

University of New Mexico

UNM Digital Repository

English Language and Literature Faculty
Publications

Scholarly Communication - Departments

1990

Genre, Gender, and Mestizaje: The Politics of Aesthetics in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa

Hector A. Torres
University of New Mexico

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/engl_fsp



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Torres, Hector A.. "Genre, Gender, and Mestizaje: The Politics of Aesthetics in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa." (1990). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/engl_fsp/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarly Communication - Departments at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Language and Literature Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

Hector A. Torres
Associate Professor
Department of English
University of New Mexico

Genre, Gender, and *Mestizaje*:
The Politics of Aesthetics in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa

...this is where the new *mestiza* comes in...now, in these postmodern times we do not have to adhere to a windows and doors closed identity that remains in the Chicano community. We can be transcultural. The very concept of *mestizaje* is this mixture of cultures and we can do that intellectually so that the *mestiza* is wide open: it's okay for the *mestiza* to be reading theories of the major, theories of the minor, world literature, world feminism. But not everybody is that stage. There are still some feminists who still need this enclosed Chicano community to give them a foundation, to give them some sort of a sense of security as a Chicana, so that all these doubles are operating simultaneously—the Chicana just becoming aware that she is oppressed as a Chicana, that she is oppressed as a woman coming into her feminism, and the Chicana who has gone through all of this. *Movimientos* after *movimientos* and all these struggles and these two worlds....

Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa
Santa Cruz, California
May, 1990¹

Postmodernism/Without Foundations

May 15th of 2004 saw the passing away of Gloria Anzaldúa, still at her scene of writing, working on a manuscript. The news of her death rippled quietly through the internet. The students and scholars who were affected by her work know the loss her passing away represents at this point in postmodernity. In the postmodern condition Anzaldúa saw an opportunity to pen a body of work that would critique the hegemony of American Empire, contesting ^{its} elision of a Mexican contribution to the formation of the American nation, challenging the exclusionary practices of the Anglo American

academy, foregrounding the politics of the social act of writing. *This Bridge Called my Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981, 1983), which she co-edited with Cherrie Moraga, contains contributions from Anzaldúa that anticipate the generic play that will generate her literary masterpiece *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987). Similarly, Anzaldúa edited and contributed to both *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990) and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002). Through these acts of writing, Anzaldúa addresses Anglo and Mexican America at practically all levels of discourse and domains of practice: for example, the blindness of white feminism *vis-à-vis* women of color in the United States, the systematic exclusion of Chicana writers from the literary canon of American literature, and the racism and homophobia at work in both Anglo and Latino cultures. Keenly aware of the demise of epistemological foundations for the logic of identity, Anzaldúa seizes the postmodern day when she decides to write in the genre of autobiography.²

In autobiography, Anzaldúa turns to an advantage the disunities of culture and self that begin spelling out a shift in aesthetic sensibility in the 1970s under the name of postmodernism (Hassan 1987, Harvey 1989). Biddy Martin, in her critical work on women's autobiography, describes this historical moment moving through American culture and institutions as it impinges on the social act of writing of Chicanas and other women of color:

The autobiographical contributions to *This Bridge Called My Back*...serve as a concrete example of how the politics of identity has been challenged on its very grounds. For the writings of Moraga, Anzaldúa, and others participate in attempts to attend to the irreducibly complex intersections of race, gender, and sexuality,

attempts that both directly and indirectly work against assumptions that there are no differences within the 'lesbian self' and that lesbian authors, autobiographical subjects, readers, and critics can be conflated and marginalized as self-identical and separable questions of race, class, sexuality and ethnicity (1988 83).

On Martin's account, the variables of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender surface onto a field of tension in which aesthetics and politics cannot be separated. These variables intersect in such complex ways that attempts to disengage them serve in fact to 'falsify' straightaway their empirical irreducibility. Anzaldúa takes the challenge to the politics of identity at this historical juncture in multicultural America as a condition of possibility for her own theoretical vision of life. *Mestizaje*, or *mestiza* consciousness, is the name Anzaldúa gives to her mode of critical thinking in order to negotiate a world being made increasingly complex by *movimientos* after *movimientos*, simultaneous doubles, and lack of epistemological and ontological foundations.

I take *mestizaje* as my point of departure for this critical study of Anzaldúa's literary production. Through this ideological practice she calls *mestizaje* or *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldúa pens a body of work that negotiates the question mark punctuating the politics of identity in multicultural America at least since the political activism of the 1960s. The cultural and economic crises of the 1970s map onto the ideological shifts in aesthetic sensibilities announced in the postmodern condition (Harvey 1999). The economic slowdown that plagues America after its defeat in Viet Nam has persisted into the new millennium, accompanied at every step by the typical boom and bust cycles of capitalism.³ Anzaldúa takes up the pen in the social act of writing during the late Reagan years, when the economic policies of his administration have generated staggering deficits, not only widening the gap between rich and poor in

the United States, but also enlarging the scope of the international division of labor—to which the introduction of such euphemisms as ‘outsourcing’ and ‘downsizing’ into the American lexicon attest. The Reagan administration represents a backlash against the history from which issue the cultural wars and the politics of a liberal education in the 1980s. As the historians of the America Social History Project put it: “William Bennett, Reagan’s secretary of education, denounced ‘relativism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ in university curricula, arguing instead for a return to the ‘Judeo-Christian tradition’” (*Who Built America?* 2000, 680-685). In many ways, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, with its discussion of NAFTA in chapter 1, anticipates the processes of globalization that come with the end of the Cold War. “The collapse of communism”, write Eckes and Zeiler, “and nearly half century of superpower tension released the ideological, if not the economic, forces of modern-day globalization” (*Globalization* 2003, 22). Anzaldúa’s social act of writing is situated in this ‘maelstrom’ of social, cultural, and economic forces, in the midst of the irony called the death of the author.

The metaphorical structure of Roland Barthes’ enunciation that the author is dead is not lost to Anzaldúa, as she mines the epistemological gap between *énoncé* and *énunciation* to crystallize a performative event:

Barthes has an essay on how the author is dead, and it’s just at the time when the marginal writers are becoming authorial...it seems to me [that] the white European male author is dead—the white male European subject is dead—and we, the minor are not ready to relinquish the space that we have just won to our struggles. But I also feel that the author never existed because, when I write, I write from the raw materials that I read, from the people I come into contact with, from the experiences that other people tell me about. I am sort of like this

pipeline that gathers up material and synthesizes it and puts it out so that it's not me a single author, but I belong to a collectivity that is invisible...when I'm writing. So I don't believe that the author ever existed so how can the author be dead? (Torres *Interviews*)

Anzaldúa puts together a critical vision of life out of these varieties and forms of experience in the symbolic, imaginary, and real orders of time and ideology. The "I" that writes recognizes the folly of taking anything for one's own, in a way that plays with private property in the realm of Capital. Just as death deprives the capitalist subject from any private property, so the non-existence of any self-sustaining author/identity in the first place deprives the death of the author of the cultural capital it holds in Western critical theory. To be sure, one must use the first person singular pronoun of the grammar to make such a statement, but the results do not empty out into the creation of a unique, essential, or unified self-life-writing. What emerges instead is a vision beyond Barthes, one in which the author never existed hence never died. In a sense, *mestiza* consciousness writes without foundations inasmuch as the new *mestiza* puts no faith even in a dead author—a *mestiza* must write because she must write. Hence, through her *oeuvre*, Gloria Anzaldúa, is neither dead and nor alive but ex-ists somewhere in between, *en los intersticios*, as we ourselves are right now. Through the exercise of *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldúa affirms and displaces metaphysical opposites, cultural contradiction and tensions, all without the benefit of foundations. This ideological position has close affinities with writing under erasure, the modes of reading and writing that deconstruction brought to America at the end of the 1960s. My reading is concerned with the impact of Anzaldúa's theoretical practice of *mestiza* consciousness on the genre of autobiography. The *mestizaje* of genres that go into the composition of

Borderlands/La Frontera, in particular, are effects that stem as much from the malleability of the genre as from the contradictory cultural forces Anzaldúa encounters at her scene of reading and writing.

The Spirit of *Mestizaje*: Minor theory, Major implications

I didn't see a division between theory and fiction or theory and poetry.
(Torres *Interviews*)

With this statement, Gloria Anzaldúa not only deploys the logic of *mestizaje* at work throughout the body of her literary production,⁴ but also glimpses or posits a unity standing in ironic contrast to the unities that the Western Liberal Arts trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic prescribes. The irony of the unity leads Anzaldúa at her scene of writing/reading to compose her work with a consciousness that respects the pressures, exigencies, and heterogeneity of cultural and economic forces of everyday life. Anzaldúa undertakes a different tactic in the expository composition of her ideological conviction that “poetry derives from theory and you can derive theory from poetry” (Torres *Interviews*). On the side of the dialectic, theory is the discourse of truth for the Anglo American academy. Poetry on the other hand sides with the literary arts that Plato so condemned for falling away from pure intellect into the realm of imagery. Rhetoric fares no better when it is dismissed as performance that distorts dialectic. It is these sorts of divisions that Anzaldúa contests as “a false dichotomy that Anglo-American feminism and European male discourse has advocated—that there’s a split between theory and fiction or theory and practice” (Torres *Interviews*). The unity that Anzaldúa asserts in place of those traditional divisions cannot be worked out as such because the unity she posits or glimpses must be worked out in a practice that involves not only the trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, but also the pulsations of body with all their

ambiguity—the unity she posits and reconfigures through and for her *mestiza* consciousness makes no pretensions to pure intellect but tries to account for and include the rhetorical logic of the body. The social act of writing is a moment of performative unity for the new *mestiza* that is sure to disappear into the ether of metaphysics as well as pass into the body, if she follows through and does not negate the “I” poised to write. Thus, while *mestiza* consciousness rejects the unity of the fathers, it does not reject unity as such but seeks for it on its own terms. This general pattern of rejecting the unity of Western theory while at the same time reworking it with other ends in mind is also the general pattern of writing under erasure.

Derrida’s well-known neologism ‘*differance*’ is meant to deliberate over Western philosophy’s inability to provide adequate epistemological foundations for the rigorous study of ontology, the Being of beings. When Derrida strikes through the verb ‘to be’ twice in his essay “*Differance*” (1982, *Margins of Philosophy* 6) he is striking at the utter inability of language in whatever part of speech to call forth from beyond itself any essential predicate for the definition of Western philosophy’s epistemological and ontological projects. And yet in the same breath, Derrida must speak of ‘*differance*’ as that which makes meaning possible and history necessary. The problem lies with language, which simply provides no sure means for giving an account of ‘*differance*.’ The elaboration of ‘*differance*’ that Derrida gives serves to radically decenter and delimit Western philosophy because ‘*differance*’ is not a unique identity or substance, it does not favor any of Western philosophy’s time-honored oppositions and master words, such as dialectics and history, consciousness and the self, syntax and logic, sensible/intelligible, or signifier/signified. Rather, ‘*differance*’ disrupts these oppositions, and even as it makes them possible, resists being reduced to them. Naturally, the deconstruction of

these master words and oppositions requires that Derrida use the language and syntax of the oppositions he is deconstructing as well as seek or formulate a space out of the reach of their reach—an impossibility. This is why elsewhere he states that a deconstruction of master words and oppositions does not leave one with choice about the truth of the matter of the opposition in question (“Structure”). What is clear in Derrida’s work is that deconstruction does not mean destruction pure and simple but involves a more complex ensemble of theoretical practices, which require the speaking and writing subject to proceed with the only language available while still engaged in the politics of knowledge construction (Spivak “Translator’s Preface”).

While Anzaldúa also seeks to displace the authority of oppositions composing Western theory, such as presence/absence, sensible/intelligible, subject/object, material/spiritual, and literature/history, she also recognizes the inhospitability of Western theory to women of color. This is why she takes up the project of performing the deconstruction of dualities through the theoretical practice of *mestiza* consciousness, which she calls Low theory. The new *mestiza* borrows from the canon of Western theory to produce Low theory, theory that is closer to the lows and highs of her daily life. The construction of theory addressing the social and economic realities of woman of color is an explicit mandate in *This Bridge Called My Back*. This was not an easy mandate to follow when white Anglo feminism had so thoroughly excluded Third World women/women of color from its cadre—the categories *This Bridge* employs to describe the subjects it gathers in its pages (*Bridge*, “introduction” xxiii-xxiv). The variables of class, race, and sexuality posed major obstacles between these two factions of feminisms, national and international. Norma Alarcón observed a major premise at work in the activism of white feminism: “It is clear that the most popular subject of Anglo-American

feminism is an autonomous, self-making, self-determining subject who first proceeds according to the *logic of identification* with regard to the subject of consciousness, a notion usually viewed as the purview of man, but now claimed for women” (29, italics in text). The subjects of *This Bridge* engage this embattled field of tension with no guarantees. One of Anzaldúa’s contributions to *This Bridge*—“Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers”—urges engagement with the field of tension, exposing as many of the forces as possible that—whether one acknowledges them or not—daily deconstruct the comforts of identity:

The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much *I* put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve... Throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and the compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked—not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat... *put your shit on the paper* (171-2, italics in text).

A double logic attends this passage—*un movimiento tras un movimiento*—a logic that simultaneously recognizes the need for the first person subject to take up the pen in the social act of writing and the difficulty of gathering that subject into a unity. That subject is less a unity than a process, an “I” that increases in value the more it opens its ‘identity’ to the daily ‘labors’ of her body, its vulnerabilities, its potential for waywardness, its lower functions even. For the new *mestiza*, the construction of theory cannot turn away from the messiness (*mestizaje*) of daily experience because to do so is likely to reproduce patriarchal discourse. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa performs theory in the flesh through the social act of writing. Upon its appearance on the

American literary landscape, reviewers of *Borderlands* noticed right away both the genius and the uneven character of the work---the highs and lows of the new *mestiza*.⁵

James Olney tracks an epochal moment in the history of the study of autobiography, a moment that comes into prominence when critics begin directing their attention away from the second element of the compounded word, the *bios*/life of the genre, and toward the first element, the *autos*/self (“Autobiography, 19). Autobiography itself, considers Olney, is a perplexing subject of inquiry with not so much an indeterminate history as one that will not yield a clear definition for the genre: “This is one of the paradoxes of the subject: everyone knows what autobiography is, but no two observers, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement” (7). Inasmuch as *mestiza* consciousness does not see any real division between theory and poetry—the discourse of truth versus literary discourse—autobiography becomes an efficient vehicle for Anzaldúa to construct discursive knowledge over such disciplinary genres as history, ethnography, and psychoanalysis. All the mirrors of identity shattered but useful, Anzaldúa deepens the complexity of being both subject and object at her scene of writing. As Olney put it with respect to the third element of autobiography: “it is through that act that the self and life, complexly intertwined and entangled, take on a certain form, assume a particular shape and image” (22).

The third element of autobiography—*graphein*—always bears a insistent urgency for the new *mestiza*. In the postmodern condition, the social act of writing becomes all the more urgent for all Third World women/women of color, the new *mestiza* in collective, ideological and aesthetic terms. Poetry, the social act of writing, must be a doing true to its etymon:

That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and although it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (*Borderlands* 79-80).

An account of the third element of autobiography such as this one that emphasizes the pain that comes of breaking down unities. The ironic unity set against the unities prescribed in the Western Liberal Arts, the tradition Anzaldúa is writing within and contesting, may not be there inasmuch as the author never existed. Such a 'unity' is felt as an act of *mestiza* consciousness—by definition not a unity but a division, not a sum but difference. Anzaldúa underscores process, change, and division over unity, balance, or synthesis. However, the concession that self/*aute* and life/*bios* can never align in the writing/*graphe*, turns into an opportunity for the new *mestiza* when she writes with knowledge that life and self deconstruct, leaving her with only one position, to choose to write and thereby construct knowledge. *Borderlands*'s traversal through practically every domain of discourse in Western theory disturbs the proposition that truth comes from the Western logos alone, as Anzaldúa disrupts logocentric norms of textual cohesion and coherence in the writing of history, ethnography, psychoanalysis, sociolinguistics, and philosophy.

Chapter 1 of *Borderlands*, “The Homeland, Aztlán,” takes on the disciplinary protocols of traditional Western historiography’s whose of objectivity and disinterestedness, the neutral scrutiny of events and their mimetic narrativization. Anzaldúa does not contest history or historiography but the promise of the premise that objectivity is attainable. For Anzaldúa, the idea that objective histories are possible to write is one of the most effective patriarchal tools of the cultural fathers to keep the *mestiza* away from the social act of writing. Because the myth of objectivity itself attests to the power of myth, Anzaldúa, engages this mythological move that withholds the power of myth but reserves it for itself. On this score, Anzaldúa’s critique of traditional historiography itself rests on a mythological that does not take itself as objective truth, the concession performing an ironic truth by dint of the ‘confession’. At the very least, Anzaldúa thrusts back the subjectivism that must accompany the epistemology of Western historiography for structural reasons⁶: these ironies can only be performances, practices that acknowledge that the ‘taint’ of subjectivity enters into all story-telling, whether we call it literature or history (Orr). Coming to grips with this ironic truth does not imply a threat to the linear exposition of history or even the abandonment of the discourse of truth and far less the pragmatics of daily political reality but a widening of the empirical and conceptual fields of writing. In “The Homeland, Aztlán” then, Anzaldúa recombines the historical events that lead to the loss of Mexico’s *Tejas* to what would become the Texas Republic and ultimately her own family’s own ancestral lands. The expositions she pens of the historical data/givens take shape with hieroglyphs, ideograms, and pictographs, as well as through thematic gaps. Such compositional strategies function as denotations of the limits of objectivity and subjectivity—iconic representation of the life of the new *mestiza*, who is also (a)kin to *la mujer*

indocumentada. Although, the myth of Aztlán rings with a heavy nationalistic toll in the opening of this chapter, the reader also has to make it contend with the subtitle “*el otro México*” and the *norteño corrido* below it. With this intertextuality Anzaldúa enters alongside the invocation an alterity function. In every direction that Anzaldúa turns her narrative, the *aute/self* reaches a limit, passes over, and transgresses the border—she becomes *indocumentada*. But nevertheless, even without credentials and in spite of all the dangers, she will work, which is to say, she must write. Writing is work and the new *mestiza* must carry on the work of writing, even without credentials because the fields of history and myth are too large to leave to the tenants of Western theory/historiography. The oft-quoted phrases, “The U.S.-Mexico border *es una herida abierta*,” and “This is her home/this thin edge of/ barbwire” not only connote the pain of writing theory in the flesh but also strike at the reifications of objectivity that Western historiography enjoys. No historian can help bringing personal interests to the study of history, even a certain narcissism consonant with the myth of objectivity itself.

Anzaldúa takes on another problem of similar epistemological scope and magnitude with Chapter 2, “*movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*”. As a critique of Chicano and Anglo cultures, this chapter experiments with the protocols of postmodern ethnography, as Anzaldúa performs the ironic role of both insider and outsider of these two patriarchal cultures. Of necessity, her position *vis-à-vis* both cultures has to be plural. And to combat the multiple oppressions she feels coming from both Chicano and Anglo cultures Anzaldúa declares the arbitrariness of all identity. Just as neither culture is happy with her choice either to write, neither is happy with her choice to declare her same-sex preference. “Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, *I made the choice to be queer*” (19). This choice signals the

erasure of sexuality. Sexual preference is exposed as arbitrary, or at least as a variable that is as arbitrary as it is essential. The enormity of the critique leads Anzaldúa to claim an ironic unity for herself, “the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (19). This mythic figure of a divine marriage corresponds to another figure that also makes its appearance in this chapter, the Shadow-Beast. Together, these images unleash a critical energy over and against Western patriarchal Anglo and Chicano cultural institutions. The Shadow-Beast resists “the lie” of binary thinking that splits the body into Descartes and de Sade. The “lidless serpent eyes” (20) is a vivid image asking readers to rethink the mind/body split and revisualize it as something other. In practice, Anzaldúa will not truck with identity projects that deny to others the theoretical resources of myth while keeping them in reserves for themselves. Such duplicity proceeds with a discursive practice that: (i) pits myth against critical theory, (ii) classes myth as lie and falsity, (iii), names itself a species of truth and rationality, but in doing so, (iv) fails to see that even its own narrow spectrum of consciousness forms a kind of mythological thinking, and hence (v) grants itself the privilege of myth but withholds it from others. This kind of duplicity Anzaldúa calls, “an absolute despot duality” (41), connoting a monarch or a lord of a Hobbesian bent that doesn’t keep to the authority of law he himself imposes on his subjects.

In her introduction to *Making Face/Making Soul*, Anzaldúa speaks about the blank spaces of white racism that white Western cultural patriarchy practices. “Whites not naming themselves white presume their universality; an unmarked race is a sign of Racism unaware of itself, a ‘blanked-out’ Racism” (xxi). The logic of markedness Anzaldúa puts to work here means that white Western patriarchy in whatever guise—Anglo American cultural institutions, Anglo feminism, Chicano culture,

etc.—takes itself as the class with the least distinctive empirical features: the most transparent and self-evident class of people such that without a second thought it is worthy to present the essential criterion for defining other classes of people.⁷ Anzaldúa's effective pinpointing of this duplicity in the Western logos, Enlightenment Reason in a certain juncture in modernity, is a source of great spiritual and critical energy, allowing her to live her life in dynamic tensions, both reconciled to and at odds with her cultures.

At the close of chapter two in *Borderlands*, as the experiment in cultural critique begins to make a transition to the next chapter, a stylistic choice Anzaldúa makes can be read as a syntactic icon of the *intersticios* the new *mestiza/la mujer indocumentada*, occupies. “Not me sold out my people but they me” (22). The non-canonical syntax puts an object pronoun in subject position, and the predicate *sold out* controls a gap between the pronouns *they* and *me*. That is, the predicate *sold out* is both audible and inaudible and in the Chicano cultural frame it evokes, it is what keeps the pronouns *they* and *me* both apart and together. Anzaldúa rigorously insists upon the compromised status of culture and cultures in the postmodern condition: the empirical fact that no culture can claim to study another culture from an independent scientific standpoint.

The third element of the genre of autobiography, *graphein*, is always the impossible alignment of an *aute* with a *bios*, and in chapters 3 and 4 the reader joins in the misalignments. The psychoanalytic dimension of reading connects the reader and writer of autobiography, as the misalignments of self and life that take place at the scene of writing re-duplicate themselves at the scene of reading. Olney tracks this trail of confusion: “The study of how autobiographers have done this—how they discovered, asserted, created a self in the process of writing it out—requires the reader or student of autobiography to participate fully in the process, so that the created self becomes, at one

remove, almost as much the reader's as the author's" (24). "Entering into the Serpent" and "*La Herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State*," chapters 3 and 4, comprise a critique of Freudian psychoanalysis and its proposition that anatomy is destiny. In the place of Oedipus the King, Anzaldúa puts *Coatlicue*; in the place of symptoms, she puts the *Coatlicue* state of the body. Such displacements and replacements performed at the scene of writing do not so much pit Jung against Freud as exploits them both. Neither is psychoanalysis *per se* rejected, only its embodiment as Oedipus the King.

The image of the Shadow-Beast looms large in "Entering into the Serpent," performatively evoking that zone or mode of consciousness that can take in all the *mestizaje* of daily life in the polis (Kristeva), but now it wants to bare everything—from *la rajadura* of the body to its *rajadura* in consciousness as *la facultad*. Entering the serpent for Anzaldúa involves a movement into a dynamic picture of life in which it is not Oedipus's obsessive search for the truth of his origins that structures the ego and its unconscious but the body of the new *mestiza* itself that does this—a different historical drama that begins in the general sentiment and tacit agreement that women's bodies are objects of fear, repression by the state, and exploitation by capital. Here, the source of conflict comes from the state when it meets with the patriarchal family. In this nexus of state, family, and capital, the new *mestiza* must put into practice a tolerance for ambiguity so that she can 'see through' the cultural nexus she occupies and contest the arbitrary power relations that look down upon her simply because she is born with one body rather than another. The *rajadura* that splits her body as woman is also the *rajadura* that opens up unto a critical vision of life. Confronting the power relations undergirding the state and the family involves the deployment of *la facultad*: the ability to sense danger in whatever guise or form, whether it is a rapist a block away or an entrenched discursive

formation such as Western psychoanalysis. “I know things older than Freud, older than gender”, declares Anzaldúa (26). What is this knowledge older than Freud and gender? The answer appears to be that anatomy is not destiny. One’s sex organs need not determine one’s identity in the symbolic order.

When Anzaldúa collates history with myth through her representations of the composite image of the Shadow-Beast/snake-*víbora*, *Coatlalopeuh/Guadalupe*, she indexes the power relations that overthrow the matriarchy of pre-Aztec society and desexualize *Coatlalopeuh/Tonantsin/Guadalupe*. In both Althusserian and Lacanian senses of the real, the new *mestiza* has to confront real power relations in her in daily life in order to write theory in the flesh. In her metaphorical propositions that the body is a serpent, the serpent is the earth and the trick is to put feathers on this serpent, Anzaldúa constructs the ironic possibility of unity. Although Enlightenment Reason declares spirit the antithesis of matter, Anzaldúa name this antithesis a form of violence, adducing that such a split also splits mind and body, subject and object. In response, she advocates the exercise of *la facultad*, which calls the new *mestiza* to practice sensitivity to every relay or pulsation she receives in and from the body. The exercise of *la facultad* leads the new *mestiza* into all the dangers of sexual politics, confronting at once the empirical issue of violence against women and the metaphysical deconstructions of the self. The mind/body split, spirit/matter alienation, and subject/object dichotomy are all at the root of such violence.

A paradoxical stylistic choice shows up in “*La Herencia de Coatlicue*” to denote the complexity Anzaldúa wants to provoke with the project of rewriting the unconscious with an archetype that does not automatically put women in a role that essentializes her life/*bios* into an object, and a secondary one at that: “Let the wounds caused by the

serpent be cured by the serpent” (46). The second person address is epic and biblical, evocative in all senses of the word. *La facultad* must recognize and misrecognize its own wounding and healing, its own being as cause and effect on the path to its political liberation. Exercising *la facultad* requires the new *mestiza* to seize upon the pulsations she senses in her body in order both to make unities and break them down. Anzaldúa seems adamant in all her writing about the necessity of the new *mestiza* to deploy the unconscious as a body on behalf of her daily self-revolution, her “*oposición e insurrección*” (51). A moment of completeness/*jouissance* funds this constant duty: “...suddenly I feel everything rushing to a center, a nucleus. All the lost pieces of myself come flying from the deserts and the mountains and the valleys, magnetized toward that center. *Completa*” (73)” Her *jouissance* secures an access to language and funds a critical project.

Chapter 5, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” turns the tenets of sociolinguistics against the prescriptions of traditional grammar as it descends from the Liberal Arts trivium. In ironic *mestiza*-style, Anzaldúa takes the role of linguist to articulate a low theory of language in opposition to the ideology that regards linguistic forms as having linguistic essence. In place of the abstract opposition between essence and non-essence, Anzaldúa writes in a *mestizaje* of codes, social and linguistic. When Anzaldúa declares in constative language: “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (59), to take the copula as an essential predication is to miss the performative side. Like the “Let” of the *Coatlicue* state, the “I am” of linguistic identity erases itself as it plays with cultural codes of authority. In Anzaldúa’s ironic equation the new *mestiza* always already encounters her life as a *mestizaje* of cultural codes, never just one. The idea that language confers identity has to wrestle with the varieties of language and their

interplay throughout the realm of culture where identity is formed—the symbolic order. “Let” and “I am” cannot really be self-identical until the imperative force of “Let” is actually satisfied---the new *mestiza* bares all her nakedness in her writing. Her body bare, the unconscious yields to something older than Freud, the days of the matriarchy. That absence is part of the subject of the “I am” and for that subject to call back those days it must write. War and politics are two sides of the same coin, as politics are war by other means.

I read Chapter 6 as an extended meditation on autobiography’s third element, the writing/graphing of life. “*Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*” works within the circle of self-reflexivity. It invests writing with the value of providing a variety of ways to arrive at the limits of language. Storytelling will take you there, as will high and low art, modern or postmodern. What Plato would have called a dithyrambic state clearly qualifies as it approximates the Shamanic state (perhaps even *Coatlicue*). In its sensuous aspect, writing takes you there and becomes the very principle by which the new *mestiza* ties herself down to the earth on her own terms. Writing makes her material: “For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone---and from the Earth’s body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my sufferings, are my Aztec blood sacrifices” (75). The plane of immanent critique has necessary ties to the real of writing, as does the last chapter: “*La consciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*”, wherein *Mestizaje* gets its fullest treatment. Anzaldúa celebrates the synthesizing powers of *mestiza* consciousness as well as points to its limits. As with Western theory, *mestiza*

consciousness is susceptible to all the dangers of essentializing identity, losing sight of the arbitrary. It is possible to commodify the borderlands and no doubt this has happened. The decade in which Anzaldúa pens *Borderlands* is one episode in the history of NAFTA and the long history of GATT (Ortiz-Gonzalez, Eckes and Zeiler). Every turn in the page confronts the reader with the breakdown of unity as a Western metaphysical category—the very stuff of ideology. *Mestiza* consciousness is a choice to be different, queer in an older usage. When Anzaldúa calls out, “People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying” (107), she is calling out to all of America to think the differences, accept the different as part of the same. *Mestiza* consciousness elaborates on difference, lives and writes off of it. The genre of autobiography is taken to the limits of the self and the literary construction of a life, for now it is charged with the pact not just to tell the truth but also to elaborate the differences (Lejeune 1975). This project will keep the new *mestiza* at work for a long time to come engaging the social and economic forces that keep her from the social act of writing and away from her arts, as it did Anzaldúa.

¹ Quotations taken from this interview are taken from the forthcoming *Temas y Discursos: Interviews with Chicana and Chicano Writers of the Postmodern*, 1990-2003. Austin: University of Texas Press. Future references will be cited as *Interviews*.

² If the history of genre attests to anything, it attests to a certain inability on the part of writers from classical times forward to keep genres pure—the law of genre as Horace coined it (Farrell 392). Indeed, one might take the history of genre and the disposition of writers to mix genres as one more sign that postmodernity is not a simple linear concept in Western history and historiography but a complex repository of Western memory, an archive of all the materials available to writers at any given cultural moment. This synchronic view of the postmodern might go some distance towards explaining why current literary theory on genre observes that the features defining a text as postmodern are *revenants* haunting contemporary literary production. In his essay “Do Postmodern Genres Exist?” Ralph Cohen observes this aspect of postmodern genres, pointing out that such features as multiple discourses, narrative discontinuity, ironic self-reference, etc.,

have been present in Western literary discourse since the 18th century (Cohen 11-25). Cohen raises the question of postmodern genres not only to answer it in the affirmative but also to offer a program of inquiry into genre history and theory. The issue as he expostulates it “is not a matter of multiple subjects or discontinuous narration, but of the shift in the kinds of ‘transgressions’ and in the implications of the revised combinations” (Cohen 16). In this respect, what Anzaldúa does with the genre of autobiography forms part of a history of literary transgressions. But while the Western American academy accepts the proposition that literary genres come mixed, it is not used to accepting these transgressions from women writers and far less from Chicana lesbians.

³ See Pollins and Schweller (1999) who correlate these boom and bust cycles in the American economy with aggressive, imperial, foreign policy.

⁴ This study does not take up Anzaldúa’s poetry, which is another project unto itself.

⁵ See Torres (2000) for a compilation of these reviews.

⁶ See Gemes (1992) for an excellent exposition of the problem of subjectivity in all theory construction from the standpoint of Nietzsche’s critique of truth.

⁷ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) incorporate this logic of markedness into their sublation/account of postmodern Empire. Relying on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, they assert: “White supremacy functions rather through first engaging alterity and subordinating differences according to degrees of deviance from whiteness” (194). See also Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* when they say: “Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them [and] the principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition that the Enlightenment holds against the mythic imagination, is the principle of myth itself” (9).