and geographical contexts encourages the narrative that these groups are extinct and erases contemporary Indigenous community members. Reflecting on her experience viewing the Denver Museum of Natural History’s exhibition of Mesoamerican culture and art, Anzaldúa states:

It angers me that these people talk as though the Aztecs and their culture have been dead for hundreds of years when in fact there are still ten thousand Aztec survivors living in Mexico. The museum itself is a colonized structure; it enacts a psychosis of sorts, implying that all Aztecs

³⁸ Alarcón borrows from Chela Sandoval’s “concept-metaphor,” which suggests a relation between two ideas typically understood as distinct to highlight the ways Anzaldúan weaves together concepts and metaphors (endnote 2, 204).

are dead and only inhabit prehistory. It induces a double being-ness in me:
feeling my Mexican Indigenous aspects represented while at the same time
feeling these parts of myself “disappeared.” (*Light* 48)

Anzaldúa calls attention to contemporary Aztec people’s erasure and notes the internal struggles she feels when seeing her culture presented as dead. Thus, Indigenous peoples’ colonial genocide persists on an individual emotional level.

Critiquing and resisting colonizing narratives through creativity also occurs in Anzaldúa’s creative writing. Revealing museums as colonizing institutions, emerges in her first published writing, a poem titled “TIHUEQUE,” the Náhuatl word for “now let us go.” Written in 1974 and published in 1976, “TIHUEQUE” is narrated from an Aztec ceremonial knife’s perspective. Recalling its beginnings as a sacrificial knife that “carved 12,000 hearts in honor / of Huitziltopochtli, God of War,” the knife now “lie[s] in a musty museum / and register[s] 5.5 on Mohs scale” (19). The poem captures the knife’s vitality and cultural significance and the colonizing institutional practices that render it obsolete. Anzaldúa’s use of poetry critiques colonialism very early in her writing career suggests creativity’s instrumental role in her methods to locate and address social issues.

Assimilation Pressures

As with internalized colonialism, assimilation emerges when society places Western knowledge frameworks and culture above “Other(ed)” cultural expressions. Pressures to adopt white-raced practices demand that communities of colors denounce their culture and adopt dominant principles and ideologies. Anzaldúa engages with

women-of-colors theorists who articulate the assimilative performance of “putting on a mask” to survive in a dominant white society.³⁹ Comparing affixing a mask to “interfacing,” Anzaldúa states:

In sewing terms, ‘interfacing’ means sewing a piece of material behind two pieces of fabric to provide support and stability to collar, cuff, yoke. Between the masks we’ve internalized, one on top of another, are our interfaces. The masks are already steeped with self-hatred and other internalized oppressions. However, it is the place—the interface—between the masks that provides the space from which we can thrust out and crack the masks. (“Haciendo” 125)

Oppression’s layered mask contains weak spots that can be broken. Creativity locates these cracks and imagines empowerment through self-assertion.⁴⁰

Artists of color strongly feel the pressure to assimilate when their work becomes defined by ethnicity rather than aesthetic. For example, the Western art world recognizes Chicana artists for their racial/ethnic identity rather than their artistic style, while white-raced artists become known for their genre (e.g., impressionist, pop art, or dada). Artists from marginalized groups resist the demand to create work that looks, sounds, and/or reads in a way that caters to white-raced upper-middle class audiences (i.e., create work

³⁹ Specifically, Anzaldúa draws on Mitsuye Yamada’s poetry and Audre Lorde’s writings.

⁴⁰ Though it is beyond the scope of my discussion, I would like to note the connection that can be made between locating the cracks that enable us to break away from internalized oppression and the work of *nepantleras*. A *nepantlera* travels through *nepantla*, gains knowledge through which they are transformed, then choose to use this knowledge to operate as a bridge between differing people and ideas (*Light* 82). Anzaldúa writes that “[l]ike tender green shoots growing out of the cracks, [nepantleras] eventually overturn foundations, making conventional definitions of otherness hard to sustain. Their activism, cultural production—indeed, their very lives—challenge traditional identity politics” (*Light* 84). Future research may benefit from examining the overlap between creativity and *nepantleras’* work.

that sells) by using their creativity to deal with personal and political issues (*Light* 59). Relating Chicana and border artists' experiences in the Western art world, Anzaldúa asserts that, "[t]he dominant culture shapes the ethnic artist's identity if s/he does not scream loud enough and fight long enough to name her/himself. Until we live in a society where all people are equal and no labels are necessary, we need them to resist the pressure to assimilate" (*Light* 59). Assimilation influences identity labels that *divide* more often than *define* us. Noting the ways artwork can express multiplicity, Guisela Latorre examines the artwork of Yreina Cervántez and Liliana Wilson, who both create artwork that relates to Anzaldúan theorizing and "embod[ies] the spirit of the new mestiza" ("Mestiza" 126). Latorre asserts that Anzaldúa's theories and visual artwork illuminate the intricacies and interwoven meanings in Chicana's and Latina's art that negotiates race/ethnicity and gender within the Western art world.⁴¹ Creativity and image construction become tools for transformative self-definition within a normative art institution.

In addition to exploring gender and racial identities through creative work, artists from marginalized groups may attempt to connect with subconscious images holding transformative potential. When an artist focuses on their connection with others they may

⁴¹ Scholars adopting Anzaldúa's theory of *la mestiza*, one who navigates the in-between geographical, racial/ethnic, cultural, and emotional space of a borderland and adopts a pluralistic personality, discuss a "mestiza aesthetics" to articulate the ways Chicanas have employed art to navigate cultural imperialism. See, for example: Tere Romo's "Mestiza Aesthetics and Chicana Painterly Visions," Gisela Latorre's "Latina Feminism and Visual Discourse: Yreina Cervántez's *La Ofrenda*," and Judith Huacuja's "Borderlands Critical Subjectivity in Recent Chicana Art."

conjure images that can potentially heal the divides caused by us/them thinking.⁴²

Describing the intentions behind *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa notes the imagination's power to bring about change. Because "our images and ensueños [daydream or reverie] emerge from that connection, from the self-in-community (inner, spiritual, nature/animals, racial/ethnic, communities of interest, neighborhood, city, nation, planet, galaxy, and the unknown universes)," we can process psychic hurt brought on by disconnection (*Light* 5). If we perceive images as threads that connect all beings (humans, animals, nature, and the cosmos), then focusing on these mental pictures can strengthen an awareness of interconnectivity. Furthermore, by focusing on commonalities, we may move away from assimilative practices encouraged by divisive thinking.

To be sure, creativity is not inherently a social justice tool; rather, artists must carefully consider and apply the images they adopt in their work.⁴³ Artists use creativity to subvert assimilating practices that reinforce the separation between groups (e.g., racial divides); however, artists engaging with Indigenous images must do so with care. According to Anzaldúa, Chicana artists employ creativity to navigate pressures to assimilate, yet must recognize their own tendencies to enact assimilating practices by

⁴² I use "they" and "their" in the singular form to be inclusive of gender pronouns that exist outside of the traditional gender binary.

⁴³ Anzaldúa recognizes the continuing legacy of her Indigenous culture of the Aztecs in her writing and reclaiming of mythic figures. Acknowledging Indigenous culture decenters the privileged Western culture and, at the same time, acknowledges the Indigenous culture's marginalization and erasure by the dominant culture to maintain its power. Anzaldúa distinguishes between her appropriation of cultural icons and the misappropriation of these images by outsiders (*Light* 58).

appropriating Indigenous images. In “Border Arte: Nepantla, el lugar de la frontera,” she notes the risk border artists run when emphasizing their Indigenous roots:

Being assimilated into white culture, being part Indigenous, being artists yet having to survive in the “real” world puts us in a precarious position, with our feet in different worlds. Though Chicanas are aware that we aren’t “Indian” and don’t live in a Native American culture, and though our roots are Indigenous, we often do misappropriate and collude with the Anglo’s forms of misappropriation. (*Light* 53)

While adopting Indigenous imagery can work against pressures to assimilate, Anzaldúa encourages artists to recognize their own social locations. Thus, artists must mindfully use both Indigenous and non-Indigenous images to craft socially aware and transformative artwork.

Conclusion

In her unpublished 2002 writing notes, Anzaldúa connects lived experience with the imagination, writing, “Images provide/give me a framework for theorizing my everyday experience” (Writing Notes M-3). As I have suggested in this chapter, her written metaphors seek out new ways to view a world based on divisive thinking. Indeed, we need creativity to break away from our desconocimientos and “[make] imaginative shifts. Images stimulates change. Changing the images that live within a person’s psyche, changing the stories that live within rather than trying to ‘fix’ the person that houses them, is a more effective way of healing” (Writing Notes M-9). The images Anzaldúa

employs challenge problematic narratives, such as Western epistemological frameworks and white supremacist notions, which are embedded in the mind/body split, imaginary/external reality dichotomy, colonizing narratives, and assimilation pressures. By investigating how creativity cultivates new stories or ideas about lived experience, the next chapter extends Anzaldúa's theory of creativity to feminist rhetoric research methods.

Anzaldúa's description of an El Mundo Zurdo (The Lefthand World) image supplies a useful transition from understanding creativity as a tool to challenge narrow perspectives, to creativity as a way to expand research approaches. El Mundo Zurdo encapsulates creating new knowledge and forming connections with others. In "now let us shift...conocimiento...inner work, public acts," Anzaldúa reflects on the power to connect ourselves and others in her El Mundo Zurdo and conocimiento theories. She states:

Not long ago your mother gave you un milagro, a tiny silver hand with a heart in its palm, never knowing that for years this image has resonated with your concept of El Mundo Zurdo amplified here into the model of conocimiento; la mano surda with a heart in its palm is for engaging with self, others, world. The hand represents acting out and daily implementing an idea or vision, as opposed to merely theorizing about it. The heart es un corazón can razón, with intelligence, passion, and purpose, a "mind-full" heart with ears for listening, eyes for seeing, a mouth with tongue narrowing to a pen for speaking/writing. (*Light* 153)

Here, the left hand holding a heart represents *conocimiento* and *El Mundo Zurdo* (The Lefthand World), a transformation-focused community based on affinities among differing and marginalized people; these theories both encourage education and knowledge exchange between groups (“La Prieta” 208-209; *Light* 153). The heart, representing caring intentions, and the left hand, symbolizing these purposes put into action, serves as a reminder to center care and respect in listening and communication practices. Anzaldúa’s image of a hand carefully holding a heart bridges creativity’s theoretical aspect discussed in this chapter and the practical applications creativity offers research methods discussed in the following chapter. Imaginative work supports feminist rhetoric methodological aims to expand rhetoric’s traditional boundaries. Like a “‘mind-full’ heart,” creativity can call researchers to take up new perspectives to examine issues, carefully consider the individuals and groups impacted by research, and develop current and new research practices.

CHAPTER III

“METHODS OF SYNTHESIZING LIFE:” APPLICATIONS OF ANZALDÚAN

CREATIVITY TO FEMINIST RHETORIC RESEARCH METHODS

I have a transparency I show during my talks... It has a mouth and la boca tiene una lengua y la puntita de la lengua es una plumita pa' escribir, so you can communicate with your mouth. Communication, dialogue, is the whole purpose of getting to know each other's points of view and working with people who are so different from us—our so-called enemies—to solve societal problems of inequality, violence against women, violence against the environment, y todo eso.

Gloria Anzaldúa, quoted in Irene Lara's "Daughter of Coatlicue: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa"

Anzaldúa encourages discussion between people from differing backgrounds and demonstrates the communicative power of drawn images. In the above epigraph, taken from an interview with Irene Lara, Anzaldúa shares her teaching strategy that brings together theory and imagery. Anzaldúa emphasizes the role communication (defined broadly, to include both listening and speaking) can play in creating new knowledge. Indeed, as her statement in this chapter's title suggests, creativity operates as a "method of synthesizing life;" a practice of collecting, processing, and interpreting experiences and ideas to share this information with others ("Nepantla, Creative Acts" 4). This knowledge development path, which Anzaldúa sometimes described as "conocimiento," helps one reach out to others when addressing social inequity and violence against disempowered groups (e.g., women, people of colors, and the environment).

In Anzaldúa's image described above, the mouth and quill-tipped tongue can be interpreted to represent words and images joined together to spark conversation. Anzaldúa made several iterations of this sketch depicting a face set within a hand. Emerging from an outline of a hand, elongated fingers stretch out like spiked hair. Beneath the fingers rests a pair of eyes and on the side of the face-hand sprouts a single ear (below either the thumb or the pinkie finger). The most prominent feature, the mouth, seamlessly merges lips and a quill that extends far past the hand's outline as if a sixth finger has emerged. The various versions of this image range in detail and illuminate *conocimiento*'s different aspects.⁴⁴ The facial features oscillate between simple shapes and more elaborate renderings; for example, the ear sports an earring and the eyes contain an iris and pupil. Although the details vary from iteration to iteration, the core message—listening and practicing mindful engagement with others—remains constant. Through this hand-face image, Anzaldúa demonstrates the need for emotions and thought when we communicate with others. Because images can facilitate communication, academic fields like feminist rhetoric can benefit from using images to explore interaction across difference.

Communicating through creative works—including written, spoken, and visual presentation forms—helps us understand diverse experiences and perspectives. Similarly, feminist rhetoric explores alternative communication modes that include overlooked voices, specifically those of women rhetors. Historically, mainstream rhetoric has ignored

⁴⁴ For example, Lara's published interview with Anzaldúa features two face-hand illustrations. The first describes aspects of *conocimiento*, while the second image focuses on her theory of spiritual activism.

women's voices and those works that exist outside the traditionally defined rhetorical product (e.g., speeches and essays). Stretching the boundaries that dictate which rhetorical artifacts merit study, feminist rhetoric opens spaces for silenced voices to speak.

Contributing to a feminist rhetoric project, I argue in this chapter that Anzaldúa's writings on creativity can be implemented to analyze written and visual rhetoric. As the image I analyzed above suggests, listening (especially listening to marginalized and silenced individuals and groups) can benefit feminist rhetoric scholars who may use visual works to open rhetoric's boundaries. Additionally, Anzaldúa's sketch suggests that visual art can play a role in communicating theory. As suggested in the previous chapters, Anzaldúa dedicated much of her writing to creativity. By analyzing and applying her theories of creativity, I demonstrate how a creative lens can assist in the feminist aim to recognize women rhetoric's multiple forms.

Although I am not the first scholar to note the value Anzaldúa's writings offer to feminist rhetoric, the field has yet to fully explore her theoretical writings on creativity. To this end, I explore my second research question: How do Anzaldúa's theories of creativity contribute to feminist research? In this chapter, I underscore an Anzaldúan theory of creativity applicable to feminist rhetoric that enriches and extends the field's research methods. In my discussion, I draw extensively on Anzaldúa's unpublished manuscripts to analyze her concepts of creativity. First, I examine feminist interventions in rhetoric; then, I explore how scholars introduce Anzaldúan theorizing into the feminist

rhetoric canon. Next, I outline common research practices in feminist rhetoric: reflexive, flexible, and dialogic approaches that can be further developed by applying Anzaldúa's writings on creativity. In addition to these three research methods, I develop a fourth method, recursion, derived from Anzaldúa's creation process. Finally, I conclude by discussing how I apply Anzaldúan-influenced methods in the following chapter.

Feminist Rhetoric

Rhetoric crosses several disciplines and expands its disciplinary borders in the process.⁴⁵ One such intersection, rhetoric and feminism, broadens how the field defines the rhetorical situation to better include women's voices.⁴⁶ Rhetoric uses symbols to persuade others and to connect the rhetor and audience (Campbell 8). Traditionally, rhetoric evaluated persuasion and the rhetor/audience relationship in ways that privilege an unmarked white male position. Women's rhetoric becomes invisible because stereotypical feminine qualities (passivity and modesty) expected of women are incongruent with rhetoric's demands. As Linda Flower suggests, rhetoric has a tradition of marginalizing people based on gender, race, and class because the "practice of rhetoric has been historically identified with analogues to the Greek polis, a restricted,

⁴⁵ John Bender and David E. Wellbery view rhetoric as an "interdisciplinary matrix" that crosses into several disciplines (e.g., philosophy, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and political science). For further reading please see *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*.

⁴⁶ Krista Ratcliffe draws on Roland Barthes' critique of traditional rhetoric to define the rhetorical situation as "cultural 'moments' of production and consumption that are continually being (re)constructed" (25). From this perspective, rhetoric is changeable due to their interaction with geographic, cultural, and psychological influences (25). For further reading see: Krista Ratcliffe's *Anglo-American Feminist Challenges to the Rhetorical Traditions: Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich and Roland Barthes' "Old Rhetoric: An Aide-Memoir."*

homogenous body of peers (that excluded women, foreigners, slaves)” (43). Thus, voices that fall outside a limited white male subject position are ignored, silenced, or erased. Feminist interventions into rhetoric trouble these exclusionary practices and seek to recognize women’s voices.⁴⁷

Feminist interventions critique the tendency to privilege the mind over the body in rhetoric research. Because a traditional viewpoint associates men with the mind and women with the body, women’s rhetoric becomes a material product not worth scholarly investigation. As Jay Dolmage asserts, women are viewed as

inhabit[ing] monstrously different bodies [than men], and this difference rules every aspect of their being, even their soul. In this way, any departure from the bodily norms is seen as potentially “crippling” all other capacities, even the soul. The ‘crippled’ or feminized body is therefore incapable of philosophical thought and is also blamed for any corporeal distractions. (3)

Being associated with a feminine body, thus, functions as a disability or hindrance in creating credible knowledge. Challenging dialogues that dismiss embodied rhetoric, feminist perspectives draw attention to materiality’s value as it influences rhetorical products. As a result, feminist lenses challenge unequal systems, centralize marginalized positions, and, consequently, expand rhetoric.

⁴⁷ Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg hold similar sentiments, stating that “[t]wentieth-century feminist have defended not only women’s right to speak but also their right to use language in unique ways to express a perspective on social issues that has been muted by the male-dominated political hierarchy” (676).

Methodologically, directing attention to women's rhetoric poses several challenges. Women's historical social condition, such as gender role expectations, limited education opportunities, and work obligations (home management work for upper-middle class white women and inside and outside the home labor for working class and women of colors) offered them few opportunities to create rhetorical products. Feminist rhetoric aims to recover women's rhetorical efforts in a climate where, compared to men, "[w]omen have no parallel rhetorical history" (Campbell 7). According to Karlyn Korhs Campbell, women's words were not preserved, and the remaining works are often viewed as an historical artifact, rather than as an artistic product created by a woman rhetor (7). In part, the materials rhetoric deems valuable to research contributes to the exclusion of women's rhetorical pursuits (Buchanan and Ryan 110). Richard Enos argues that "[b]y re-envisioning the place of women in the history of rhetoric I mean not only an awareness of their 'place' but also an awareness of our limited methods of research" (66). By "limited methods of research," Enos refers to the over-reliance on primary literary sources commonly found on "library shelves and most faculty offices" (69). Examining the same resources elevates a select pool of rhetors and neglects other rhetorical works not included in common primary texts. Despite the historical tendency to exclude female rhetors from traditional rhetorical arenas, women communicated their ideas through alternative rhetorical forms (e.g., diaries, letters, and quilts). Consequently, Enos posited that scholars should define a rhetorical product "by expanding our range of evidence beyond extant literary sources" (68). Alternative research materials must be sought out

when traditional primary sources fail to accommodate the field's development.

Responding to this need, my project analyzes Anzaldúa's understudied writings on creativity and applies her theories to feminist rhetoric research.

Feminist lenses widen the field by encouraging new rhetorical research methods. Consider, for instance, feminist historiographical efforts to recover women's writing. Krista Ratcliffe outlines four approaches that continue feminism's "challenges to literary, historical, and philosophical traditions" (1). These methods include: 1) recovering lost or marginalized rhetorical theories, 2) rereading and revising conventional rhetorical theories, 3) extrapolating or drawing on non-rhetorical texts as rhetorical theories, and 4) conceptualizing new rhetorical theories (2). Feminist rhetoric scholars reshape the field's research to focus on women's marginalized voices and writings. Equally as important, these approaches diversify women's voices and develop rhetoric's engagement with women rhetors.

Historiographic methods offer contributions that are both problematic and influential to feminist rhetorical research. These practices tend to essentialize women as a category and fail to thoroughly interrogate the ways gender intersects with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality.⁴⁸ The landmark debate between Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Barbara Biesecker illustrates a primary critique directed at scholars' monolithic

⁴⁸ Barbara Biesecker supports this point, stating "More important, perhaps, the critic taking up the project of re-writing the history of Rhetoric would be required to come to terms with rather than efface the formidable differences between and amongst women and, thus, address the real fact that the different women, due to their various positions in the social structure, have available to them different rhetorical possibilities and, similarly, are constrained by rhetorical limits" (157).

understanding of “women.” In her 1989 two-volume text *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, Campbell examined women’s rights advocates’ work, highlighting the techniques that suffragists employed to overcome the rhetorical challenges they faced as women. In response, Biesecker’s 1992 article “Coming to Terms with the Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric” questioned Campbell’s move to insert a few extraordinary women rhetors into the rhetorical canon, which Biesecker considers “female tokenism” (144). Rather than extolling a few individual women, Biesecker argued for feminist rhetoric scholars to shift the question from *who* speaks to *what conditions* invite or prevent one from speaking (148). Such a shift in focus simultaneously interrogates the rhetorical canon and recognizes the “formidable differences between and amongst women, and thus, addresses the real fact that different women, due to their various positions in the social structure, have available to them different rhetorical possibilities, and similarly, are constrained by different rhetorical limits” (157). Campbell’s response to Biesecker continues to discuss rhetorical recovery work’s benefits and drawbacks; however, I take from their dialogue the need for innovative tactics to locate women’s rhetoric coupled with a critical feminist lens to guide rhetorical research and analysis.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Kathleen J. Ryan identifies the Campbell and Biesecker debate as a difference in theorizing that positions recovery against gender critique. Campbell’s work emerges from a recovery standpoint, while Biesecker roots her position in gender critique. Ryan argues that the distinctions between approaches emerge in feminist rhetorical studies edited collections (28). On one hand, edited collections focused on recovery work “also have the potential to change public memory by challenging the commonplace that rhetors are always males persuading one another in the public sphere and by creating commonplaces about women’s role(s) in the history of rhetoric;” and, on the other hand, collections focused on gender critique “use critical writing and theorizing to offer new ways to read women’s and men’s contributions to the history of

In attending to historical, cultural, geographical, and social influences, feminist lenses inform women's writing contexts. Challenging the monolithic "woman" notion (often synonymous with a white, upper-middle-class woman), feminist rhetoric acknowledges and investigates women's differing conditions based on social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Indeed, as Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford assert, "it is impossible to take the subjectivity of the rhetor for granted, impossible not to locate that cultural, and ideological forces, impossible not to notice not only the context itself, but also who is absent from this context as well as what exclusionary forces (regarding knowledge and argument, for example) are at work here" (412). In other words, we better understand how the rhetorical canon excludes women when we consider women's subject positions. Furthermore, by identifying the social structures that limit individual women's rhetorical production, scholars can better contextualize alternative rhetorical works.

Anzaldúa Theorizing in Feminist Rhetoric

To further rhetorical analysis, feminist rhetoric scholars have occasionally employed Anzaldúa's writings and theories to examine cultural, racial/ethnic, and gendered influences on identity. Some attempts evoke Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* to expand the field's discussion and research on identity, culture, and

rhetoric, proffer new understandings of rhetorical studies, and urge other scholars to enter into this dialogue" (29). Although the Campbell and Biesecker debate and edited collections that focus on either recovery or gender critique make the two approaches appear to be oppositional, Ryan posits a both/and approach in which edited collections can offer both forms of research and collectively inform feminist rhetoric (29).

embodiment in liminal spaces. Specifically, I highlight feminist rhetoric's attention to Anzaldúa's writings on mestiza consciousness, border consciousness, and embodiment. For example, Anzaldúa's theory of mestiza consciousness, according to Linda Flower, operates as a "stylistic and linguistic argument for a special voice that expresses identity wrapped around a doubleness" (44). From la mestiza's perspective, knowledge and identity are complex and situational. Drawing on Anzaldúa's theory, Flower develops an "intercultural rhetoric" in which "difference is not read as a problem but *sought out as a resource for constructing more grounded and actionable understandings*" (40, original emphasis). To work between and among varying cultures requires a multifaceted perspective. Indeed, Anzaldúa offers a rhetorical form or "cultural cross talk [...]" designed to not only challenge but change a cross-cultural audience" (46). Anzaldúan theories' transformative properties offer feminist rhetoric a means to communicate and exchange ideas between differing cultural communities.

Likewise, feminist rhetoric scholars adopt Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands to posit a transformative and self-empowering component in rhetoric.⁵⁰ Understanding that rhetoric's persuasive qualities perpetuate unequal power arrangements, Julia M. Allen and Lester Faigley posit that writers employ several discursive strategies to incite social

⁵⁰ Literary scholar Margarita Cota-Cárdenas draws similar conclusions in her analysis of Anzaldúa and other Chicana writers, who call for creative means to subvert institutional oppression and locate cultural identity in Chicana literary texts. Chicana writers' impulse to create "can be considered political subversive gestures [...]" The Chicana feminist keeps on writing in order to save herself, the writing becoming, an essentially hopeful (and revolutionary) act in itself" (76-77). Creative writing, such as Chicana poetry, holds rhetorical significance and expresses resistance set within a socio-geographical time and space. Here Anzaldúa's writing serves both as an example of and as a lens through which scholars perceive rhetoric that inhabits the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, and geographical location.

change.⁵¹ Anzaldúa illustrates the borderlands by code-switching, which “brings together notions of self-hood, place, and language to define border cultures” (158). A borderlands rhetoric, thus, draws upon several cultural-, geographic-, and identity-based locations to offer narratives that run counter to and challenge the dominant discourse.

Ana Mariella Bacigalupo applies similar ideas in an international context by examining how self/Other dialogues impact Chilean Mapuche women.⁵² According to Bacigalupo, Mapuche women construct multiplicitous identities that form a border consciousness; they “are masters in this ethnic and cultural juggling” (47). Borrowing from Anzaldúa’s concept “border crossings,” in which we must navigate the space between different cultural and geographic borders, Bacigalupo perceives Mapuche women operating in “a ‘pluralistic mode’ (1990, 379) to gain a new, multiple consciousness. There are multiple narratives, multiple selves, multiple possibilities for action that are context specific” (47). In other words, understanding rhetoric through a border consciousness allows for varied self-expressions that include geographic, cultural, and gendered social locations.

Anzaldúa articulates and values embodiment in ways that can inform feminist rhetoric’s conceptions of the speaker. By foregrounding the body, scholars may consider

⁵¹ See, for example, Cristina D. Ramírez’s examination of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Mexican women’s journalists’ writing that demonstrates what Ramírez calls a “mestiza rhetoric,” to resist oppressive ideologies (606-607). According to Ramírez, a mestiza rhetoric “contains a discourse that emerges from a cultural background that recognizes its multiple subjectivities, adapts ideas and logics from various cultures;” however, does not depend on the “explicit discursive recognition of indigenous roots” (607). Surprisingly, Ramírez engages with Anzaldúa very little, despite Andrea Lunsford’s prior published work on an Anzaldúan-influenced mestiza rhetoric in “Toward A Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality.”

⁵² Mapuche people are a distinct Indigenous group from Southern Chile (Bacigalupo 35).

how the rhetor's body has traditionally been ignored (i.e., in the study of male rhetors) or used to excluded certain voices (i.e., female rhetors). Jay Dolmage, for example, blended Anzaldúa's writings on embodiment and la mestiza to open rhetoric's analysis field. Drawing on mythical figures, Ancient Greece's goddess Metis, Hélène Cixous' Medusa, and Anzaldúa's mestiza, Dolmage posits "new rhetorical possibilities for an alternative, embodied tradition to create rhetorical exigence for bodies that have been overlooked and Othered" (2). Arguing that la mestiza operates as an embodied subversive agent, Dolmage asserts that "[t]hese are rhetorics of extraordinary bodies, reminding us that ours can be bodies of extraordinary rhetorical power" (21). A focus on embodiment can direct attention not only to bodies in general, but especially to dismissed bodies. Together, Flower, Allen and Faigley, Bacigalupo, and Dolmage demonstrate that Anzaldúan theorizing furthers the field's effort to locate and nuance women's rhetoric through identity, embodiment, and cultural and geographic locations.

Feminist Rhetoric Methodology

Undoubtedly the above scholarship contributes to feminist rhetoric; however, many of Anzaldúa's theories remain understudied. In her writing notes, Anzaldúa states, "I don't want *Borderlands* to be my *magnus opus*, I want to achieve something greater." (Writing Notes H – 61). Examining her outside-of-*Borderlands* theories can help us grasp the extent and magnitude of her entire life's work. Anzaldúa's theories of creativity contribute to feminist rhetoric's engagement with Anzaldúan theorizing and can be used to further develop the field's rhetorical research. Feminist research practices strengthen

rhetorical recovery work by recognizing a rhetorical situation's context and scholars' position in the research. To address methodological gaps, feminist rhetoric scholars have adopted feminist research techniques to "review, rework, and reinvent research processes and procedures in order to support such feminist agendas as recovery work and gender techniques" (Buchanan and Ryan 110). Anzaldúa's theories on creativity and imagination can deepen and expand this research process. Building on well-known feminist research methods, I view Anzaldúa's theories of creativity as a useful contribution to feminist rhetorical inquiry.

Feminist research methods assist rhetoric's project to examine a wider variety of voices. According to Joanne Addison, feminism enables researchers in rhetoric "to ask questions that have not previously been asked as well as to posit theories and conduct research that would otherwise remain unimagined" (138). As she suggests, imaginative components in research offer new possibilities for feminist rhetoric. To expand this potential, I posit that Anzaldúa's writings on creativity offer new insights to assist developments in feminist rhetoric research methods. Applying Anzaldúan theorizing to feminist rhetoric research can be especially beneficial because her understanding of creativity connects visual and written work and, therefore, my application of Anzaldúan creativity to feminist rhetoric research can bolster the field's aims to revalue women's rhetoric that falls outside traditional presentation forms (i.e., speeches and essays). Furthermore, her theory of creativity that centers social-justice work can be applied to feminist research that draws attention to marginalized voices.

My project follows the road paved by scholars who have applied Anzaldúan theorizing in research methods. Drawing on Chicana scholarship, including Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Jessica Enoch argues that Chicana feminism helps to counter scholarship that has ignored the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality within Chicana experiences (22). Through four historiographic analysis methods, Enoch examines the "survival stories" of Chicanas whose forced sterilization narratives emerged in *Madrigal v. Quilligan*. These four techniques include three established feminist rhetoric research approaches (contextualize, analyze, and create), and a fourth technique she proposes, historiography. According to Enoch, historiography examines the women's stories larger effects and how the women's words survived (6-7). Indeed, the works in *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anzaldúa's essay "La Prieta" (included in the anthology but not discussed by Enoch) illuminate the intersecting oppressions women of colors encounter. Because the edited anthology represents one of Anzaldúa's earliest works, examining her subsequent writings and theorizing on creativity could further our understanding of how women's stories form and persevere.

Paying nuanced attention to the inner workings between individual identity and social institutions epitomizes Anzaldúan theorizing. Applying Anzaldúa's writings to research methods, Erin Ranft engages Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantla*, which Ranft defined as a "reclaimed and revisioned" Indigenous Mesoamerican philosophy operating

in Anzaldúa's 1980's theory of mestiza consciousness (209).⁵³ Weaving together nepantla with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, Ranft devises an "intersectional nepantla" to examine identity-based oppression.⁵⁴ Applying an "intersectional nepantla" lens to black feminist authors' literary works, Ranft examines identity-based oppression experienced by the individual and the collective and takes into account these oppressions' historical, social, and cultural origins (221). Applying Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla to women-of-colors writings, as demonstrated in Ranft's research, supports the complex analyses of women of colors' rhetorics and suggests that additional explorations into Anzaldúa's later theorizing can further this project.

Anzaldúa theorizes imagination in ways that pair well with transformative research methods. For example, sociologist Jorge Capetillo-Ponce argues that Anzaldúa's myths function as a methodological approach to challenge dominant research methods (168-69). In her writing, Anzaldúa evokes the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, typically depicted as having both animal and human body parts and representing contradiction (e.g., life giving and life taking), to navigate ambiguous spaces. Capetillo-Ponce's emphasis on myths indicates that research benefits from creative thinking, especially while investigating complex problems. In addition, he notes that Anzaldúa's theories, like

⁵³ My understanding and application of Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla extends beyond her 1980's framework associated with *la mestiza*. In fact, I draw on several of Anzaldúa's later works that draw connections between a nepantla state and creativity. See for example: *Interviews/Entrevistas*, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, "Nepantla, Creative Acts of Vision," "Nepantla: Gateway and Thresholds caminos y puertas," "(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces."

⁵⁴ According to Ranft, Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality derives influence from the Combahee River Collective's assertion that women of colors experience interlocking oppressions. Crenshaw further develops the theory with a criminal justice lens that highlights gender-, race/ethnic-, class-based oppressions' individual and institutional effects.

mestiza consciousness and nepantla state, prove useful in exploring research problems' many parts because her theories bridge different ideas and link the personal and political (169). Anzaldúa's ability to hold multiple perspectives concurrently assists feminist research because social-justice issues (e.g., racism, sexism, and homophobia) require researchers to reflect on their own positionality as it relates to the research project. Although Capetillo-Ponce, Ranft, and Enoch demonstrate Anzaldúa's theories rich applications to research methods, discussions regarding Anzaldúan creativity in feminist methodology remain understudied. To address this gap, I investigate how Anzaldúa's theories of creativity can develop feminist rhetoric research.

Anzaldúan-Influenced Research Approaches

For Anzaldúa, art challenges the status quo and uncovers more diverse experiences. Anzaldúa's theory of creativity, which sees past fixed individual and group identity, parallels feminist research methods that examine marginalized positions. As indicated in the previous pages, I posit a commonality between Anzaldúa's writings on creativity and ethical feminist research methods. According to Heidi A. McKee and James E. Porter, ethical feminist research employs care and respect, critical reflexivity, flexibility, dialogic process, and transparency to address social-justice issues and work towards improving participant's circumstances (155-56). Discussing all five research methods extends beyond the chapter's limitations; therefore, I develop reflexive, flexible, and dialogic practices because I find them most relevant in applying Anzaldúa's theories of creativity to feminist rhetorical research methods. Additionally, reflexivity, flexibility,

and a dialogic lens can, at times, encompass the other approaches, transparency as well as care and respect. For example, as we reflexively consider our place in the research, we may find more space for care, respect, and transparency.

In the following pages, I outline each practice and locate aspects that can be further developed through creativity. I draw on Anzaldúa's theories of creativity as I analyze each research technique to expand feminist research's breadth and depth. In examining Anzaldúa's writings on creativity, I identify her recursive practice as a fourth research method that can be applied to feminist rhetorical research. Adding a recursive strategy to the research process complements reflexive, flexible, and dialogic practices while also prompting scholars to revisit the research to deepen, complexify, and readjust research approaches. Overall, I aim to construct a research approach that employs creativity to reinforce feminist research methods.

Reflexive Practice

A scholar's social location can impact the research topic and methods of collecting and analyzing information. The first technique, a reflexive practice, cultivates the researcher's consciousness regarding their position (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, and ability) and role in power dynamics (e.g., between the researcher and participant) affects the research (McKee and Porter 155). Reflexivity calls into question objectivity, a positivist notion that claims a scholar does not impact the research. While attempting to remove their subjectivity from their work, the researcher ignores the ways they de-humanize those they study. As Anzaldúa notes, "In trying to become 'objective,'

Western culture made ‘objects’ of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing ‘touch’ with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence” (*Borderlands* 59). Divisive practices place people in a subject/object relationship that privileges the “subject” group while disempowering individuals and groups labeled as “objects.” Translating this notion into feminist research, an ethical practice refuses to construct binaries that entirely separate the researcher from their participants or data; instead, the researcher carefully examines the interaction between the two positions. Indeed, as Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Deborah Piatelli note, a reflexive practice “questions the authority of knowledge and opens up the possibility for negotiating knowledge claims and introducing counterhegemonic narratives, as well as holding researchers accountable to those with whom they research” (559). Applied to feminist rhetoric research, reflexivity can bring awareness to definitions of gender, race/ethnicity, economic class, dis/ability, and sexuality; thus, analyzing and contextualizing women’s rhetorical work sets into relief historical, cultural, and social influences.

An introspective reflexive practice creates new knowledge that can assist in research development. Anzaldúa’s creative methods mirror feminist research’s reflexive practices. In her writing notes, Anzaldúa often recorded her writing process and techniques she might later test and/or adopt. Discussing her multi-step creative process, she articulates step five, asserting: “Adjust, evaluate, learn. Observe the results of your actions. Viscerally, subconsciously, internally. As you work you assimilate or internalize what works and daily accumulate the creating skills” (Writing Notes C-11). Directing

attention to personal growth in the creative/research process helps determine the research's current development, the project's future growth, and the artist/researcher's potential impact. Grafting Anzaldúa's creative process with a reflexive approach further develops evaluation practices. Because "[t]he creative process is a continual learning process [...] learning what works and what doesn't work," creativity encourages scholars to experiment with research tactics to meet a project's needs (Writing Notes C – 25). Reflexivity encourages a recurrent process that develops new ideas and mirrors cyclical learning in the creative process.

Reflexivity calls researchers to develop a deep awareness and acknowledge their role as it relates to or potentially conflicts with research knowledge production. Every researcher brings with them experiences and perspectives that may or may not align with their participant's. When two differing or even conflicting perspectives meet, the researcher can choose to engage in reflexive thought to negotiate the divergent viewpoints. I connect this potentially tense space with Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantla*, a liminal space positioned between differing psychic, intellectual, historical and social perspectives and experiences. If we understand research as a space where two or more worlds meet ("Nepantla, Creative Acts" 1)—the researcher's experiences, which include values, preconceptions, and knowledge, and the participant's experiences, which hold their own viewpoints, biases, and truths—then we can view the negotiation between these two worlds, or the research process, as a form of *nepantla*. By refusing to ignore either

their own or their participant's perspective, the researcher might cultivate new knowledge derived from both perspectives.

Nepantla can operate as a capacity to identify conflicting feelings and ideas that emerge in the creative process. While developing a story, Anzaldúa reflects on her nepantla state. Once she settles into writing, she moves into nepantla, "a syncretistic faculty, [that] watches the unconscious struggle between several possible readings. It finds and recognizes what belongs together and facilitates interaction between ambiguity and control, between undifferentiated confusion and defined clarity" (*Light* 114). Both a site of struggle and a faculty to interpret conflicting thoughts, Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla can be applied to reflexive research to create new ideas. Because Anzaldúa conceived the nepantla state as an emotionally challenging space we can recognize how reflexive research can also produce strong feelings that influence scholarship. Applying this concept to feminist rhetoric research, scholars may use these emotions to develop multiple readings of a rhetorical product.

Flexible Approach

At times, research uncovers unexpected findings and requires scholars to adapt. The second technique, a flexible approach, requires researchers' openness to adjustments if their reflexive process brings about a change in perspectives. Indeed, ethical feminist research includes the "willingness to make adjustments in the project, to modify a project protocol as needed to make it more careful, reflexive, dialogic, and ethically rigorous" (McKee and Porter 156). Recalling traditional rhetoric's limited research material, a

feminist framework demands a flexible approach when determining and collecting rhetorical works that encompass women's rhetoric.⁵⁵ Anzaldúa's theory of imagination can cultivate fluidity throughout the research process. Anzaldúa understands the imagination to be a creative tool for experimenting, learning, and acting. As "a theory of agency," the imagination allows "[you] to reinvent yourself [,] you have to interrupt or suspend the conscious 'I' talking in your head that's tied to a certain identity and behavior;" and, subsequently, through the imagination we manifest an ability "to change" or open ourselves to alternative possibilities ("Nepantla, Creative Acts" 4).⁵⁶ Applied to a feminist research practice, Anzaldúa's theory of imagination enables the researcher to imagine additional perspectives, a necessary skill given that the research process often involves unexpected roadblocks and/or discoveries.

In addition to exercising flexibility in the general research process, this tool can be particularly productive in data collection. Indeed, a flexible approach can revise the boundaries that dictate what counts as a persuasive text to include creative works (8). This movement has two purposes. First, defining women's speaking and writing that

⁵⁵ For example, Liz Rohan's analyzes an annotated description of a quilt sewed by a woman in the early twentieth century positions craftworks as a rhetorical form. Rohan argues that "[m]emory as craft, as practiced in the domestic sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, posits memory as a veritable rhetorical canon in its own right, a means of persuasion, and also its end, a process that requires the development of complex rhetorical devices—both material and cognitive" (370-371).

⁵⁶ The concept of agency holds importance in rhetoric (Turnbull 207), especially within a feminist framework. For example, Valerie R. Renegar and Stacey K. Sowards examine third wave feminism to find that contradiction "fosters agency [and] invites a revaluation of women's and other marginalized groups' rhetorical practices," which helps address the historical silencing of certain voices (e.g., women and people of color) (3). Other studies that theorize agency in feminist rhetoric include: Jacqueline Royster's *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*, Jessica Enoch's "Survival Stories: Feminist Historiographic Approaches to Chicana Rhetorics of Sterilization Abuse," and Mary Hawkesworth's "Feminist Rhetoric: Discourses on the Male Monopoly of Thought."

highlights creativity as rhetorical evidence, contributes to feminist rhetoric's growth. For example, by reading Anzaldúa's sketches as rhetorical works, scholars can better understand visual images' role in Anzaldúa's persuasive style. Second, artistic products may enable flexible research.⁵⁷ Examining artwork prompts the imagination to devise new analytical lenses that identify knowledge embedded within the image. Anzaldúa states, "Each piece of writing I do creates or uncovers its own spirit that manifests itself through words and images. Imagination takes fragments, slices of life and experiences that seem unrelated, then seeks their hidden connections and merges them into a whole" ("Speaking Across" 291). Anzaldúa's creative works can be applied to a flexible research approach to emphasize the imagination's value in connecting ideas. Analyzing creative works in feminist rhetoric prompts flexibility in the researcher, but also reveals the author's or artist's perception and relation to their world.

Anzaldúa's metaphors emphasize the ways mental pictures can prompt new ideas and thinking processes.⁵⁸ Anzaldúa frequently employs the metaphor of Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess, to articulate the impulse to dismantle and reassemble ideas to create something new. Coyolxauhqui "represents the psychic and creative process of tearing apart and pulling together (deconstructing/reconstructing). She represents

⁵⁷ Indeed, a flexible approach to research intersects with serendipitous discoveries in archival research. Making the unexpected discovery in archival research can take research in new and exciting directions. For further reading on unexpected discoveries in archival research please see: Frances J. Ranney's "Mining the Collective Unconscious: With Responses from Ruth Ray and Gwen Gorzelsky." For additional scholarship on serendipity in historical research please see: Emma Wild-Wood's "'Se Débrouiller' or the Art of Serendipity in Historical Research."

⁵⁸ In "Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman" Anzaldúa also notes metaphors can address harmful social narratives (e.g., stereotypes) and prompt social change (122).

fragmentation, imperfection, incompleteness, and wholeness” (*Light* 50). Metaphors like Coyolxauhqui can process difficult ideas (e.g., the perspective of being both incomplete and whole) and help researchers create images to navigate theory and analysis.⁵⁹ Furthermore, as a flexibility tool, a metaphor can prompt the researcher to examine the image’s applicability and usefulness, which opens additional opportunities to reflect on the research process.

Dialogic Lens

Perhaps one of research’s most vital aspects involves sharing ideas and knowledge. Exchanging information in scholarship closely connects to the third technique, a dialogic lens, which shifts focus towards communicating in multiple modes within a topic or issue. McKee and Porter assert that feminist researchers adopt a dialogic process enabling them to explore several viewpoints, foster co-collaboration (with participants and/or other authors), and invite participants’ assessments (156). A dialogic lens pairs well with Anzaldúa’s theories that value collaboration and peer feedback. Lunsford also remarks on the commonalities between Anzaldúa’s writing process and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism (36). Lunsford comments on how Anzaldúa

⁵⁹ Though not strictly a metaphor, Lisa S. Mastrangelo’s building a dinosaur analogy (re)constructs an understanding of the early Michigan graduate program in rhetoric and composition for women at the turn of the twentieth century (404). Mastrangelo processes the information from the University of Michigan Bentley Archives into parts of a dinosaur (e.g., body, legs, and tail/neck) to illustrate the key structure of women’s early experiences in the rhetoric and composition program. For example, the dinosaur’s body represents the female student body in the graduate rhetoric program; the legs, which supported women’s gravitation toward the rhetoric program, are Fred Newton Scott and John Dewey, two prominent scholars in rhetoric; and the neck or tail of the dinosaur represents these women’s complex experiences derived from their transcripts (404, 410, 414). In this way, Mastrangelo’s analogy helps her understand and convey her research findings.

articulates a writer's work as a dialogue between the artist and audience as well as among images, words, and sounds; she notes that "Anzaldúa's discussions of the crucial role audiences/others play in her own writing provide a fine example of what Bakhtin means by 'answerability,' which Anzaldúa refers to as 'responsibility,' literally the ability to respond, to answer, to join in a conversation that is always ongoing" (36).⁶⁰ Viewing research as a conversation recognizes that knowledge develops not in a silo but through collective effort. Moreover, when emphasizing creativity's place within a dialogic lens, images assume a more valuable role in knowledge-making. By pairing a reflexive and flexible approach, a researcher can better locate different and interlocking conversations necessary for dialogic work.

While it may seem inclusive enough to foster a dialogic perspective among people, words, and images, Anzaldúa dilates this lens further to encompass psychological and spiritual contributions. For example, she builds her theories of *nepantla* and *conocimiento* by incorporating information obtained through conversations between an inner consciousness and the spirit, writing: "I am interested in how one can use the concept of *nepantla* to connect the inner life of the mind and spirit to [the] outer world of social action. It is a work of *conocimiento*. I want to bring a psychological/mythological dimension to identity formation, cultural transformation, and spiritual practice via the creative act" ("*Nepantla, Creative Acts*" 1). In this passage, Anzaldúa attends to several

⁶⁰ In this passage, Lunsford cites the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras* where Anzaldúa states, "That's what writers do, we carry on a constant dialogue between language and hands and images, one or another of our identities trying desperately to get in a word, an image, a sound" (xxiv).

threads running through social-justice work. First, she perceives one's "inner life" as communication between the mind, a traditional knowledge production vehicle, and the spirit. Second, she views the individual in dialogue with the collective. And third, she observes the creative act as opening new dimensions in transforming identity, culture, and spirituality. For Anzaldúa, everything interconnects and equally impacts knowledge creation.

A dialogic interaction occurs between conscious and unconscious levels when producing information. Words and images converse like different consciousness levels intersect; both pairings build new meaning through their dialogue. Anzaldúa notes that "[a]n image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness" (*Borderlands* 91). Writing supports the close ties between images and emotions; however, images most directly connect to unconscious knowing. Images may assist researchers in connecting multiple knowledge sources and communicating these findings. Indeed, Anzaldúa asserts that "[i]f we've done our job well we may give others access to a language and images which they can articulate/express pain, confusion, joy, and other experiences thus far experienced only on an inarticulated emotional level" ("Metaphors" 122). Therefore, feminist rhetoric may apply Anzaldúan creativity in reading women's rhetoric in order to highlight rhetoric's emotional component.

Recursive Strategy

Advancing new information does not always follow a linear path; scholars may trace back-and-forth through prior points in the research to further develop, reinterpret, or take ideas in a new direction. I propose a recursive strategy as an additional facet of Anzaldúa theorizing that can be applied to feminist rhetoric research.⁶¹ Within my project's scope, I define recursion as a reoccurring movement that may cycle back to previous points in the research process while also moving beyond these points in varying directions. When Anzaldúa discusses creativity, she carefully notes that the image-making process does not necessarily follow a linear trajectory. In fact, "Creativity cannot be dissected and disciplined to fall into certain proper time slots. The creative work cannot be done in an assembly-line kind of time—this is the wrong approach to time" ("Nepantla, Creative Acts" 5). If one views the research process as similar to the "activity of generating images," then the research trajectory may change (5). In other words, if we stop viewing research as linear or one-directional and instead approach the research process as recursive, we may uncover new ideas.

I situate recursive methodology in reflexive, flexible, and dialogic techniques as well as Anzaldúa's creativity and imagination principles. Anzaldúa writes, "Art and writing are ways of seeing, they are methods of synthesizing life" ("Nepantla, Creative

⁶¹ Although discussing recursion's multiple applications would take us beyond my project's framework, I note that composition theory commonly practices recursion. In Cognitive Process Theory, writers rely on thinking processes to organize their composition. Within organizing processes' hierarchical system, in which some parts are embedded within another, a writer can employ recursion to recall prior processes to work through a problem in their writing (Flower and Hayes 375).

Acts” 4). From this vantage point, I view recursion as harmonizing with reflexivity because we must be willing to revisit our perspectives at multiple points in the research. Likewise, recursion also demands flexibility; we must be open to spiraling back to previous thoughts and discussions to gain new knowledge. Moreover, when we return to earlier information, we can deepen and augment dialogic inter-workings. Above all, Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity invites conscientious and open-minded research in feminist rhetoric that values creativity within the research process.

Because Anzaldúa’s recursive practice operates in both her image- and knowledge-making processes, a recursive strategy can be applied to similar paths in developing new information. A scholar’s journey through researching and writing can take many turns and undergo numerous changes. A recursive tactic encourages openness to change during a research project on two levels: 1) as researchers begin processing research material, creating new information, and acknowledging life experiences, they may return to previous points in the project as a way to reflect and, before moving forward again, potentially shift the project’s direction; and 2) in reflecting on their journey, researchers can assess the knowledge gained and potentially apply this information to future research projects. This recursive or, as Keating terms, “serpentine” working method continually seeks out new ways to understand and address research problems (“Editor’s Introduction” xxi). Anzaldúa discusses this movement in her writing notes: “You consider your experience, mark it, make it[,] think about it. You make connections to it by what you hear, see, read [...] you make an artwork out of your

experience” (Writing Notes N-7). Constantly coiling and uncoiling, a recursive strategy evokes new and creative knowledge production forms.

Conclusion

Feminist rhetoric seeks to explore and address the issues and challenges presented in uncovering and analyzing women’s rhetoric through feminist research processes.

Eileen E. Schell comments on this project, stating that a focus on process leads to valuable questions: “How does a scholar unfold a research project over time, deepen a research inquiry, navigate and negotiate multiple fields of inquiry, address particular ethical challenges and struggles specific to feminist research, and possibly question the received wisdom of some of the field’s way of engaging in feminist rhetorics?” (3). I aim to contribute to these probing questions by developing a feminist research reflexive practice, flexible approach, and dialogic lens. Anzaldúa’s writings on creativity can be taken up by researchers who wish to engage with the imagination and images to conduct mindful and ethical research. Furthermore, by drawing on Anzaldúa’s recursive strategy, feminist rhetoric may continue to seek out alternative research trajectories and challenge normative knowledge formation.

In this chapter, I established that Anzaldúa’s theories of creativity can be applied to feminist rhetoric research’s larger social-justice efforts. Anzaldúa discusses her creative process, stating: “When I’m writing I sketch images in order to gather and organize my thinking. For me, this sketching is better than making outlines. An image is worth a thousand words because there is a cluster of meanings associated with each

image, with each thing that I sketch” (“Creativity” 107). Because she valued images’ organizing and generative power, I am interested in the knowledge Anzaldúa produced through her sketches. In the following chapter, I apply textual analysis and the previously discussed research techniques—reflexive practice, flexible approach, dialogic lens, and recursive strategy—to analyze Anzaldúa’s sketches. Noting the link Anzaldúa establishes between image-making and thinking, I seek to better understand her writings on creativity through her visual art. Indeed, both images and ideas contribute to the overall project to challenge divisive thinking and offer new lenses to view the world.

CHAPTER IV

“CREATIVITY IS THE ABILITY TO CONNECT AND TO SYMBOLIZE”: AN ANALYSIS OF ANZALDÚA’S ARCHIVED SKETCHES

I am before an audience. On stage, a chalkboard. I am about to lecture. I never read papers but talk them through using ideographs to keep myself on track, to give my listeners a visual they can hang the concepts and theories I am talking about. I had been doing this for quite a while and attributed the tactic to my having been an artist, hence the visuals.

Gloria Anzaldúa, “Barred Witness: Literary/Artistic Creations”

Both the artist and audience benefit from creativity. As Anzaldúa’s statement in the chapter title indicates, the artist adopts creativity “to connect and to symbolize” new ideas and theories that they share with their audience (“Proving Ground” 4). In the above epigraph, drawn from a 1991 unpublished essay, “Barred Witness: Literary/Artistic Creations,” Anzaldúa outlines her talk format that seamlessly blends written and visual theory using what she terms “hieroglyphics” and “ideographs”—“a series of pictures with stories which result in the formation or explication of theories” (36). Because Anzaldúa views theorizing as inherently visual, examining her sketches offers additional insight into her written theories. Rather than, research employs theory to analyze artwork, the more typical approach, I use Anzaldúa’s sketches to inform how I read her theories in order to forge new connections between her theories of creativity, *conocimiento*, *nepantla*, and shamanism. In this chapter, I first discuss my image selection process; then I explain my research methods that blend textual analysis with the feminist research

techniques discussed in the previous chapter: reflexive practice, flexible approach, dialogic lens, and recursive strategy. Next, I analyze the sketches' form and content and connect the ideas represented in the images with Anzaldúa's written theories. Finally, I conclude by considering how the themes and theories embedded in her visual works to help us better understand Anzaldúa's writings and conceptualize people as multiplicitous and interconnected.

Data Selection

Sitting in the quiet archive room at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Library at the University of Texas, Austin, I open a folder from Box 149 containing Gloria Anzaldúa's sketches. Prior to visiting the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers I combed through the archive's extensive online catalogue and came prepared to explore Anzaldúa's artwork and unpublished essays on creativity. Unfamiliar with what material resided in the box containing several folders of artwork, I discovered numerous drawings, some loose and some housed in sketchbooks, that ranged widely in form, content, and medium. Some pieces offered work-related uses, such as stationary created from photocopied serpent and lizard drawings and oversized easel pad doodles to illustrate her theories. Other pieces explored aesthetic pursuits, rendering humans, animals, nature, and abstract shapes with fine lines in pen, blurred washes of ink, broad fills in marker, and pixelated strokes of digital drawings.

Recollecting my initial experience, I recall Suzanne Bost's remarks on the sketches she encountered in the archive:

Perhaps the most important things to be gained from these visual documents are the experience of disorientation and the process of determining how to handle them, making up new ways of reading, getting lost in the maze. This is not to say that these documents cannot be treated as conventional artefactual evidence, but their matter also teaches us how to do otherwise. (621)

Like Bost, I was inspired but also bewildered by the prospect of navigating the archival labyrinth. Throughout my research and writing process, I would select a grouping of images only to find the drawings or selection process no longer fit the overall project's path. It became clear that there was no finite image set that could (or should) be neatly packaged into a collection for analysis; as Bost notes:

Learning to navigate the Anzaldúa archive taught me to appreciate alternative boundaries, strange systems, surprise encounters, and unexpected affinities. After sifting through folders full of multiple drafts of similar, overlapping pieces of Anzaldúa's writings, I felt that establishing clear boundaries around a single work would perhaps be undesirable, even if it was possible. (618)

Anzaldúa's drawings may be housed and separated into tidy manila folders; yet their theoretical and aesthetic significance permeates the entire archive. Through my archival research's recursive pattern, I realized the dense interconnections among Anzaldúa's visual and written works.

Examining my research process through a recursive lens, I realized that Anzaldúa's archive propelled me to create new ways to locate and collect images for

analysis. As AnaLouise Keating asserts, “Like other forms of writing and scholarship, archival research can assist us as we work to create new knowledge” (“Archival Alchemy” 159). In cycling back to the primary goal of my project, exploring what Anzaldúa’s theories of creativity can offer social justice work and feminist research, I recognized that my project required a new selection approach and shifted my thinking from containment to growth. I no longer viewed Anzaldúa’s drawings as pieces that fulfilled a criterion and thus could be placed into a categorical box. Instead, I began perceiving the multiple connective threads that weave theoretical, temporal, and aesthetic networks among several sketches. In my first archive visit, I discovered the drawing “Creativity,” dated “22 junio 1987,” in a folder of 1987-1990 sketches. Immediately, I comprehended the piece’s significance to my project because the title connected to Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity. As I continued researching her writings on creativity and made two additional trips to the archive, I came to view this sketch as my analysis’ focus point, from which I could expand outward and trace connections to other images.

While “Creativity” links to several archived sketches, I perceive the strongest aesthetic connection to another drawing created eight days prior. After linking these two drawings, both created in June 1987, I next examined the other sketches from the same month. The archive folder contains twelve drawings from June 1987 spread across six days. These drawings range in detail and subject matter, including intricate animal forms, indeterminable inky figures, and simply sketched humans. Because analyzing twelve works extends beyond the chapter’s confines, I analyze six of the June 1987 sketches,

selecting an image to represent each day. On days that have multiple drawings I chose the sketches that most closely related to “Creativity” in form or content. In examining a cluster of sketches from the same period, I hope to learn about the relationship between the images and theories Anzaldúa worked with shortly after the completion of *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987). Additionally, I also consider how her 1987 gigs and talks relate to the ideas expressed in her drawings.

This networked analysis method, which moves outward from “Creativity,” serves two purposes. First, I hope to illuminate the connections among Anzaldúa’s multiple drawings. By tracing each sketch back to this first drawing, I established a web-like structure that enables me to enact a reflexive practice (e.g., revisiting my conceptualization of the first drawing) and flexible approach (e.g., strengthening my ability to move from sketch to sketch). And, second, I aim to develop new connections between her visual and written works. Linking Anzaldúa’s works’ multiple genres strengthens my argument that visual artwork was equally significant and often embedded within her written work and, in addition, supports a dialogic lens (e.g., following theoretical threads from one drawing to several writings) and a recursive strategy (e.g., returning to and building on the first drawing’s analysis).

My analysis contributes to scholarship on Anzaldúan theorizing since all but one drawing in my sample (i.e., “Creativity”) has yet to be examined.⁶² Moreover, my approach addresses and builds on one of the eleven suggestions Keating offers

⁶² Gisella LaTorre analyzes this sketch in “Mestiza Aesthetics: Anzaldúan Theories on Visual Art and Creativity.”

researchers who examine Anzaldúa's archives. Keating remarks that Anzaldúa first developed her theories in her fictional writing then in academic texts; therefore, Keating asks us to consider: "*What kinds of connections can we find when we read Anzaldúa's fiction in dialogue with her theoretical essays, and how might these new connections enable us to redefine and in other ways re-vision her theories of mestiza consciousness, conocimiento, and so on? How might new insights enable us to build on her theories?*" ("Archival Alchemy" 164-65, original emphasis).⁶³ Responding to these thought-provoking questions, I offer my analysis of Anzaldúa's drawings that explores the ways her visual art communicates theoretical concepts and connects to her written theory.

Research Methods

Though images and writing may communicate ideas differently, both can be read as a text. Examining Anzaldúa's sketches through textual analysis, I draw from Catherine Belsey's argument for the "reading of a picture as 'text'," whereby a viewer engages with the picture to produce a dialogue (157).⁶⁴ According to Belsey, the "process of interpretation" creates "the effect of a *relation* between a text and a reader" (163, original emphasis). The interpretation facilitates meaning-making between the reader and image. On one hand, the image does not completely dictate its interpretation or force the reader

⁶³ Keating's additional ten suggestions include: examinations of 1) Anzaldúa's fiction and autohistoria, 2) unpublished poetry, 3) contributions to trans and queer theory, revisions to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, including 4) the change from "La conciencia del mestizaje" to "La conciencia de la mestiza" and 5) "the Medusa state" to "The Coatlicue State," 6) the significance of la Llorona in her theorizing, 7) her editorial work, 8) interviews, 9) book collection and marginalia, and 10) her correspondence.

⁶⁴ In *Principles and Practice of Textual Analysis* Vinton A. Dearing also argues researchers can apply textual analysis to analyze visual images. According to Dearing, textual analysis examines the genealogical relationship between messages, including all forms of transmitters (e.g., words, sounds, and images) (1).

to view the work in one set way (163). On the other hand, a visual language constructs an image's meaning. Therefore, in forming a relation between the image/text and reader/researcher, the image, to a degree, can control its range of perceived meanings (163). To strengthen and deepen my interpretations, I read Anzaldúa's images alongside her theories (e.g., her writings regarding *nepantla*, *el cenote*, internal colonialism, and *la naguala*), which prompt a richer description and image analysis. However, I acknowledge Belsey's consideration that any given textual analysis emerges from a specific historical and cultural context (166). As such, I do not assume my analyses to be exhaustive nor represent all past or possible future readings of Anzaldúa's images.

Visual artwork produces theory in ways that differ from written text. Sandra Weber articulates a list of benefits found in employing images in research that, I suggest, applies to Anzaldúa's visual theorizing. Specifically, Weber argues that images are useful to research because they can sophisticatedly convey ideas that are difficult to describe with words (44-46). These benefits correlate with the previously discussed Anzaldúan-influenced research methods (reflexive practice, flexible approach, dialogic lens, and recursive strategy) by supporting the necessity to self-reflect, remain flexible, identify connections, and revisit earlier points in the research as I examine visual and written theories embedded in Anzaldúa's images and words. Furthermore, my analysis relies on perceiving image as texts to better understand how Anzaldúa's sketches potentially formulate new ideas that can challenge divisive thinking.

As I interlace textual analysis and Anzaldúan-influenced research approaches, I envision a process similar to a spider spinning a web. Recalling one of Anzaldúa's descriptions of nepantla as a space between two or more worlds, where tension "provides associations and connective tissue," I envision multiple research methods interlacing when placed together. This nepantla space where "[y]our head is full of spiders, all weaving their glistening webs," can be translated into a method of analysis that illuminates links between images and ideas (*Light* 108).⁶⁵ To anchor my threads of analysis, I draw on Anzaldúa's published and unpublished writings and her events and gigs from around the time she created the drawings discussed in this chapter. I begin by describing the first drawing; then I locate three threads running between the imagery and Anzaldúa's theoretical writings: nepantla, la Llorona, and materiality. Moving outward from this central image, I discuss the other five drawings' form and content, connection to Anzaldúa's theories, and relation to the first drawing. The recursive pattern found in my web-weaving and Anzaldúa's writing process offers an intricate and complex understanding of Anzaldúan creativity and its social-justice implications.

Drawing One

In Box 149 Folder 3, titled "Sketches 1987-1990," lies the drawing "Creativity" which, as its name suggests, directly relates to the creative process. Dated "22 junio 87" and signed "GEA," this pen-and-ink drawing is rendered with simple lines a bulbous

⁶⁵ Anzaldúa also referenced spinning webs when discussing *conocimiento*. In her archived writing notes, she remarks: "Conocimiento To [sic] grow theories, to spin them out of gossamer webs, and to pass them on to the next generation. An evolution of *conocimiento*, an evolution of the soul" (Writing Notes J-10).

figure. The large figure has wide outstretched arms with hoof-like hands (or perhaps two large fingers on each hand), and below the arms the body expands out into a large middle section that ends in a skirt-like shape with two legs protruding from the bottom. This large middle section contains an open space that has two circles at the top, perhaps nipples, and a small, thin figure lodges inside. This figure has no arms or legs, only two eyes that distinguish it as human- or animal-like. Gentle shading in diluted ink fills in the layered figures fashioning a subtle depth that adds to the images' expansive feeling (see fig. 3).

Boldly inked lines set into relief the wide space between the figures that Anzaldúa filled with quick, dry brushstrokes. The in-between area evokes Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantla*, which she discusses as both a space and function, and, oftentimes, connects to creativity. She states, "*Nepantla, el lugar entremedios*, is the space between body and psyche where image and story-making takes place, where spirits surface. When I sit and images come to me, I am in my body but I'm also in another place, the space between worlds (*nepantla*). Images connect the various worlds I inhabit or inhabit me" ("*Speaking Across*" 291). Here, the *nepantla* space functions as an opening within oneself that connects to different worlds through images. Applying this concept to "Creativity," we might read the internal body as another world accessed through *nepantla*.



Fig. 3. Gloria Anzaldúa, “Creativity,” ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

While Anzaldúa articulates *nepantla* as a link between multiple worlds, she also emphasizes the activity within this space. If we interpret the drawing to illustrate bringing together external and internal worlds, what occurs in the interaction between these two worlds? For Anzaldúa, *nepantla* holds the potential to shift and change the person experiencing *nepantla*: “Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla* es *tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling” (“(Un)natural bridges” 243).

Though nepantla prompts much growth and transformation, it also involves intense and difficult feelings. Anzaldúa employs nepantla to discuss creative work, identity formation, and intellectual functions: “I use nepantla to talk about the creative act, I use it to talk about the construction of identity, I use it to describe a function of the mind” (*Interviews* 176). In connecting nepantla to creativity, identity, and intellect, Anzaldúa draws attention to her theory of nepantla’s multiple applications. Therefore, the sketches’ multiple bodies could represent one or several of these generative spaces.

The amorphous figures in this first drawing can be interpreted to indicate nepantla’s transformative process influencing personal growth and development. As Anzaldúa points out, moving through nepantla presents emotional challenges. The fast-sweeping movement of ink that shades the space between the two bodies builds the conflicting feelings that can occur when different ideas clash. I liken this liminal visual space to Anzaldúa’s discussion of identity emergence and development. She asserts, “So you go through this birthing of nepantla. When you’re in the midst of the Coatlicue state—the cave, the dark—you’re hibernating or hiding, you’re gestating and giving birth to yourself. You’re in a womb state. When you come out of that womb state you pass through the birth canal, the passageway I call nepantla” (*Interviews* 225-226). Anzaldúa’s theories of nepantla and creativity, thus, rely on cultivation and passage to deliver new identities, thoughts, or images. Indeed, scholars note that Anzaldúa sometimes adopts a womb/pregnancy metaphor to describe transformation. Discussing her poem “Matriz sin tumba o ‘el baño de la basura ajena,’” George Hartley connects matriz (Spanish for

womb) with creativity. Hartley asserts that Anzaldúa's work "struggle[s] against the mainstream patriarchal Anglo-American conversion of the mestiza's womb/matrix (in all its implications) into mere trash" and transforms this womb into a creative center that heals psychic and physical wounds (41-42). As a de-colonizing tool, creativity brings forth liberating ways to conceptualize racial/ethnic identity. Furthermore, the sculpted forms in "Creativity" indicate that emotional and material aspects garner equal significance when journeying through *nepantla*.

Recognizing the self's multiple parts may also indicate a connection between the drawing and *la Llorona*, the ghost woman seeking her lost children. In an early dissertation draft, Anzaldúa defined *la Llorona* as having three different but intertwined bodies: physical, psychic, and symbolic. The three bodies have a complex relationship: "*La llorona* is the permeable body superimposed on the physical body, the psychic body and the symbolic body. The ghostly body of *la Llorona* penetrates into our physical world, into all our worlds. Her ghostly body is also penetrated by our other worlds" ("*Llorona, the Woman Who Wails*" 2-3, original emphasis). Jody A. Briones highlights a sketch in Anzaldúa's early dissertation draft, "*Llorona, the Woman Who Wails*," that depicts *la Llorona*'s ghostly body in three layers (psychic, temporal, and symbolic aspects of identity) (61). Indeed, several of Anzaldúa's early dissertation drafts (titled "*La Llorona y la víbora*") include outline drawings of a body and, in some renditions, three bodies overlap. Because this drawing and these renditions of *la Llorona* both possess layered bodies, we might consider how the drawing connects to Anzaldúa's conception of

la Llorona. If la Llorona and creativity both operate as connectors between our world's multiple levels, does drawing one also represent the ghost woman? The ink washes that fill in the form produce a transparent effect; we can see into and through the figure simultaneously. As such, the wispy features in this first drawing may be read as rendering la Llorona's ghostly form.

Not only does la Llorona seep into the many aspects of Anzaldúa's life, she also drives Anzaldúa's creativity. In Anzaldúa's poem "My Black *Angelos*," we might link La Llorona to "*la bruja con las uñas largas*" who places her "[t]aloned hand on my shoulder / behind me, putting words into my head" (206, original emphasis). La Llorona frequently appears in Anzaldúa's writings as a force pushing her to create.⁶⁶ Because la Llorona as a mother and Anzaldúa as a writer are both seeking something—lost children and creative imagery—the smaller figure housed within the larger figure could be interpreted as the person or thing they seek. La Llorona compels Anzaldúa to achieve her creative goals. Speaking in second person, Anzaldúa invites us into her creative relationship with la Llorona: she is "your *musa bruja*, the *naguala* that incites you to write. In her horse aspect, la Llorona will carry you from beginning of story to finish line" (*Light* 96).⁶⁷ Just as la Llorona does not rest in her mission to find her lost children, she relentlessly pushes Anzaldúa to access stories that reside within.

⁶⁶ For example, please see her published poems "My Black *Angelos*," and "She Ate Horses" and unpublished manuscripts "Entre Américas: El Taller," "Llorona, the Woman Who Wails: Chicana/Mestiza Transgressive Identities," and "Writing Guide, 'Nepantla: In/Between and Shifting.'"

⁶⁷ In the poem "She Ate Horses," Anzaldúa depicts Llorona as a woman with a horse's head (*Interviews* 229).

As an inspirational muse, la Llorona becomes more than a ghost woman seeking her lost children; she also embodies female agency. Anzaldúa recalls in an interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego:

Llorona was the first cultural figure I was introduced to at the age of two or three years old. My grandmothers told me stories about her. She was a boogeyman. She was horrific, the terror, the woman who killed her children, who misplaced her children [...] To me she was the cultural figure in Mexican mythology which empowered me to yell out, to scream out, to break out of silence. To me she's very important. (*Interviews* 229)

As this statement suggests, by refashioning negative concepts of women, Anzaldúa employs creativity to serve empowering purposes; for example, she transforms la Llorona's story from a female villain into an agentic woman. Creativity's ability to morph and alter preexisting ideas and narratives features in the drawing's loosely-structured figures. The undulating lines that make up the bodies indicate the shapes' fluidity. Because Anzaldúa renders her images in a way that visually imply a transformation in process, we can also consider how ideas, such as destructive ways of thinking (e.g., stereotypes of women and people of colors), fluctuate and potentially be refashioned to offer alternative narratives.

While the drawing may forge strong connections between creativity and spectral representations, the figures' non-corporeal aspect represents only one interpretation. However, scholars tend to focus on the image's incorporeal components. For example,

Gisella LaTorre reads the smaller figure set within the larger figure as a spirit housed within a body. By connecting the body and spirit, “Anzaldúa represents the body itself as a receptacle of the spirit and thus, as inherently divine” (130). To be sure, Anzaldúa valued our spiritual component and did not shy away from discussing spirituality in much of her work. She writes, “The spiritual is one dimension of human experience, a human need, a witnessing of the flow of life and the patterns manifested in life, including individual patterns and a deep sense of belonging and participation in life. I’ve always been interested in the role of the spirit in the process of creativity” (“Nepantla: Creative Acts” 6). However, if creativity centers on the spirit and the body becomes a mere container for this life force, what additional insight may be lost?

Here, I would like to offer an additional interpretation, one that focuses on the image’s materiality.⁶⁸ Specifically, what can be learned from the drawing if we interpret the figures as material beings. Recalling her vivid imagination as child, Anzaldúa relates that “I was the girl whose imagination swallowed the house, lagoon, corrals, and words. My imagination made me pregnant with story. I literally ate my grandmothers’ and mother’s stories” (*Light* 26). Consuming and then birthing ideas indicates a significant time investment and effort involved in producing creative works. If we view the sketch as an enfolded body housing a second material body, the image may be interpreted as a creative pregnancy in which the imagination cultivates physical works. In this

⁶⁸ Considering the emphasis Anzaldúa places on the body as her “reaction against New Agers who want to transcend the body,” I am interested in how her drawing places equal emphasis on the body and the spirit (*Interviews* 290).

interpretation of the drawing, we can understand Anzaldúa's definition of creativity, as a "means to bring forth, to manifest, to cause to come into existence," in a visualized sense ("Nepantla: Creative Acts" 7).⁶⁹ In this way, the enclosed figure represents both a metaphorical body and creativity's material product (i.e., the sketch).

The drawing may also be read as merging the inner and outer self by removing the slash in the body/mind dualism. By presenting two embedded bodies, we can see how cognitive and material knowing co-exist. In addition to reading the image as embedding one figure within another, we might read the drawing as containing three nested figures. By reading the two circles in the middle cavity as eyes, the space then becomes another third figure. In an interview with Christine Weiland, Anzaldúa explains a similar drawing:

I made this little sketch; in the middle is the personality, which I called "Gaudi" because that's what I'm called at home all the time. Around the personality, which is like the nucleus (well, it's not really the nucleus, it's very small in the middle) is the body, the life force or emotions, and then the mind. Each of those parts has a little ego. And then, around that is the individual soul or psychic being, the little speck or spark from the big flame which is life, which is consciousness.

(*Interviews* 102)

⁶⁹ Jane Caputi also observes a birthing theme in Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento*. Caputi notes that *conocimiento* relates to opening oneself: "*Imagine* this gateway as an opening of a birth canal, allowing for the emergence of new ways of sensing, feeling, and knowing" (192). Because "creation is a time of new birth," creativity and knowledge production come from a pulling apart to "bear" these ideas (192). Therefore, knowledge creation comes from producing thoughts and ideas.

Anzaldúa challenges Western epistemological traditions on two levels. First, “Gaudi” represents the body’s and mind’s union (typically separated in Western thought) and the close proximity between emotions and life force. Second, in indicating this third presence or soul, Anzaldúa nestles an inner sense of self within a larger cosmic presence; thus dissolving not only the body/mind dualism, but also the separation between the self/world. The multiple connections within and outside of ourselves, represented in the drawing, demonstrate the rich information embedded in the image that forges links between her discussions of *nepantla*, *la Llorona*, and materiality. In addition to her written work, the drawing strongly relates to Anzaldúa’s other drawings, as I establish below.

Drawing Two

In a drawing dated June 14, 1987 (eight days prior to the first drawing), an untitled sketch that, for convenience, I refer to as “the second drawing,” Anzaldúa portrays the same nestled figure on the left side while a single-bodied figure occupies the right side. Like “Creativity,” the figures in this drawing have little to distinguish themselves as human, despite their simple arm- and leg-like protrusions and staring eyes (see fig. 4). Subtle differences distinguish this drawing from the layered figure in the first drawing. For instance, nestled figure in the second drawing appears to stand on longer legs, and the arms are shorter with three, instead of two, fingers. The eyes in the main figure, darkened with ink, cast a vacant stare. Considering the multiple-bodied form’s girth, the single-bodied character appears exceptionally tall, as if stretched to meet the

expansive figure's height. Matching the layered being's shorter arms, the slim figure's own arms extend very little; however, the thinner character lacks fingers and its feet closely resemble a flipper.

Curiously, if the first drawing can be interpreted as representing la Llorona's ghostly presence, the second drawing, which features a second ambiguous figure, strengthens the relationship between creativity and non-corporeal beings. The tall, thin ghostly presence evokes Anzaldúa's experiences with ghosts, particularly from her time in San Francisco during the mid-seventies. In an interview with Christine Weiland, Anzaldúa recalls her encounter with a tall, thin ghostly male figure who gave her artistic inspiration: "Sometimes it would say words in my head and I'd type them up. I thought it was the spirit of Cortázar, a writer I admire very much. This was just a vibration, a sensing, that would always be over my left shoulder" (*Interviews* 105). Connecting herself to this non-corporeal presence (possibly Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar's spirit) demonstrates Anzaldúa's openness to inspiring outside forces. Connections between ghosts and creativity links the first and second drawings beyond similar artistic renderings. Furthermore, the relationship between ghosts and creativity indicates an openness to other consciousness levels in the creative process.



Fig. 4. Gloria Anzaldúa, Untitled, 1987. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

In addition, the imagination, which plays an important role in Anzaldúa's theory of creativity, often draws on knowledge housed within the subconsciousness. If we interpret the duo in the drawing to represent inspirational spirits, then we might consider the effect of the subconscious and spiritual influences on the imagination. Anzaldúa notes that imagination helps us reclaim a feminine voice that has been silenced by patriarchal domination:

By making images I mean the ability to evoke material from the imagination.

Imagining has enabled us to fish out the repressed feminine psyche relegated to the underworld. It has given us back ourselves. Image making and visualizations means reconnecting getting in touch with what the patriarchy took away from us—our bodies, our imaginations, our ideas, ourselves and our capacity to create.

(“Writing Guide: Nepantla and the Creative Process” 19)

For Anzaldúa, the imagination offers opportunities to counter oppressive structures (e.g., patriarchy) and reconnect with marginalized knowledge sources. The second drawing, thus, may function as a reminder for us to challenge the status quo with creative perspectives that remain open to spirit influences and subconscious information.

Drawing Three

Dated June 15, 1987, activity bustles across the third drawing’s composition. Centered within the commotion, a still face rests among various line-drawn shapes and objects. The spare, simply-drawn face includes two horizontal lines for eyes, and a brimmed hat rests on top. To the far left, a desk lamp hovers above a table that covers the composition’s bottom half. Behind the table a bald, faceless figure, dressed in a collared outfit, sits directly under the lamp. On the face’s right side, a “C” shape emerges that may represent an ear for listening or a mouth for speaking. Next to this figure rests an animal with hair running down its back and a raised leg. Its head leans into the central face as if planting a kiss or whispering an idea. Extending out from the animal’s leg, a horizontal line dips down to connect with a shape that somewhat resembles a cordless phone. To the

face's right perches another profiled creature with a boxy face, rotund middle, and curved tail. This being is trapped inside, or perhaps emerging from, concentric circles. A continuous gestural line occupies the page's far right; it begins with sharp movements and transitions into a looping flow. Where the line ends, it meets the final shape in the sketch, a series of stacked lines that echo a vertebrae or fern frond structure. A collection of tally marks adorns the structure's top, which continues down behind the table and, along with the lamp, bookends the composition (see fig. 5).

While each individual image holds much interest, the three central figures strongly connect with Anzaldúa's theories: the lamp head, the front-facing head, and the concentric circles. Their somewhat similar shape and placement ties the trinity together and places more visual emphasis on them. Occupying the center, the face—which I interpret as Anzaldúa—becomes the main character that all the images relate to. The lamp to the left might represent a writer's working space and the circles to the right can be interpreted as *el cenote*, Anzaldúa's theory for a type of unconscious reservoir of images. Anzaldúa developed practices to gain access to *el cenote* and draw from its rich image collection. In "Creativity and Switch Modes of Consciousness" Anzaldúa shares a creative process that relies on accessing internal images from her subconscious: "When I studied painting and writing, I discovered that I could create concrete universes. Rather, I didn't create them; I was the conductor for them, the channel. Sometimes these worlds would write or paint themselves out" (104). Working as a "channel" for these unconscious images, Anzaldúa indicates the reciprocal relationship between artist and

image. In other words, an artist does not command, but, rather, works *with* images. Through the artist, an image finds expression, and through an image, the artist can materialize their ideas. By reading Anzaldúa's description of her creative process with the sketch, we can interpret the congregating figures around the central head as animating the interaction between the artist and images.

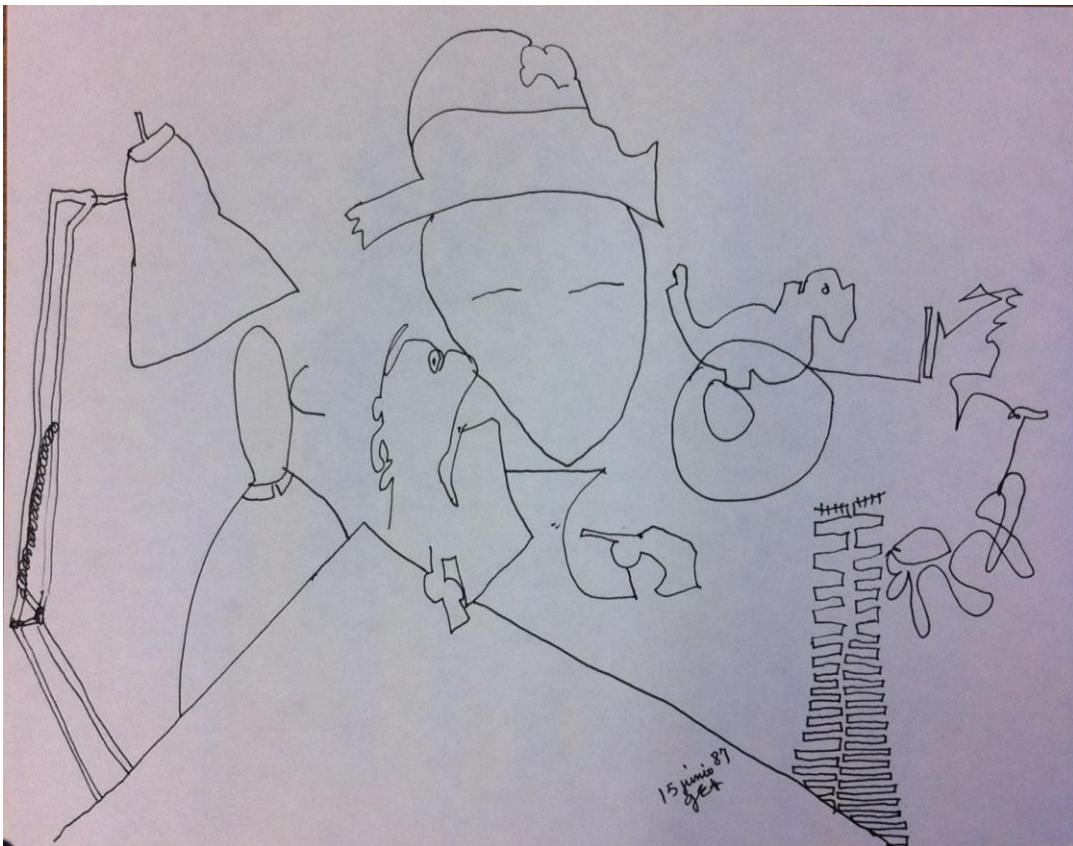


Fig. 5. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Untitled*, 1987. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

The drawing contains varied figures and forms, many of which coalesce around the concentric circles. Reading the pool of circles as *el cenote*, we can better understand the image cavern's importance in creative endeavors such as writing and visual art.

Indeed, a few months after creating the drawing, Anzaldúa proposed a workshop titled “El Cenote Writing Workshop.” In the archived proposal letter, she connects creativity with el cenote, stating that “I see our creative self and the creative act as a *cenote*, an immense circular hole full of water with trees growing out of the sides and overhanging the brink. *El cenote* is a well or water reservoir in caves; it is a place of pilgrimage, a sacred place. I hope that together and separately, we can take daily trips to that place” (“Correspondence” El Cenote—1987-1988, original emphasis). El cenote facilitates writing and imagination and, thus, can be useful to others engaging in creativity. By reading the figures in the third drawing as unconscious images flowing from el cenote, we see the chaotic process of sifting through and interpreting images. Moreover, the drawing offers potential images Anzaldúa may have been deciphering during June 1987.

The creative process that involves accessing images housed within el cenote connects to *nepantla* and further adds to the drawing’s theoretical significance. Occupying this in-between space, those working through *nepantla* can tap into el cenote (*Light* 98). *Nepantla* and the imagination work in conjunction to process the images streaming from el cenote. Anzaldúa posits that “[t]he imaginal consciousness, the dreaming *naguala*, seizes the symbols and metaphors that el cenote renders and turns them into sentient worlds, while *nepantla* interlaces those worlds into a coherent whole” (*Light* 108). Anzaldúa’s words indicate that creativity not only interprets images that construct individual stories, but also orchestrates multiple narratives. By linking the first and third drawings we can view the latter as the initial gathering of images to construct a

story, then the former as the point when the images come together to form cohesive entities. Interpreting the third drawing as such demonstrates Anzaldúa's theories' (e.g., nepantla and el cenote) complexity and interrelatedness as they relate to her theory of creativity.

Drawing Four

Paring down the activity from the third drawing, the fourth drawing, created on June 16, 1987, focuses on two main figures facing each other in profile. The first figure appears to be a young woman or girl with smooth features and long hair. Her head occupies the mid-left side, and lines extend downward to form a single arm and hint at a torso. Facing the female figure, an adult man with short hair and a collared shirt dominates the right side. His large head looks to be shaped with age; for example, an extended forehead and an emerging double-chin may indicate advanced years. His ear, a defining feature, forms from reiterating curved lines that resemble resounding vibrations or ripples in a pond (see fig. 6).

While the drawing expresses a sense of stillness or inactivity, two elements characterize specific interactions between the dyad. First, a chain joins the two figures and runs from the man's collar downward to the bottom of the female figure's torso. Often associated with slavery, captivity, and/or subservience, the chain may indicate a dominant/subordinate relationship between the two people. Taking into account the figures' size and placement—the male head is larger and located higher in the composition—as well as the historical and current social dynamics between women and

men, the male figure appears to hold a position of power over the female figure. Placing the drawing into conversation with Anzaldúa's writings at the time, we might read this image as relating to colonialism. Anzaldúa critiques Western colonization's imposition of power over and violence against Indigenous peoples in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* and "En Rapport, In Opposition: *Cobrando cuentas a las nuestras*" (both published in 1987). She outlines the colonization process by stating that "[i]n the 'dominant' phase of colonialism, European colonizers exercise direct control of the colonized, destroy the native legal and cultural systems, and negate non-European civilization in order to ruthlessly exploit the resources of the subjugated with the excuse of attempting to 'civilize' them" ("En Rapport" 112). In this respect, colonization occurs on several fronts that creates and maintains a hierarchical structure. The chain in the sketch may symbolize forms of domination in social, cultural, and economic conquest narratives.



Fig. 6. Gloria Anzaldúa, Untitled, 1987. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

The second interaction, a one-sided conversation between the characters, reiterates the power imbalance between the female and male figures. While we might have difficulty reading their expressions (e.g., both have a simple horizontal line for an eye), only the male figure appears to be capable of speaking; his mouth opens as if in mid-sentence, whereas her mouth remains shut. A connection could be made between the female figure in the drawing and Anzaldúa's discussion of Indigenous women's oppression:

The dark-skinned woman [who] has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor,

colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people (and in Mesoamerica her lot under the Indian patriarchs was not free of wounding). For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. The odds were heavily against her. (*Borderlands* 44-45)

Anzaldúa stresses the violence and subjugation Indigenous women endured and continue to experience. In pairing Anzaldúa's sketch with her discussion of oppression, the image may signify the patriarchal oppression embedded within colonization (and potentially preexisting in Indigenous cultures), which further exploits Indigenous women.

While I do not perceive an immediate link in form between the first and fourth drawings, I note a shared connection to Anzaldúa's creative approach. Typically, Anzaldúa uses creativity to transform problematic metaphors (e. g., *la Llorona*), but in this sketch, she employs creativity to pinpoint the problem's roots. To be exact, Anzaldúa points attention to colonialism and patriarchy. At times, those impacted by these or other oppressive structures may be affected to such a degree that they re-inscribe marginalizing systems. For example, Anzaldúa calls attention to internalized colonialism, a secondary phase of colonialism in which marginalized groups judge each other based on the same hegemonic ideals they are subjected to by the white dominant culture. She sees this dynamic play out in the ways women of colors tend to turn on one another: "[W]e try to impose one's self on the Other by making her the recipient of one's negative elements, usually the same ones that the Anglo projected on us" ("En Rapport" 112). Therefore, calling the oppressor accountable for their actions, rather than victim blaming, becomes

vital to women of colors' solidarity. Keeping internal colonialism in mind, Anzaldúa may employ this coupled imagery to direct attention away from perceived (divisive) differences among women of colors to the actual problem source, colonialism and patriarchy. Such a move assists social-justice efforts by forging links among marginalized individuals and visually articulates oppressive structures.

Drawing Five

Moving from a dyadic to triadic grouping, the fifth drawing, dated June 20, 1987, contains three faces. On the left, the first face in profile bears a straight nose, curved ear, and long hair. The human head extends into a bird-shaped body with clawed feet and a wing adorned with vertical and horizontal lines. From the bird-human hybrid's backside flows additional faces. The second face contains a single eye and eyebrow, a nose extending down with two nostrils, and an incomplete lip. These partial facial features rest in the liminal space between the outer heads. The lines enclosing the second face extend to the third head, whose geometric styling creates a mask-like quality—the straight forehead and U-shaped chin resembling the typical drama mask form. Within the mask-face, two curved eyebrows and almond-shaped eyes punctuate a downward glance; an undulating line and two circles form a nose; and misaligned rectangles and an off-kilter crescent moon create a mouth (see fig 7).



Fig. 7. Gloria Anzaldúa, Untitled, 1987. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

Collectively, the image speaks to the viewer as one unified being with three distinctive parts. Anzaldúa notes that her interest in three aspects within one being derives from her surname, also composed of three parts. In “Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness” she relates that “[o]ne reason I’m concerned with these [multiple] realities is because my last name, ‘Anzaldúa,’ is a Basque name, where ‘an’ means above, the upper worlds, the sky, the spirit; ‘zal’ means the underworld, the world of the soul, of images, of fantasy; and ‘dúa’ is the bridging of the two; and the bridge, to

me, is the interface” (103). Reading Anzaldúa’s tri-level name alongside the three-faced image, we might interpret the drawing as representing these three worlds: the human-bird figure may connect to “An,” the upper world; the mask-like face may portray “zal,” the fantasy world; and the “dúa” or middle face literally and figuratively bridges the outer two faces/worlds. The sketch, thus, may represent different consciousness levels and visually portray the fluid switching between these multiple worlds.

Further extending this interpretation, the animal figure may indicate a nonhuman element in Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity that involves shifting between our own different parts. Anzaldúa discusses the concept of three bodies in relation to shapeshifting whereby an individual has three bodies (i.e., human and animal bodies) that they travel, or shapeshift, between. Shapeshifting to the animal-self allows access to a creative perspective useful in personal development and transformation. Indeed, Anzaldúa often connected la naguala to creativity and self. She notes that, “My nagual (daimon or guiding spirit) is an inner sensibility that directs my life—an image, an action, or internal experience. My imagination and my naguala are connected—they are aspects of the same process, of creativity” (*Light* 4). By closely associating the imagination with naguala, Anzaldúa establishes both as interdependent and vital to a sense of self. However, she cautions that “you can *lose* that [animal] body, like people can misplace their souls. [...] The human body would only have two, instead of three selves [...] I’d be missing a part of myself” (*Interviews* 284). A connection to la naguala and, subsequently, to creativity must be sustained to maintain one’s wholeness. Kelli Zaytoun also makes the association

between Anzaldúa's understanding of images, la naguala, and the self. She argues that la naguala operates as a means for interconnectedness: "Perhaps Anzaldúa, intentionally and creatively, set out to unleash la naguala, the shapeshifter, into our individual and collective imaginations as the vehicle through which the boundaries of selfhood and other—other selves, other beings, and contexts in general—blur" ("Now" 9). Thus, the drawing may indicate that creative practices acknowledging one's naguala may be a technique to maintain all the parts of ourselves.

If Anzaldúa's naguala guides her creative process, how might the animal form impact our understanding of her creative work? In other words, what does her choice of an aviary body indicate about the drawing's meaning? Drawing on Anzaldúa's 1982 unpublished manuscript "On the Process of Feminist Image Making," I see two possible interpretations. First, because "[f]eathers and wings are central images in [her] writing" and birds are the "[s]ymbol for the spirit," the human-bird signifies the spirit's importance in forming a holistic self. Second, given Anzaldúa's connection to Aztec mythological deities, the human-bird figure may reference Xochiquetzal, a goddess, associated with female sexuality, who wears bird feathers. In fact, on her bedroom wall Anzaldúa hung a picture of her Nagual, "a were-wolf-owl animal" and pictures of Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue, and Xochiquetzal (goddesses representing different aspects of the earth-mother and female sexuality) ("On the Process" 2). By associating the bird in the composition with female sexuality, the drawing could indicate the value Anzaldúa places on sexuality, especially in relation to identity and creativity.

To reiterate, comparing the composition in the fifth drawing to the first drawing offers insight into the multiple aspects of consciousness, identity, and creativity. If as Anzaldúa suggests, one has three selves, the three-part image may portray a complete being's different forms (or shapes) where nothing is missing. While the nestled figures in the first drawing possibly offers one visualization of "Gaudi," a representation of Anzaldúa's identity/personality, her depiction of three connected faces could indicate that multiple consciousness levels expand outward and defy containment. However, the animal body, which links to Anzaldúa's theory of *la naguala*, draws attention to the shape-shifting aspect associated with the imagination not evident in the first drawing.

Drawing Six

In the sixth drawing, dated June 30, 1987, Anzaldúa depicts a plant-like object in the foreground whose stem splits into two branches that sprout leaves or perhaps heads at either end. On the left, a heavy, dark line runs horizontally as if creating a mouth and, on the right, a looped shape forms a hooded eye. Dots run up and down the stalks, and on what might be the ground, zigzag and vertical lines form grass. Behind the plant sits a bassinet-shaped object adorned with a pleated skirt. The plant- and cradle-shaped objects rest near each another, and the spatial closeness seems to indicate intimacy. The repeating V-shaped split or opening visually solidifies the objects' relation (see fig. 8).

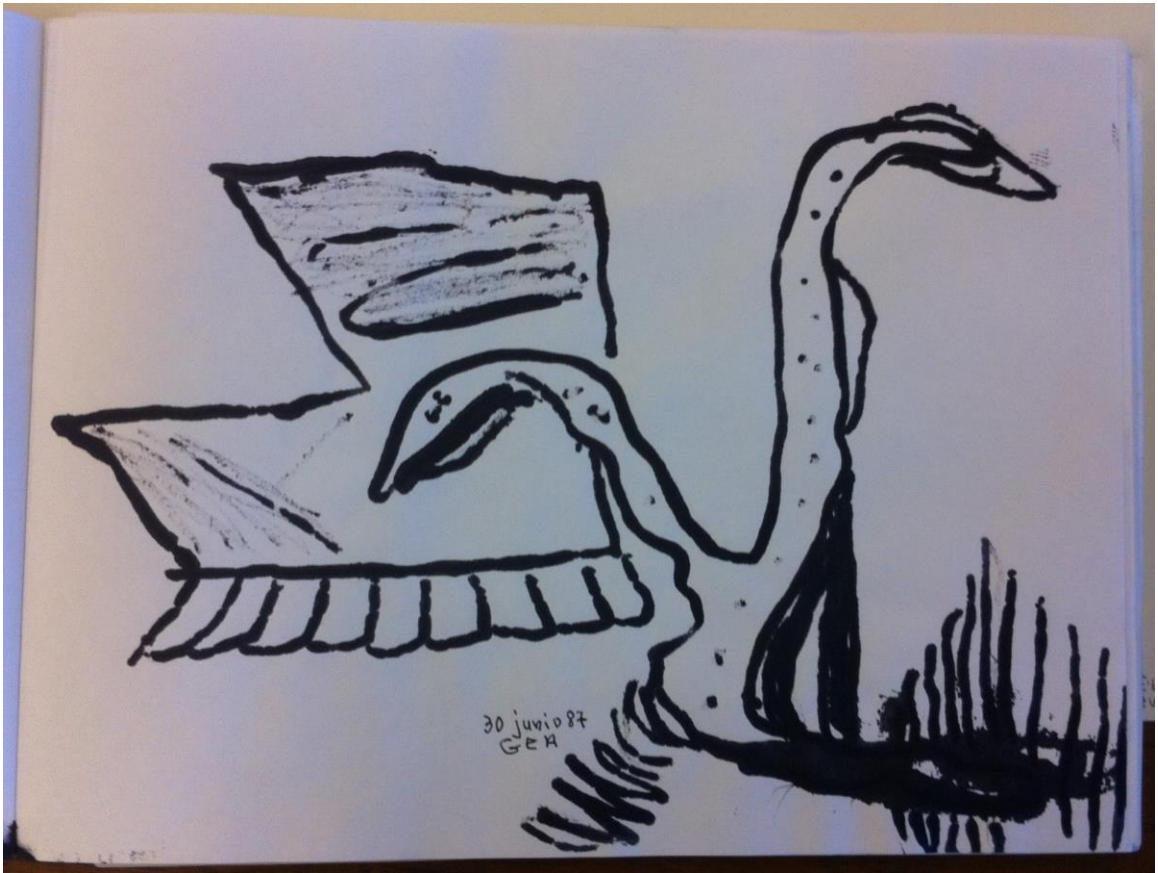


Fig. 8. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Untitled*, 1987. ©The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. Permission for use granted by the Trust. May not be duplicated without permission.

While the concept of a split or opening resonates with several Anzaldúan theories (e.g., *nepantla*, borderlands, *mestiza* consciousness, and *nos/otras*), I find her writings on the double-faced woman and serpents especially interesting in relation to the sketch. In “Dream of the Double-Faced Woman,” written in the early 1980’s, Anzaldúa discusses a feeling of duality resulting from Western social and epistemological directives to separate the body and spirit. According to Anzaldúa, the root of individual suffering comes from this split: “She attributed most of her ills to the separation of the flesh from the spirit: A separation of the economics of the physical life with the economics of the spirit” (70).

Cleaving oneself into parts, rather than existing as a unified being, inhibits a relationship with the self. The forked plant imagery echoes a separation between the body and spirit and living as a “double-faced woman.” However, the coupled stems’ shared trunk serves as a reminder that both parts—the body and spirit—remain connected.

The estranged relationship between the body and spirit echoes the inhibition of female sexuality. A disconnect from the body directly impacts sexuality, a point Anzaldúa punctuates by stating that “[s]he did not have a language nor a vocabulary to talk about the body, about making love. The clit, her serpent’s tongue, her sexual tongue had been silenced. Or because of disuse, she had forgotten to speak its language, how to move its tongue” (“Dream” 71). By associating women’s sexuality with language and the serpent’s tongue, Anzaldúa highlights the impact of stifling female sexuality, especially lesbian women’s sexuality.⁷⁰ To inhibit a serpent’s tongue or, similarly, silence lesbian experience and desire, takes away an ability to sense and navigate the world. In 1987, Anzaldúa presented at several events and conferences that discussed lesbian and gay identity issues. For example, on April 18th, she read poetry at “Sinister Wisdom,” a benefit event celebrating its 11th year as a lesbian literary and political journal based in

⁷⁰ Anzaldúa frequently evoked the serpent to symbolize female sexuality. For example, in an “Daughter of Coatlicue: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa” she states “To me sexuality is creativity, symbolized by the kundalini serpent, when energy rises through your energetic body in terms of the chakras and you get this rush of feeling, eroticism, sexuality. For me, this is connected to creativity, writing, making art, and also sexuality, the needs of your body, in terms of release” (qtd. in Lara 53). She also employs the imagery of a forked tongue to describe Chicano Spanish that blends together Spanish and English as part of Chicana/o’s distinct identity.

San Francisco.⁷¹ In June, Anzaldúa gave the keynote address “The Multicultural Lesbian” at the *Lesbian Community Conference: Cabrillo Lesbians Together*, Cabrillo College in Capitola, CA; and at the end of October she spoke on the panel “Differences within Differences: Issues of Lesbian and Gay People of Color” at *Definitions and Explorations, Lesbian/ Gay Studies Conference* held at Yale University (Keating, “Appendix 2” 330).⁷² Considering these 1987 presentations and talks, we can interpret the forked shape in the drawing in two ways. First, the v-shaped object may portray two snakes with immobile tongues. This interpretation highlights lesbians of colors’ oppression and silencing. Second, the image could represent a snake’s forked tongue finding its voice. From the latter perspective, the body (represented by the tongue) and spirit (inferred from the encapsulated dots) conjoin to empower female sexuality.

Divisions and binaries represent a major issue that Anzaldúa tackles in her writing and personal life. She frequently relied on creativity to heal those divides; creativity alerts

⁷¹ The event also featured the speakers: Adrienne Rich, Catherine Nicholson, Elana Dykewomon, Harriet (Desmoines) Ellenberger. Anzaldúa’s contribution included the reading: “Notes from the Editor: A Letter to Elana by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz.” “Nightvoice,” “horse,” “I crawled away from you, Raza,” “Cihuatl, ‘Woman Alone’,” and “El Retorno.” (For more information, please see “Chronological Gigs” Box 120 Folder 14 in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers 1942-2004.)

⁷² Other gigs included a May presentation on the panel “Homophobia: Fear of Going Home” at the *Amor en Aztlan: A Crosscultural Fiesta Conference* and on May 9th the keynote address at “Where Do We Go From Here?” at the *Third Annual Empowering Women of Color Conference: Standing at the Crossroads, This Bridge Called My Back* hosted by University of California, Berkeley (Keating, “Appendix 2” 330). (For more information on the *Third Annual Empowering Women of Color Conference*, please see Box 120 Folder 15 in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers 1942-2004.). During November 14-15, she delivered a speech titled “Writers as Social Activists” at the *Lesbian Political Action Conference* at Mission High School in San Francisco, CA (Keating, “Appendix 2” 330). Finally, Anzaldúa ends the year (December 15-18) with a paper presentation titled “The Internal Oppression of Women of Color” at the *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality? Lesbian and Gay International Conference* at Free University in Amsterdam (Keating, “Appendix 2” 330). (To view correspondence from the conference, please see Box 12 Folder 8 in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers 1942-2004.)

attention to a division and offers ways to heal the separation. The background object that may represent a bassinet or cradle, could suggest a fertility theme. If we read the foreground image as a loose representation of female reproductive organs, we could interpret the drawing as indicating creativity's potential to birth concepts and artworks. Furthermore, a fertility theme runs parallel to the sketch "Creativity" that could be interpreted as a gestation of creative ideas.

Discussion/Conclusion

A piece of art succeeds when it changes the way you feel about yourself or other people, when it changes your attitude to your past (and thus changes your perspective on [the] past which in turn changes that past itself). A piece of art succeeds when it changes how you perceive yourself and others. It is then that art adds information and insight into the condition of being wo/men.

Gloria Anzaldúa, "Writing Guide: Nepantla and the Creative Process"

Art serves an important role in communicating transformative ideas. As Anzaldúa's above epigraph indicates, artwork help us better understand theoretical perspectives and can promote individual and social change. Indeed, as I hope to have demonstrated, my analysis of six drawings from June 1987 reveals several connections to Anzaldúa's written works and further develops our understanding of her theories. In the images analyzed above, I note two important, transformative themes: multiplicity and interconnectedness, both of which contribute to WGS scholarship. Several sketches visually demonstrate how we exist as a whole entity but also contain distinct parts (e.g., body, spirit, and mind). Attention to multiplicity supports and extends WGS theories, such as intersectionality, by firmly situating spirituality within knowledge and

experience. In the first, second, and fifth drawings, Anzaldúa crafted multi-part figures (or multiple selves) that form a unified being. Portrayed visually, multiplicity demonstrates both/and thinking (i.e., we can possess several distinct parts and exist as a unified whole person) that locates and interconnects several ideas. Anzaldúa's images operate as interlocutors, linking several theories that readers may not recognize if they only read a single Anzaldúan essay or text. Again, Anzaldúa's emphasis on interconnectivity can contribute to WGS's inter- and transdisciplinary work. Just as the first drawing connects Anzaldúa's writings on *nepantla*, *la Llorona*, and materiality, creative work can link WGS to other disciplinary knowledges and practices. Because Anzaldúa possessed the ability to encapsulate several ideas within one image, her visual portfolio garners significance and her artwork demonstrates how images (e.g., the self's multiple aspects, forked images, and animals) convey concepts that invite transformation (e.g., encouraging holism, dissolving binaries, and interconnecting beings).

Although this chapter does not permit me space to discuss in detail Anzaldúa's other six images from June 1987, I note two interesting themes for discussion in future research. First, several drawings contain images that reference flora and fauna. Simple line drawings of nature-related beings range from a potted plant, a rotund fish, and a long-beaked bird to ambiguous forms that may represent a spiked lizard, a blob creature, and a one-eyed leaf. Anzaldúa frequently wrote about her connection to animals and

nature, which she experienced on creative, spiritual, and physical levels.⁷³ Pairing these images with her writings on animals and nature may further develop the links between the creatures and Anzaldúa's theories. Second, Anzaldúa's patterning in several sketches operates not only as a stylistic device (e.g., shading and texturing), but also may be read as an indicator of the plants' and animals' character (e.g., lyrical lines can indicate flowing movement, while boxy scales can represent a tough quality). By analyzing the aesthetic choices and images' rendering, we can further develop our understanding of multiplicity and interconnectedness, in relation to these creatures and, consequently, assess her artworks' transformative potential in human/nonhuman interactions.

In addition to transforming the artist, creative works can also change the viewer. Communicating concepts like multiplicity and interconnectedness through her sketches, Anzaldúa offers a pathway to transformation that runs parallel to her written works and can invite solidarity across difference. Anzaldúa thought deeply about art's potential impact and advocated for work that challenges oppressive social structures, rather than imagery that held only visual value.⁷⁴ In her unpublished 1997 manuscript "Nepantla:

⁷³ For examples, please see: Anzaldúa's interviews with AnaLouise Keating (1991) and Christine Weiland in *Interviews/Entrevistas, Borderlands/La Frontera*, "Foreword to Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit", "Llorona Coyolxauhqui," *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, "Speaking Across the Divide," and "Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Body: An Interview with Linda Smuckler."

⁷⁴ For example, she notes that "[t]he more information and insights concerning the human, wo/man condition the artist gives in her work, the more energy the reader-viewer has to change or modify herself and grow. If the information and insights given through the writing have already been written or painted, or if they are formulaic, or clichéd—nothing is learned, no change is triggered and the artist has just added one more book or canvas to the junk pile in bookstores and galleries" ("Writing Guide: Nepantla and the Creative Process" 1).

In/Between” she discusses the exchange between the artist, artwork, and audience, stating that:

Art reveals some previously unrecognized aspect of the reader-viewer’s relation to others and to the universe and provides the language with which to conceptualize old realities in new ways. If the artist allows the reader-viewer to re-create that discovery along with her—the work is a catalyst triggering a change of consciousness for both. The more information and insights concerning the human, wo/man condition the artist gives in her work, the more energy the reader-viewer has to change or modify herself and grow. (20)

Artwork’s power (including written and visual works) offers new ideas about the world, inviting viewers to adopt new perspectives. Given Anzaldúa’s commitment to dismantling divisive thought, her artwork crafts lenses that offer alternatives to traditional binary mindsets. For example, the drawings analyzed in this chapter call viewers to consider how multiple aspects of their self operate in a holistic manner. In the following chapter I explore the idea of transformative art and revisit the social-justice implications in Anzaldúa’s artwork.

CHAPTER V

“ART WILL BRIDGE DIFFERENT WORLDS”: FORGING CONNECTIONS

THROUGH ANZALDÚA’S VISUAL ART

Las artistas will look into shamanistic ideas of the relation and the link between life and art, between the surface of life and the unconscious depths and all the layers in between. Our art will bridge different worlds.

Gloria Anzaldúa, “Letter of Proposal for the Nepantla Project”

Creativity and artwork, for Anzaldúa, radically transform knowledge systems and introduces new ideas to transform social issues. As she indicates in the above epigraph and chapter title, artists bring about transformation by bridging the outer and inner worlds (“Letter of Proposal” 2). Scholarly attention to Anzaldúa’s theory of creativity and her sketches can illustrate how her creative work link and communicate across different worlds within herself and between herself and audience. In the interview with Andrea Lunsford, Anzaldúa notes how she uses images to convey theory: “Let me show you a little graph, a little visual, so that you can understand what I’m saying, because a lot of times it’s hard for me to say everything in words” (*Interviews* 254). Indeed, Anzaldúa had much to say, as evidenced by her prolific published and unpublished works, and her visual art offers inroads into these works. In the previous chapters, I presented visual pathways into Anzaldúan theorizing through her art. To conclude my project, I explore additional bridges Anzaldúa’s drawings construct between her multiple audiences.

I suggest three connections we can make between Anzaldúa’s artwork and her theories that bridge her work with multiple audiences. First, Anzaldúa’s writings and

scholarship on her work join various academic fields. Anzaldúa's sketches further strengthen and diversify these academic networks and support interdisciplinary fields', such as WGS, inter- and transdisciplinary research. Second, her drawings link and develop multiple Anzaldúan theories that span across her writings. Third, Anzaldúa's sketches build bridges between the artist and audience. In the artist-audience connection, the artist shares potentially transformative visual information. Indeed, by examining the bridging work Anzaldúa's art enacts, I hope to demonstrate how her drawings "bridge different worlds" (inside and outside the academy) and, in the process, potentially transforms these worlds ("Letter of Proposal" 2).

Academic Connections

As a self-titled "[f]eminist visionary spiritual activist poet-philosopher fiction writer," Anzaldúa created work that functions in several capacities, one of which includes academic applications (Keating, "Introduction" 3). Scholars analyze Anzaldúa's writings, apply her concepts, and build on her theories. As Betsy Dahms posits, Anzaldúa "constitutes a field of study in and of herself," while also remaining highly relevant to several academic fields (9). For example, Anzaldúan studies extends to American literature, cultural studies, feminist studies, queer theory, postmodernism, and contemporary U.S. Latina/o studies (Busch 139). As scholarship grows to include Anzaldúa's archived writings and drawings, I see the potential for scholars to develop additional inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations between academic disciplines. Because Anzaldúa's theories reach across multiple disciplines, her work invites

transdisciplinary research, which seeks to engage with and borrow from several disciplines to address a central issue and create new knowledge.

While scholars discuss transdisciplinarity in a variety of ways, I define the concept as problem-based research that works across multiple disciplines, and constructs knowledge existing beyond disciplinary boundaries. Transdisciplinary scholarship as problem-based research resonates with Patricia Leavy's definition of transdisciplinary research practices that "prioritize the problem at the center of the research over discipline-specific concerns, theories, or methods" (9) and Alfonso Montuori's summary of transdisciplinarity as "a *focus* that is inquiry-driven rather than discipline driven" (xi original emphasis). Speaking metaphorically, transdisciplinarity constructs a bridge that spans several grounds and focuses on the in-between suspension point rather than the destinations. Indeed, a focus on the issue or problem necessitates bridging practices useful in examining social inequity. Attention to creativity may assist fields invested in social change, such as WGS. In addition, Anzaldúa's visual images' accessibility may initiate conversations between disciplines about her art. For example, collaboration visual art and WGS scholars could produce research that blends deep visual analysis with complex feminist and/or womanist analysis.

Despite the scholarly attention transdisciplinarity has garnered in the past two decades, scholars have difficulty distinguishing the practice from inter-disciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity has been defined in variable ways: Some early scholars understand transdisciplinary as a "holistic vision" and an "openness for collaboration" (Klein 4),

while others argue that the approach necessitates collaboration between researchers from differing disciplines (Manderson 93). Within WGS, distinguishing between trans- and interdisciplinarity becomes a difficult task because scholars describe interdisciplinarity in terms almost synonymous to transdisciplinarity. For example, Sally L. Kitch articulated interdisciplinary research in terms similar to Irene Dölling and Sabine Hark's discussion of transdisciplinary approaches; all three authors see inter- and transdisciplinary work as offering new solutions to social issues.⁷⁵

Anzaldúa's work contributes to a transdisciplinary research initiative because her work contributes to academe beyond a single field and extends to non-academic communities. I offer my present study of Anzaldúa's sketches as one path WGS might use to adopt transdisciplinary research that encourages academic collaborations between WGS and feminist rhetoric. While another scholar may have examined Anzaldúa's artwork from fields such as visual arts (e.g., analyzing her sketches through a feminist lens) or feminist rhetoric (e.g., exploring her drawings as a rhetorical product), I distinguish my project as a transdisciplinary WGS dissertation because I center it within a social-justice framework while also drawing on visual arts and feminist rhetoric. The crosspollination between Anzaldúan studies, visual arts, and feminist rhetoric contributes to WGS by deepening its inter- and transdisciplinary research aims and creating new

⁷⁵ For further reading please see: Sally L. Kitch's "PhD. Programs and the Research Mission of Women's Studies: The Case for Interdisciplinarity" and Irene Dölling and Sabine Hark's "She Who Speaks Shadow Speaks Truth: Transdisciplinarity in Women's and Gender Studies."

inroads to explore social-justice initiatives (e.g., challenging divisive thinking) through creative works.

Anzaldúa Theorizing Connections

Similar to Anzaldúa's writings, her visual artwork can resonate with a diverse readership. In her unpublished writing notes, she remarks on artwork's ability to capture a broad audience: "When a piece has a quality of universality, many types of people can live in the piece and gain value from living there—people from different walks of life, cultures, historical periods" (Writing Notes C 32-33). Not only does an artwork have the capability to speak to multiple differently-situated viewers, it also has the potential to establish commonality across difference. I suggest that Anzaldúa's art offers her viewers images that possess universal characteristics (e.g., simple figures and basic shapes) to express equally universal ideas (e.g., spirituality and interconnectedness), which have been forgotten, ignored, or silenced by the dominant Western knowledge frameworks. By finding familiarity with an image and its related concept, the viewer can consider Anzaldúa's theoretical perspectives.

Because intellectual and emotional exchanges occur between a viewer and artwork, audiences can examine Anzaldúa's sketches to develop a more holistic understanding of her theorizing. Pedagogical engagements with Anzaldúa's work adopt similar tactics. For example, Stephanie Alvarez, Stephanie Brock, Janie Covarrubias, Lauren Espinoza, and Orquidea Morales recall their experience in creating an art exhibition containing Anzaldúa's images and quotations, which served as the final project

for Alvarez's special topics course on Gloria Anzaldúa. They assert that "[p]roviding visual images not only invites the viewer to step into the exhibit through the use of a familiar medium for an art exhibit, but also serves as an intellectual road map—an invitation for more people to follow Anzaldúa as she 'enters the serpent'" (132-33). Anzaldúa's artwork invites audiences to journey through her theories in much the same way she did—through images. "Adding in a graphic design element and the pictograms," Alvarez et al. offer audiences the opportunity to reflect and meditate on "Anzaldúa's lived theory" (133). Academic and general audiences alike can connect to Anzaldúa's theories through her images.

Furthermore, just as Anzaldúa's images possess a unifying quality through their universal characteristics, her sketches and writings on creativity can also function like the center of a wagon wheel connecting images to her theoretical texts. For example, my analysis of the third drawing in chapter four connects Anzaldúa's writings on *el cenote* and *nepantla*. Anzaldúa's drawing visually links these theories and, like multiple wheel spokes, directs attention to her published and unpublished essays. Additionally, her writings on creativity encourage theoretical applications across academic disciplines. For instance, I applied Anzaldúa's writings on creativity and her theories of *nepantla*, *conocimiento*, and shamanism to feminist rhetoric research methods. If we view Anzaldúa's sketches as operating like wheels that connect her theories (developed through multiple writings), we can view her theory of creativity as constructing the wagon by which we can travel to various academic destinations, e.g., feminist rhetoric. In

the quest for art to “bridge different worlds,” Anzaldúa’s writings on creativity and drawings create and traverse these crossings (“Letter of Proposal” 2).

Artist-Audience Connections

Just as Anzaldúa’s artwork forges links across her theories and writings, her sketches connect Anzaldúa to her audience. The act of viewing artwork initiates a conversation among artist, artwork, and audience that can be a powerful knowledge-creation experience. For example, while examining Liliana Wilson’s artwork, Anzaldúa notes that several questions emerge to produce a dialogue with the artwork. She asks herself “What feeling does her picture arouse in me?” and asks the image: “What are your needs?” “How do you feel about the tree on your arm, fish coming out of your chest?” (Writing Notes M-7). In this two-pronged conversation, Anzaldúa first reflects on her emotions while viewing the images, and then expresses interest in the images’ feelings. The viewer’s emotional response to images informs the knowledge created when interacting with an artwork. When Anzaldúa asks herself “How do I respond to the feelings they [images] express through their colors, textures, bodies, faces, environment?,” she encourages further dialogue: “Talk to the lines and colors about their textures, their subtle movements, the way they touch or do not touch, the energy they generate through their patterns” (Writing Notes M-7). If the viewer takes the time to sit with an art work and carefully examine the piece, the form and content can provide a wealth of information. The knowledge gained from communication between the artist-to-artwork and artwork-to-audience has the power to transform the viewer’s mindset.

Indeed, an artist's world vision can impact the audience as well as the artist—for example, by communicating challenging ideas through images, an artist can make this alternative viewpoint more accessible. In *The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson also note artwork's impact on the viewer. In an aesthetic encounter, the viewer relies on their personal experiences as a framework to understand the composition, then builds on this foundation to develop new perspectives and feelings: "The information in the work of art fuses with the information in the viewer's memory—followed by the expansion of the viewer's consciousness, and the attendant emotional consequences" (18). Applying this concept to viewing Anzaldúa's sketches, we draw on our prior associations with colors, forms, and objects to understand her ideas differently than if we read only a single Anzaldúan text. In addition, readers not fluent in English, Spanish, and/or Náhuatl might be limited when reading Anzaldúa's written texts; however, interpreting lines, shading, and patterning does not require the same fluency level. As Anzaldúa suggests, a visual image can impact viewers on an energetic level:

The work will pass on this energy to the reader or viewer and feed her or his soul. The artist transmits and transforms inner energies and forces, energies and forces that may come from another realm, another order of intelligence. These forces use la artista to transmit their intelligence, transmit ideas, values that awaken higher states of consciousness. ("Speaking Across" 292)

Creativity brings forth images that inform the artist's and audience's interaction with the world. Because outer change begins with internal changes, encounters with creative works can assist in prompting personal shifts in perspective.

Creativity presents tools for artists grappling with social issues, such as sexism and racism, and for their audiences who can benefit from this information. A viewer may share similar struggles or learn from another's experiences through images and/or words. Because, as Anzaldúa suggests, "[t]he artist awakens and activates the imagining process in readers or viewers, thus empowering them," examining the potential dialogue between artist, artwork, and viewer enables us to extend our applications of Anzaldúa's theory of creativity (*Light* 41). Indeed, Anzaldúa's artwork and theory of creativity have impacted me on this type of personal level: Not only have they inspired my current project, but they have also altered my own artistic process. As mentioned in chapter one, my research and artwork have developed in tandem. My paintings draw on lived experience and subconscious imagery to create works that help me make sense of and develop knowledge. In fashioning my ideas through brushstrokes and drips, I explore the ways image-making can articulate social identity struggles. To be more precise, I craft my (bi)racialized experiences against a historical assimilation backdrop and negotiate Western social expectations of East Asian identity. Influenced by Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantla*, I visually articulate the theory's emotional struggles with images of cocoons (representing social expectations), which parts of my body emerge from. Anzaldúa's theorizing inspires me to creatively identify social norms and call attention to the inner

work that accompanies social transformation. It is my hope that, like Anzaldúa, my artwork invites audiences to critique cultural stereotypes and explore complex identity formation.

In my present analysis, I hope to offer an additional pathway into Anzaldúan theorizing through her visual art. First, by placing Anzaldúa's writing on creativity into conversation with feminist rhetoric, I demonstrate one of many academic spaces that can be developed through further engagement with her work. Second, in analyzing Anzaldúa's drawings, I reveal the multiple theoretical connections embedded in the images' forms and renderings. Future research can build on this project by examining different archived artworks (e.g., her handmade stationary, large easel pad drawings, or doodles in her writing notes) and their theoretical connections. Other projects might also examine the connections between Anzaldúa's theory of creativity and psychoanalytic theories (e.g., the writings of Carl Jung, James Hillman, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi) in transdisciplinary research that brings together WGS, psychology, and visual art. Another research direction might investigate how Anzaldúa's animal, nature, and other nonhuman renderings provide new insight into conversations in feminist new materialism and recent developments in posthumanism. As Anzaldúa demonstrates through her artwork, which makes profound connections between differing disciplines, people, ideas, and beyond, "[c]reativity can bring us together" (Writing Notes J-97).

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