Gloria Anzaldúa was born in the ranch settlement of Jesús María of the Valley in south Texas, where her parents, Mexican Americans Urbano and Amalia García Anzaldúa, farmed with several other families. She has a sister and two brothers. As she explains in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987; excerpted here), Anzaldúa grew up in a linguistically rich environment, learning several dialects of Spanish and English and some Nahua, an indigenous language of Mexico. In 1953 the family moved to Hargill, Texas, a tiny farming community, to look for better employment. Anzaldúa’s parents had no more than an elementary school education. However, her father valued education highly, especially for his sons, and he refused migrant farm work because he did not want his children to miss school. Anzaldúa’s father died when she was fifteen. While her mother held a job as a nurse’s aide, Anzaldúa worked in the fields to help support the family, continuing through high school and through college at Pan American University, where she took a B.A. in 1969. Anzaldúa has said that from an early age, she felt at odds with her family, who did not approve of her love for reading, writing, and drawing and who were shocked by her emerging lesbian identity. Her family opposed her seeking higher education, believing that it was not appropriate for women and that she could provide more financial help to the family by staying at work full time. Anzaldúa explains: “I was the only woman, not just the only woman, the only person from the area who ever went to college.” Anzaldúa persevered, going on to earn an M.A. in English and art education from the University of Texas at Austin in 1972. She then began teaching the children of migrant workers in Texas and Indians who traveled a route between the two states. From 1974 to 1977 she enrolled in the comparative literature program at the University of Texas at Austin but left without completing her Ph.D. because she was not allowed to write her thesis on feminist Chicana literature. While at the University of Texas, Anzaldúa studied with historian James Field, who first encouraged her to write in the mixture of languages and styles found in *Borderlands* and who, she says, also served as a role model for her of someone “who crosses back and forth between insider and outsider” in the academy. So that she could pursue graduate work in Chicana studies, Anzaldúa moved to the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1979. She still lives in Santa Cruz and has taught at the university and various other schools in California and at Vermont College of Norwich University, where, she has said, the experience of feeling like a “foreigner” in New England prompted her to write *Borderlands*. Anzaldúa has become a well-known poet and woman of letters, frequently reading her work around the country and publishing numerous essays and poems in literary journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*, a periodical focusing on lesbian issues. She has served on the editorial board of that journal since 1984. Anzaldúa has also edited two collections of writing by women of color, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, coedited with Cherrie Moraga (1981), which won the 1985 Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, and *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990). Both anthologies have become standard texts in women’s studies courses. Her 1987 collection of her own essays and poems, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, is generally considered to be her most important work and one of the most important works in twentieth-century feminist theory. Scholars are beginning to recognize this book’s significance for women’s language and rhetoric.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa pioneers the use of new discursive resources for women writers, particularly women of color, by mixing dialects of English and Spanish, analytic and autobiographical material, and formal and fictional genres. Chicano scholar Hector Torres characterizes the mix in this way: “Anzaldúa shows herself conversant in several of the standard academic ‘codes’—such as critical theory, history, and sociolinguistics—but, not satisfied with any single one of them, she chooses to blend them into her own polyvalent voice. The result is an auto-biographical work that...upends the traditional prohibition against mixing genres, functions as both literary and referential discourse.” Torres and composition scholar Andrea Lunsford has called this mixed discourse a “mestiza rhetoric,” with “mestiza” referring not only to the specific racial and cultural mixing that has produced the Mexican American people, but also to a more generalized concept of cultural multiplicity, or complex identity, that is expressed in language drawn from a variety of cultural sources. Lunsford describes Anzaldúa’s “new kind of writing style” in this way: “She shifts from poetry to reportorial prose to autobiographical stream of consciousness to literary mythic chants to sketches and graphs and back again, weaving images from her multiple selves and from many others into a kind of tapestry or patchwork quilt of language.” Mestiza rhetoric deals with a condition Anzaldúa analyzes as “nepantla,” from an Aztec word meaning “torn between ways”: She sees mestiza rhetoric as a way to repair, without erasing, the internal rips, that is, to make internal multiplicity into a positive discursive resource. As Anzaldúa explains it, “It’s a hybridity, a mixture, because I live in this liminal state in between worlds, in between realities, in between systems of knowledge, in between symbology systems. This liminal, borderland, terrain or passageway, this interface, is what I call Nepantla.”

Chicana studies scholar Yvonne Nuño-Bejarano and women’s studies scholar Jane Halley both defend Anzaldúa from the charges leveled by some Chicano and Chicana critics that her project in *Borderlands* is not sufficiently political. Halley

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“Quoted in Engel, p. 19.

“Quoted in Torres, p. 13.

“Lunsford, p. 2.

“Lunsford, p. 10.

“Lunsford, p. 17; emphasis in original.”
and Yarbro-Bejarano both argue that Anzaldúa describes and fosters a process of self-formation that treats cultural multiplicity, present even in the cultural diversity of Mexican-American society, and that Anzaldúa views her own experience of mestizaje as a necessity prerequisite to the self-confidence needed for collective political action against racism, sexism, and homophobia. Literary scholar Ana Luisa Keating would agree; she finds many similarities between Anzaldúa’s work and that of Hélène Cixous (p. 1525) in Anzaldúa’s concept of mestiza escritura — but sees Anzaldúa as more free than Cixous from charges of essentialism because of the political slant of her work. At the same time, Yarbro-Bejarano has warned against attacking Anzaldúa from her specific Chicana context, because white feminists must acknowledge the sorts of racial loyalties that inform her work and because to do so would be irresponsible scholarship given the influences on her of earlier women thinkers of color who have articulated concepts of multiple identity. Nevertheless, scholars agree that Anzaldúa calls for conditions among all people who want to fight oppression, whether they are gay or straight, white or of color, and that she also allows her theory of mestiza consciousness to be used to help explicate the socially constructed nature of all identity and the implications of such constructed identities for language use.

Anzaldúa is committed to mixing art and politics and very aware that this agenda highlights the need to communicate effectively across cultural, sexual, and class boundaries. She understands that mestiza rhetoric must be deployed tactically:

OK, if I write in this style and I code-switch too much and I go into Spanglish too much and I do an associative kind of logical progression in a composition, am I going to lose those people that I want to affect, to change? am I going to lose the respect of my peers— who are other writers and other artists and other academicians— when I change too much? When I change not only the style, but also the rhetoric, the way that this is done?

As Andrea Lunsford has said, “One of the reasons work like yours is so important to the future of composition studies is that it gives concrete evidence of many voices in a text, many voices speaking out of who you are, many voices that you allow to speak.” Anzaldúa has shown that one can do such switching and mixing while communicating very powerfully.

Selected Bibliography

Anzaldúa’s major publications are her two anthologies, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1981), coedited with Cherríe Moraga, and Making Faces, Making Souls/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color (1990), and the collection of her own work, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), from which the excerpts printed here are taken. Biographical information on Anzaldúa can be gained from her essay, “La Prieta,” in This Bridge Called My Back; from Héctor A. Torres’s entry on her in the Dictionary of Literary


Andrea Lunsford’s introduction to the interview cited above explains the significance of Anzaldúa’s work to rhetoric. For commentary on Chicana and Chicana response to Anzaldúa’s work, and for analysis of the relationship between mixed internal identity and mixed discourse, see Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, “Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: Critical Studies, ‘Difference,’ and the Non-Urban Subject” (Cultural Critique 28 [fall 1994]: 5–38), and June Hechel, “Nepantlia: Poets’ Narrative and Cultural Identity in the Mixteco, Moreel, and Otomi Languages” (Chicana Studies 4 [January 1996]: 35–54). Comparing Anzaldúa’s work to that of Paula Gunn Allen and Andre Lorde, two other feminists of color with similar “border-crossing” theoretical concerns, as well as to the work of Hélène Cixous, is Ana Luisa Keating’s Women Reading Women Writing (1996).

From Borderlands/La Frontera

HOW TO TAME A WILD TONGUE

“We’re going to have to control your tongue,” the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my roots. I get a whiff of the starch when I gasp. “I can’t cap that tooth yet, you’re still draining,” he says.

“We’re going to have to do something about your tongue,” I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of catarina pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. “I’ve never seen anything as strong or as stubborn,” he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?

Who is to say that rebelling a people of its language is less violent than war?

—RAY GWYN SMITH

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. “If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong.”

“I want you to speak English. Pa’ hablar bien trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent,’” my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I and all Chicanos students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents.

Attacks on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. The Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua. Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out.

Overcoming the Tradition of Silence

Ahoogals, escupimos el oscuro. Peloendo con nuestra propia sombra el silencio nos sepulta.

En boca cerrada no entra mosca. “Flies don’t enter a closed mouth” is a saying I kept hearing.
When I was a child, *ser habladora* was to be a gossipy and a liar—talk too much. Muchachitas bien criadas, well-bred girls don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, hablar pa'l reloj, repelena, chismosa, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being mal criada. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory to applied to women—I've never heard them applied to men.

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word *notogras*, I was shocked. I had not known that we had Spanish women or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

And our tongues have become dry the wilderness has dried out our tongues and we have forgotten our speech.

---Irena Klephisz

Even our own people, other Spanish speakers nos quieren poner candados en la boca. They would hold us back with their bag of reglas de academia.

**Oye como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera**

*Quien tiene boca se equivoca.*

—Mexican saying


*Pecho, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're running the Spanish language.* I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas, Chicanos of Spanish. Spanish is considered by the priest and by most Latinos deficient, a mutation of Spanish. But Chicanos Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, evolución, evolución de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción have created variants of Chicanos Spanish, un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corre...

---Irena Klephisz, *Diario de un viaje* (The Journey Diary), in *Chicana Landscape: A Pintura and the Rights of the Other*, by Melissa de la Torre, p. 31.

...a modo de vivir. Chicanos Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language. For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language, for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo, for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish or standard English, what recourse is left to them to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni inglés, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a connection of two languages.

Chicanos Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish and Standard English
4. Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicanos Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. Pachuco (called cafio)

My "home" tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6, 7 and 8 being closest to me. From school, the media and job situations, I've picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Loicha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I've picked up Standard Spanish and standard Mexican Spanish. From los reyes de la ciudad, Mexican immigrants, and braceros, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I'll try to speak either Standard Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents, and my grandparents, I picked up Chicas Spanish.

Younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts and older relatives.

With Chicanos from Nuevo México or Arizona I will speak Chicanos Spanish a little, but often they don't understand what I'm saying. With most Californios Chicanos I speak entirely in English (unless I get drunk). When I first moved to San Francisco, I'd rattle off some in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana regresa that I can talk freely.

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms of pachucos. *Pacho* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English. *Tex-Mex*, or *Spanglish*, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother, I sometimes speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up Pachuco, *pachuco* (the language of the outcasts) is a language of rebellion in direct opposition of Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. *Raza* means girl or woman, *vara* means gay, *ida* means yes, *toma* means to talk, *periquero* means petting, *gacha* means how nerdy, *ponte apurado* means watch out, death is called la pena. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the Pachuco tongue.

**Chicanos Spanish**

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as malo/mal, cohetete. We leave out certain consonants when they appear between vowels: ladillo/allo, nojado/nojo. Chicanos use "archaisms," words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say "sema, true, hora, hora, aguacate, agua, agua". We retain the "ar-" and "al-": *jaral* from *jaral* (the French jalais or the Germanic jalich which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majesty of the Spanish tongue is a voice from the Southwest. Hernán Cortés was one of them—and Andalucia. Andalucianos pronounce *ll* like a y, and their d's tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: *tirao* becomes *tirao* They brought the *language popular, dialects and regionalisms*.

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift *ll* to *y* and *z* to *s*. We leave out initial syllables, y los por estar, oy por estar, hora por estar (cuando y cuándo and also leave out initial letters of some words.) We also leave out the final syllable such as *pa para.* The intertropical *le* and *la* becomes *ella, ella, botella,* get replaced by *torta and torita, en, en.* We add an additional syllable at the end of certain words, *te vocar to vocar, agasar to agasar.* Sometimes we'll say *lavaste las vacas,* other times *lavastas* (substituting the *tes* verb endings for the *aste*.

We use anglicisms, words borrowed from English: *beda from bar, carpeta from carpet, mática de lavar* (instead of lavadora) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word, as cockerel for *gallina,* watch for watch, parkir for parkir, and rapiir for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English.

We don’t use the word vosotros/as or its accompanying verb forms. We don’t say claro (to) understand, imagine, or me emociona, unless we mean we understand, imagine, or me emociona, unless we pick up Spanish from Latinas, out of a book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

Linguistic Terrorism

Deslenguasado. Someo los del espectro de defecto.

We are your linguistic nurturers, your linguisticParsed error: if you were to give us your 20-something’s turtleneck, we’d say it’s not fit for you. Because we speak with tongues of fire, we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically, we are the most fluent because we have no language.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chico Americanos have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differently against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I thought that if I said it out, then it didn’t have to be true. To be closer to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there. Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Racial terms like speaking in tongues diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.

Chicas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in our countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a first language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latino, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with mexicanos y latinas we speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or events. Yet, at the same time, we’re press each other trying out Chicanas each other, ying and yang, to the “real” Chicanas, to speak like Chicanas. There is no one Chicanas language as there is no one Chicanas identity. Chicanas whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicanas is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes because French is considered more “cult.” But for a language to remain alive it must be used.6 By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinas.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in myself, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicanas Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilinkually, and to use words without having all the ways to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue, my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

My fingers
more shy against your palm
Like women everywhere, we speak in code...


"Vistas," corridos, y comida: My Native Tongue

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was City of Night by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I went to the Pan American Bookstore, I was surprised to see a bilingual book by a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in—the Thursday night special of $1.50 a carload, the sense of belonging. "Vamos a las vistas," my mother would call out and we’d all—grandmother, brothers, sister and cousins—squeal into the car. We’d fold down cheese and bologna white bread sandwiches with looking Pedro Infante in melodramatic tear-jerkers like Nosotros los pobres, the first "real" Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing Cuando los hijos se separan and uprising of the people. That many of us movies played up the love a mother has for her children and that unworthy sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing type "westerns" of Jorge Negrete and Miguel Aceves Mejia. When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn’t go to Mexican movies, or befalls or tune their radios to bolero, rancherita, and corrido music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was norteno music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicanos, or cantina (bar) music. I grew up listening to corridos, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, bajo sexto, drums and button accordion, which Chicanos had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernandez were popular, and Flaco Jimenez was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who turned had borrowed the polkas from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when corridos—songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands— reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local cantinas and wafted into my bedroom window.

Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas/Mexicano border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The corridos are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa’s song, “La escaramuza,” is the most famous corrido. Of John F. Kennedy and his death is still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border corrido singers who was called la Gloria de Texas, my mother’s period song during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The present corridos narrate one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as entertaining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural myth-makers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status.
Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?"

Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experiences of the self inside.

—KAUFMAN

Nostreros los Chicanos straddle the borders. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don't say nostreros los americanos, o nostreros los españoles, o nostreros los hispanos. We say nostreros los mexicanos. By mexicanos we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one. We distinguish between mexicanos del otro lado and mexicanos de este lado. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of race, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but Aztecs like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres.
(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.) —Mexican saying

Si te preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?" te diré, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sisters say the same. I sometimes will answer "soy mexicana" and at others will say "soy Chicana" o "soy tejana." But I identified as "Raza" before I ever identified as "mexicana" o "Chicana."

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when coping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70-80% Indian.

We call ourselves Hispanico(1) or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when coping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American(2) to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican." (And when coping out.

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-Chicano cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicananness or Anglosness. I have so internalized the borderconflict that sometimes I feel the scales cancel out the other and we are nothing, no one. A veve.

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up, we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant norteamericano culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the months the centuries the oars until the white laws and commerce and customs will not in the deserts they've created, lie bleached. Humildes

do no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.

When not coping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly even consider our Black ancestry); Chicanos when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; Raza when referring to Chicanos; tejanos when we are Chicanos from Texas.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers united and I Am Joaquín was published and la Raza Unda party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people.

Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul when we became aware of reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we have a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, what we had achieved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integra tion take place. The meantime, tendemos que hacer la lucha. ¿Quién está protegiendo los ranchos de mi gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la frontera entre la India y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, si, el Chicano que anda como un ladrón en su propia casa.

yet proud, quieto y valiente, nosotros los mexicanos-Chicanos will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, irrepentable as stone, yet possessing a malfeasibility that renders us unbreakable, we, the mestizos and mestizos, will remain.

TLILLI, TLIAPPALI

THE PATH OF THE RED AND BLACK INK

Out of poverty, poverty,...

—A Mexican saying

When I was seven, eight, nine, fifteen, sixteen years old, I would read-on bed with a flashlight under the covers, hiding my self-imposed insomni a from my mother. I preferred the world of the imagination to the death of nowhere and space along the side of the pickup no matter how fast he was driving.

Nudge a Mexican and she or he will break out with a story. So, puddling under the covers, I make up stories for my sister night after night. After a while she wanted two stories per night. I learned to give her installments, building up the suspense with convoluted complications until the almost midnight several hours on. It must have been then that I decided to put stories on paper. It must have been then that working with images and writing became connected to night.

Invoking Art

In the ethno-poetics and performance of the sham an, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the
secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined. Before the 18th century, poetry gathered to play music, dance, sing and read poetry in open air places around the Xochicuilco, el Arbor Florido, "Tree-in-Flower." (The Cofaxihuhtli or morning glory is called the snake plant and its seeds, known as cleistogamie, are hallucinogenic.)

The ability of cross (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is also a shaman, a shaman.

In looking at this book that I am almost finished writing, I see a mosaic pattern (Aztec-like) emerging, a weaving pattern, thin here, thick there. I see a preoccupation with the deep structure, the underlying pattern that is red earth, black earth. I can see the deep structure, the scaffolding. If I can get all the bone structure right, then putting flesh on it proceeds without too many hitches. The problem is that the bones often do not exist prior to the flesh, but are shaped after a vague and broad shadow of its form is discerned or uncovered during beginning, middle and final stages of the writing. Numerous overlays of paint, rough surfaces, smooth surfaces make what I am doing occupied with texture as well. Too, I see the barely contained color threatening to spill over the boundaries of the object it represents and into other "objects" and over the borders of the frame. I see a hybridization of metaphors, different species of ideas of exploring up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions, though I believe in an ordered, structured universe where all phenomena are interconnected and imbued with spirit. This common found product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has had a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will. It is a rebellious, willful entity, a precocious girl child.

forced to grow up too quickly, rough, unyielding, with pieces of feather sticking out here and there, fur, twigs, clay. My child, but not for much longer. This female being is angry, sad, joyous. Let us light a candle—a clumsy, complex, groping blind thing—for me it is alive, infused with spirit. I talk to it; it talks to me.

I make my offerings of incense and cracked corn, light my candle. In my head I sometimes will say a prayer—an affirmation and a voicing of intent. Then I run water, wash the dishes or my underthings, take a bath, or mop the kitchen floor. This "induction" period sometimes takes a few minutes or sometimes hours. But always I go against a resistance. Something in me does not want to do this writing. Yet once I am immersed in it, I can go fifteen to seventeen hours in one sitting and I don't want to leave it.

My "stories" are acts encamped in time, "enacted" every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as "sacred" objects (as is the case with the Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a "who" or a "what" and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic forces. The work manifests the same needs as a person, it needs to be "fed," to tango que beber y vestir.

When invoked in the room, the object/event is "present," that is, "enacted," is it both a physical thing and the power that infuses it. It is meta-physical in that it "spins its energies between gods and humans" and it task is to move the gods. This type of work dedicates itself to managing the unmanageable and its energies. I'm not sure what it is when it is at rest (not in performance). It may or may not be a "work" then. A mask may only have the power of presence during a ritual dance and the rest of the time it may merely be a "thing." Some works exist forever invoked, always in performance. I'm thinking of totem poles, cave paintings. Invoked art is communal and speaks of everyday life. It is dedicated to the joyous and hopeful, happy, secure, and it can have negative effects as well, which propel one towards a search for validation.

The aesthetic of virtuosity, art typical of Western European cultures, attempts to manage the energies of its own internal system conflicts, harmonics, resonances and balances. It bears the presences of qualities and internal meanings. It is dedicated to the validation of itself, its task is to move humans by means of achieving mastery in content, technique, feeling. Western art is always whole and always "in power." It is individual (not communal). It is "psychological" in that it spins its energies between itself and its witness.

Western cultures behave differently toward works of art than do tribal cultures. The "sacri- fices" Western cultures make are in housing their art works in the best structures designed by the best architects; and in servicing them with insurance, guards to protect them, conservators to maintain them, specialists to mount and display them, and educate upper classes to "view" them. Tribal cultures keep art works in honored and sacred places in the home and elsewhere. They attend them by making sacrifices of blood (goat, horse, rhino), libations of wine. They feed, clothe and clothe them. The works are not treated just as objects, but also as persons. The "witness" is a participant in the enactment of the work in a ritual, and not a member of the privileged class.

Ethnocentrism is the tyranny of Western aesthetics. An Indian mask in an American museum is transposed into an alien aesthetic system where what is missing is the presence of power invoked through personpower invoked through otherpower. It has become a conquered thing, a dead "thing" separated from nature and, therefore, its power.

Modern Western painters have "borrowed," copied, or otherwise extrapolated the art of tribal cultures and called it cubism, surrealism, symbolism. The music, the beat of the drum, the Blacks' jive talk. All taken over. Whites, along with a good number of our own people, have cut themselves off from their spiritual roots, and they take our spiritual art objects in an unconscious at- tempt to get them back. If they're going to do it, I'd like them to be aware of what they are doing and go at doing it the right way. Let's all stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent.

White America has only attended to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to ascend it or to be nurtured in it. Instead of assuritpiciously rip- ping off the vital energy of people of color and putting it to commercial use, whites could allow themselves to share and manage and learn from the respectful way. By taking up cura- terismo, Santeria, shamanism, Taoism, Zen and otherwise delving into the spiritual life and ceremo- nies of multi-colored people. Anglos would perhaps lose the white face sterility they have in their kitchens, bathrooms, mortuaries and missile bases. Though in the conscious mind, black and dark may be associated with death, evil and destruction, in the subconscious mind and in our dreams, what is associated with black may be hope in the left hand, that of darkness, of femaleness, of "primitive- ness," can divert the indifferent, right-handed, "na- tional" suicidal drive that, unchecked, could blow us into acid rain in a fraction of a millisecond.

Ncucianti, I, the Singer

For the ancient Aztec, tlachtli, tlacuilo, la tinca negra y roja de sus célebres papeles, in that black and red ink painted on paper (nahuatl) were the colors symbolizing escritura y sabiduría (writing and wisdom). They believed that through metaphor and syn- boles, by means of poetry and truth, communi- cation with the Divine could be achieved, and that (which is above) - the gods and spirit world- could be bridged with mictlan (that which is below - the underworld and the region of the dead).

9Armstrong, 10 [B3].
10 Armstrong, 10 [A4]. It is in this respect that it makes people
Poet: she pours water from the mouth of the pump, lowers the handle. Their lift it, lowers, lifts. Her hands begin to feel me pull from the entrails, the live animal resisting. A sigh rises up from the depths, the handle becomes a wild thing in her hands, the cold sweat gathers out, splashing her face, the shock of nighttime filling the bucket.

An 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.

The Shamanic State

When I create stories in my head, that is, allow the voices and scenes to be projected in the inner screen of my mind, I “tame.” I used to think I was going crazy or that I was having hallucinations. But now I realize it is my job, my calling, to traffic in images. Some of these film-like narratives I write down; most are lost, forgotten. When I don’t write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious and because some of the images I do resist and traumas which I have reconstitute, I sometimes get sick when I do write. I can’t stomach it, become nauseous, or burn with fear, worse. But, in reconstituting the traumas behind the images, I make “sense” of them, and once they have “meaning,” they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy.

To facilitate the “movies” with soundtracks, I need to be alone, or in a sensory-deprived state. I will plug up my ears with wax, put on my black velvet eye-shades, lie horizontal and unmoving, in a state between sleeping and waking, mind and body locked into my fantasy. I am held prisoner by it. My body is experiencing events. In the beginning it is like being in a movie theater, as pure spectator. Gradually I become so engrossed with the activities, the conversations, that I become a participant in the drama. I have to struggle to “disengage” or escape from my “animated reverie.”

Writing Is a Sensuous Act

Talro mi cuerpo como si estuviera levantando un trago. Toco las salidas venas de mis manos, mis chichas adornadas como pújaros a la anochecer. Estoy encerrada sobre la cama. Las imágenes, aletudos alrededor de mi como murciélagos, la sábana como que rutilase alas. El rullo de los trenes subterráneos en mi sentido como conchas. Parece que las paredes del cuarto se me arrinan cada vez más cercanas.

Picking out images from my soul’s eye, fishing for the right words to recreate the images. Words are blades of grass pushing past the obstacles, sprounting on the page; the spirit of the words moving itself and being as concrete as land and as palpable: the hunger to create is as substantial as fingers and hand.

I look at my fingers, see plumes growing there. From the fingers, my feathers, black and red ink drip across the page. Escribe con la tinta de mi sangre. I write in red. Ink. Intimately knowing the smooth touch of paper, its speechlessness before I spill myself on the insides of trees. Daily, I battle the silence and the red. Daily, I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and soul sore from the constant struggle.

Something to Do with the Dark

Quien cantas, sus males expresa.

un dicho

The toad comes out of its hiding place inside the lobes of my brain. It’s going to happen again. The ghost of the toad that beseeched me I find it’s gone. The feel of it is slipping the strength from my veins, it’s sucking my pale heart. I am a dried serpent skin, wind scuttling me across the hard ground, pieces of me scattered over the countryside. And there in the dark I meet the crippled spider crawling in the gutter, the day-old newspaper fluttering in the dirty rain water.

Musas bruja, venga. Cuébre con una sábana y espante mis demonios.

Ojógame, musa bruja. ¿Porqué hoy estés en mi cara? Su grito me desarrolla de mi carcoma, me sacude el alma. Vieja, quierete de aquí con tus alas de navaja. Ya no me despéjade mi cara. Vaya con sus pituñas alas que me desgarran de los ojos hasta los talones. Váyese a la tiznada. Que no me coman, le digo. Que no me coman sus palabras halagadores.

Hija negra de la noche, carmala. ¿Por qué me sacas las tripas, por qué cardas mis entrañas? Este hilvanando palabras con tripas me está matando. Hija de la noche vete a la chingada!

Writing produces anxiety. Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being — the feeling of being queer a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen.

Living in a state of being as if in a Bordeletta, which makes poets write and artists create. It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh. It worries itself deeper and deeper, and I keep aggravating it by poking and poking. I begin to believe that I have no something to put an end to the aggravation and to figure out why I have it. I get deep down into the place where it’s rooted in my skin and pluck away at it, playing it like a musical instrument. If the fingers press down the pain worse before it can get better.

Then it comes out. No more discomfort, no more ambivalence. Until another needle pierces the skin. That’s what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be.

My flowers shall not cease to live; my songs shall never end:
I, a singer, intend them; they become scattered, they are spread abroad.

-Canciones mexicanos

To write, to be a writer, I have to trust and believe in myself as speaker, as a voice for the world. I have to believe that I can communicate the image.

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**Traducido por:**

El poeta deja de escribir, la historia se detiene. Los personajes se van, los hechos del pasado se desvanece y en el vacío se inicia la escritura. La escritura es un puente entre el mundo del sueño y el mundo de la conciencia. Las imágenes son las cadenas que sostienen el puente. Las imágenes son más directas, más inmediatas que las palabras y están más cerca del inconsciente. La literatura pictórica precede al pensamiento en palabras; el pensamiento metafórico precede al pensamiento analítico.

**El estado shamanico**

Cuando creas historias en tu cabeza, lo que haces es tener una “toma” de ellas, y una vez que tienen “sentido” son cambiantes, transformados. Es entonces cuando lo que escribe me cura, me hace sentir mejor.

Para facilitar el “movies” con overlays, necesitas estar solo, o en un estado de privación sensorial. Te taparás los oídos con cera, ponerte gafas de seda negra, te harás un estado horizontal y sin movimiento, en un estado entre dormir y estar despierto, mente y cuerpo bloqueados en mi fantasía. Te mantendrás encerrado en ello. Tu cuerpo está experimentando eventos. Al principio es como si estuvieras en un teatro de cine, como espectador puro. Gradualmente te vuelves tan absorbido por las actividades, las conversaciones, que te conviertes en un participante en el drama. Tienes que luchar para “desenganchar” o escapar de mis “animaciones”.

**Escribir es un acto sensuoso**

Tallo mi cuerpo como si estuviera levantando un trago. Toco las salidas venas de mis manos, mis chichas adornadas como pájaros a la anochecer. Estoy encerrada sobre la cama. Las imágenes, aletadas alrededor de mí como murciélagos, la sábana como que rutilase alas. El rullo de los trenes subterráneos en mi sentido como conchas. Parece que las paredes del cuarto se me arrinan cada vez más cercanas.

Aguja de mi propia sangre. Escribe con la tinta de la sangre. Escribe con la tinta de mi sangre. Tengo que escribir en rojo. Tinta. Intimamente sabiendo el toque suave de la página, su silencio antes de que caiga y se derrame sobre los árboles de mi mente. Día a día, lucha contra el silencio y la roja. Día a día, tomo mi garganta en mis manos y aprieto hasta que sale lo último que queda de mí, mi laringe y alma cansada por el constante esfuerzo.

**algo para hacer con el oscuro**

Quién canta, sus maless expresa.

un dicho

El sapo sale de su escondite dentro de las fosas de mi cerebro. Va a volver a suceder. El espíritu de la rana que me imploró en el silencio ha desaparecido. El placer de ella se desvanece de mis venas, me está tragando mi corazón. Soy un ser serpiente desencadenado, viento acariciando mi tierra dura, pedazos de mí dispersos por el campo. Y allí en la oscuridad, encuentro el ángel del paseo del traidor, el diario viejo volando en el agua sucia.

Musa bruja, venga. Cubré con una sábana y espante mis demonios.

¡Ojógame, musa bruja! ¿Por qué estás hoy en mi cara? Su grito me desarrolla de mi carcoma, me sacude el alma. Vieja, querete de aquí con tus alas de navaja. Ya no me despéjade mi cara. Vaya con sus pituñas alas que me desgarran de los ojos hasta los talones. Váyese a la tiznada. Que no me coman, le digo. Que no me coman sus palabras halagadoras.

Hija negra de la noche, carmala. ¿Por qué me sacas tus tripas, por qué cardas mis entrañas? Este hilvanando palabras con tripas me está matando. Hija de la noche vete a la chingada!

Escribir produce ansiedad. Mirando hacia adentro de mí mismo y mi experiencia, mirando a mis conflictos, engendra ansiedad en mí. Ser escritor se siente como — el sentimiento de que estás siendo — un gran quejido, un forzar, un luchar, una peligrosidad, una lucha contra las paredes.

Vivo en un estado en el que me siento como en un Borgoña, lo cual hace que los poetas escriban y los artistas creen. Es como un clavo de cactus en la piel. Lo que me empuja más adentro y me hace más profundamente enfermo, y yo lo empeño en agudizarlo aún más. Inicio a creer que no tengo nada que hacer para acabar con la angustia y poder entender por qué lo tengo. Me entiendo en el suelo donde está raíz en mi piel y lo arranco, jugando con él como un instrumento musical. Si los dedos presionan más, el dolor empeora antes de que pueda mejorar.

Entonces sale. Nada más incomoda, nada más ambivalencia. Hasta que otra aguja pene en mi piel. Eso es lo que es el escribir, una eterna rueda de hacerlo peor, hacerlo mejor, pero siempre haciendo sentido de la experiencia, cualquiera que sea.

Mis flores no deben extinguirse; mis canciones nunca terminarán:
Yo, un cantante, intención; se dispersan, se extienden.

— Canciones Mexicanas

Para escribir, para ser un escritor, tengo que confiar y creer en mí mismo como hablador, como voz del mundo. Tengo que creer que puedo comunicar la imagen.
LA CONCIENCIA DE LA MESTIZA
TOWARDS A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS
Por la mujer de mi raza
hablará el espíritu. 32
José Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, en-
visaged a raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas
africana, una raza de color —la primera raza sín-
tético del globo. He called it a cosmic race, the raza
cosmica, a fifth race embracing the four major
tales of the world. 33 Opposite to the theory of the
pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that
White America practices, his theory is one of
inclusiveness. At the conference of two or more
gente de raza, with chromosomal constant,
crossing over, this mixture of races, rather than
resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid
progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with
a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological,
cultural and biological cross-pollination, an
"aristocracy" of mestizos is presently in the
making—a new mestiza consciousness, a concien-
cia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Border-
lands.

Una lucha de fronteras
A Struggle of Borders

Because I, a mestiza,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
ambiguity among the races is unavoidable.
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy hartada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente.

The ambivalence from the clash of voices re-
results in mental and emotional states of perplexity.
Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisive-
ness. The mestiza’s dual or multiple personality
is plagued by psychic restlessness.

In a constant state of mental neapollitanism, an
Aztec word meaning torn between ways, la mes-
tiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and
spiritual values of one group to another. Being
tricultural, monolingual—Spanish, English, and
multilingual, speaking a patois—and in a state of perpetual
transition, la mestiza faces the dilemma of the
mixed breed: which collectivity does the daugh-
ter of a dark-skinned mother listen to?

El choque de un mundo amputado entre el
mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a
tiempo de la de la entumecida. Cradled in one culture,
sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all
three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza
undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of
orders, a inner war. Like all people, we perceive the
verticality of our culture communi-
cates. Like others having or living in more
one culture, we get multiple, often opposing
messages. The coming together of two self-conscious
habitually incompatible frames of reference causes
an echo, a cultural collision.

Within us and within la cultura chicana, com-
monly held beliefs of the white culture attack
commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture,
and both attempt to conquer, to impose their view of
the dominant culture. Subconsciously, we see an at-
ack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and
we attempt to block with a counterattack.

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite
riverbank, to offer shooting partitions, challenging
particular, white conventions. A counterattack locks
one into a duel of oppressor and oppressor:
locked in mortal combat, like the top the
criminal, both are reduced to a common language
of violence. Violence is a commonplace
The mestiza challenges the
preeminent culture’s ways, and
for that, it is proudly defiant. All restriction is
limited to, and dependent on, what it is reaching against.
Because the counterattack stems from the problem
with authority—other and as well as inner—it is a
step towards liberation from cultural domination.
But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way
to a new consciousness, we will have to
leave the opposite bank, the split between the
two mortal combatants somehow healed so that

32This is my own “take off” on Jose Vasconcelos’ idea.
José Vasconcelos, La Raza Cosmica: Misión de la Raza
Borica-Amerindia (México: Aguilar S.A. de Edic, 1901),
Day 1.

33Arturo Kohler termed this “browning.” Albert
Rothenberg, The Creative Process in Art, Science, and Other
Fields (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 12.
we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpents and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.

A Tolerance for Ambiguity

These numerous possibilities leave la mestiza floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are cemented habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual forms, forget certain thinking, analytical reasoning, and rethinking that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking,52 characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more horizontal, reflective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be like the Indian in Mexican culture, to be existential from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she understand contradictions, she turns ambivalence into something else.

As we are jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inveterates or resolves the ambivalence. I'm not sure exactly how. The work takes place underground—subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs. That focal point of Palenque, the 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 separate parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a mestiza consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from connecting the creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.

En unos pocos centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—a mestiza creates a new consciousness. The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white and the colors males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of a dualistic thinking is to create the individual and collective consciousness of a beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.

La encrucijada/The Crossroads

A chicken is being sacrificed at a crossroads, a simple mound of earth and mud Elaine for Esula. Yanah, god of indeterminacy, who blesses her choice of path. She begins her journey.

Su cuerpo es una bocacalle. La mestiza has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads.

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland casts me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disdain me, but I am all races because there is no other race in the world.) Because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced but is a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.

We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (re)volution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward. Nuestra alma el trabajo, the opus, the great work; spiritual mestiza, a “necrophagous,53” an inevitable unfolding. We have become the quickening serpent movement.

Indigenous like corn, like coca, the mestiza is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn—a female seed-bearing organ—the mestiza is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of our cultural heritage. She grows in the cob, with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads.

Lavando y removiendo el maiz en agua de cal, despojando el pellejo. Moliendo, mezclando, amasando, haciendo tortillas de masa.54 She steeped the corn in lime, it swells, softens. With stone roller on metate, she grinds the corn, then grinds again. She knows to and moulds the dough, puts it into balls into tortillas.

We are the porous rock in the stone metate squashing on the ground. We are the rolling pin, el mollete, the hungry mouth. We are the coarse rock. We are the grinding motion, the mixed potion, somos el molcajete. We are the pestle, el cimarron, pimienta. We are the chile colorado, the green shoot that cracks the rock. We will abide.

El camino de la mestiza/The Mestiza Way

Caught between the sudden contraction, the breath sucked in and the endless space, the brown woman stands still, looks at the sky. She decides to go down, digging herself long the roots of trees. Sifting through the bones, she shakess them to see if there is any marrow in them. Then, touching the dirt to her forehead, to her tongue, she takes a few pangs, the leaves in the rest of their burial.

She goes through her backpack, keeps her journal and address book, throws away the muni-bar metronomes. The coins she takes out, she puts into a box, puts them in a box, keeps the knife, cumin and eyebrow pencil. She puts books, in the trunk, in the trunk, until the greenbacks flutter through the air. She keeps her knife, cumin and eyebrow pencil. She puts books, pieces of bark, hibiscus, saguaro, tortilla, the rattle and drum in her pack and she sets out to become the complete sotol.55

Her first step is to take inventory. Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja. Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back—which is the baggage from the Indian

52To borrow chemist Eya Pringle's theory of "discriptive structures," Pringle discovered that substances interact in a predictable ways as it was taught in science, but in different and fluctuating ways to produce new and more complex structures, a kind of birth in which it grows more complex.53Hannah Gillein. Searching for a New World View, The World Today (January 1981), 25 [Am].
54Tortillas de masa harina; corn tortillas are of two types, the smooth uniform corn made in a tortilla press and usually bought at a tortilla factory or supermarkete, and goods made by mixing masa with lard or shortening or butter (my mother sometimes puts bits of bacon or chipolote).55Aznarí's reference for this quote is missing in the original. [Ed]
Casas hace sufrir de una raza amena que ignora nuestra común, y de guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory habits when around white people. He is a man of culture, and entangled with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate. We need a new masculinity and this new man needs a movement.

Lumping the males that deviate from the general norm with man, the oppressor, is a gross injustice. Asombrar pensar que nosotros hemos quedado en ese pozo oscuro donde el mundo encierra a las lesbianas. Asombrar pensar que hemos, como feministas y lesbianas, cerrado nuestros corazones a los hombres, a nuestros hermanos los hijos desheredados y marginales como nosotros. Being the supreme crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian, Native American, Latinx, and with the queer in Italy, Australia and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. Our role is to link with each other — the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with whites with extraterrestrials. It is to transfer ideas and information from one culture to another. Colored homosexuals have more knowledge of other cultures; they have always been at the forefront (although sometimes in the closest) of all liberation struggles in this country; they have suffered more injustices and have survived despite all odds. Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their peers. People, listen to what your jotería is saying.

The mestizo and the woman exist at this time and propose the revolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls.

Somos una gente

Hay tantísimas fronteras que dividir a la mujer y al hombre que existe también un puente.

— GINA VALDEZ

Divided Loyalties. Many women and men of color do not want to have any dealings with white people. It takes too much time and energy to explain to the downright mobile, white middle-class women that it’s okay for us to want to own “possessions,” never having had any nice furniture on our dirt floors or “luxuries” like washing machines. Many feel that white should help their own cause rid themselves of race hatred and fear first. I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator. I think we need to allow whites to be allies. Through our literature, art, culture and our ties with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos or the Chicano farmworkers or los Naciremianos they won’t turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances. They will not see us as the enemy but as our allies.

Individually, but also as a racial entity, we need to voice our needs. We need to call to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for our sense of defectiveness, for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty — you’re rather defeat your brittish acts. To say you’ve split yourself from minority groups, that you don’t identify with, or have no one to identify with. You are your own people, the nation. Taking off parts of your self, transferring the “negative” parts onto us.

(Where there is persecution of minorities, there is shadow projection. Where there is violence and war, there is regression of shadow.) To say that you want to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irreversibly tied to her. Gringo, accept that we have a greater influence in your psyche than taking back your collective shadow the infrastructural split will heal. And finally, tell us what you need from us.
El día de la Chicana

El día de la Chicana, un día no como cualquier otro, es un día de celebración para muchas mujeres hispanas. En este día, muchas mujeres se unen para celebrar su identidad y su contribución a la sociedad. Las mujeres de todas las edades y de todos los lugares acuden a las celebraciones para mostrar su orgullo y su fuerza. En este día, las mujeres se dan la mano y se apoyan para avanzar juntas hacia un futuro más brillante.

El retorno

En este día, las mujeres también se dan cuenta de que su lucha no ha terminado. A pesar de los avances, todavía existen desafíos y desafíos a la igualdad de género. Las mujeres continúan luchando por sus derechos y por un mundo más justo y equitativo. El día de la Chicana es un recordatorio de lo que aún se necesita hacer y de lo lejos que aún queda el camino.

En resumen, el día de la Chicana es un día de celebración y de lucha continua. Las mujeres se dan cuenta de su poder y de su fuerza, y se comprometen a seguir adelante en su lucha por un mundo más justo y equitativo.
survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage.

Today I see the Valley still struggling to survive. Whether it does or not, it will never be as I remember it. The borderlands depression that was set off by the 1982 peso devaluation in Mexico resulted in the closure of hundreds of Valley businesses. Many people lost their homes, cars, land. Prior to 1982, U.S. store owners thrived on retail sales to Mexicaners who came across the border for groceries and clothes and appliances. While goods on the U.S. side have become 10, 100, 1000 times more expensive for Mexican buyers, goods on the Mexican side have become 10, 100, 1000 times cheaper for Americans. Because the Valley is heavily dependent on agriculture and Mexican retail trade, it has the highest unemployment rates along the entire border region; it is the Valley that has been hardest hit.

"It's been a bad year for corn," my brother, Nune, says. As he talks, I remember my father scanning the sky for a rain that would end the drought, looking up into the sky, day after day, while the corn withered on its stalk. My father has been dead for 20 years, having worked himself to death. The life span of a Mexican farm laborer is 56—he lived to be 38. It shocks me that I am older than he. I, too, search the sky for rain. Like the ancients, I worship the rain god and the maize goddess, but unlike my father I have recovered their names. Now for rain (irrigation) one offers not a sacrifice of blood, but of money.

"Farming is in a bad way," my brother says. "Two to three thousand small and big farmers went bankrupt this country last year. Six or seven years ago the price of corn was $8.00 per hundred pounds," he goes on. "This year it is $3.90 per hundred pounds." And, I think to myself, after taking inflation into account, not planting anything puts you ahead.

I walk out to the back yard, stare at los rosales de mamá. She wants me to help her prune the rose bushes, dig out the carpet grass that is choking them. Mamagrande Ramona también tiene rosales. Here every Mexican grows flowers. If they don't have a piece of dirt, they use car tires, jars, cans, shoe boxes. Roses are the Mexican's favorite flower. I think, how symbolic—thorns and all.

Yes, the Chicana and Chicano have always taken care of growing things and the land. Again I see the four of us kids getting off the school bus, changing into our work clothes, walking into the field with Papi and Mama, all of us bending to the ground. Below our feet, under the earth lie the watermelon seeds. We cover them with paper plates, putting terracotta on top of the plates to keep them from being blown away by the wind. The paper plates keep the freeze away. Next day or the next, we remove the plates, bare the tiny green shoots to the elements. They survive and grow, give fruit hundreds of times the size of the seed. We water them and hoe them. We harvest them. The vines dry, rot, are plowed under. Growth, death, decay, birth. The soil prepared again and again, impregnated, worked on. A constant changing of forms, renacimientos de la tierra madre.

This land was Mexican once and will be again.

3Out of the twenty-two border counties in the four border states, Hidalgo County (named for Father Hidalgo who was shot in 1810 after initiating Mexico's revolt against Spanish rule under the banner of la Virgen de Guadalupe) is the most poverty-stricken county in the nation as well as the largest Hispanic population living without support in California for migrant farmworkers. It was here that I was born and raised. I am amused that both it and I have survived. [End.]

Stanley Fish
b. 1938

Stanley Eugene Fish was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and grew up in Philadelphia. He was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and earned his Ph.D. in 1962 at Yale. He taught at the University of California at Berkeley and subsequently at Johns Hopkins University and at Duke University, where he was professor of both English and law, chair of the English Department, and director of the university press. He left Duke in 1998 to become dean of arts and sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Fish's earliest scholarly work focused on the Renaissance (with a book based on his dissertation on John Skelton's poetry in 1965) and on the work of Milton and George Herbert. His first major work, Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost" (1967), applies an early version of reader-response theory, arguing that Milton uses literary strategies to lead his readers to a sense of the sinfulness of pride and, in doing so, to "surprise" them by showing how they themselves have been prideful in their very reading of the poem. This approach shifts the critical focus from the idea that meaning is in the text itself to the idea that meaning occurs as a result of the operation of the text upon the reader. Fish's scholarly writing from this time forward is distinguished by his careful attention to literary theories, particularly those based on language theories, such as reader-response, speech acts, and, later, deconstruction.

In Surprised by Sin, Fish maintains that the "surprise" works in Paradise Lost because of Milton's goal of bringing the reader to self-consciousness about sin. Soon, in several articles later collected in Is There a Text in This Class?, The Authority of Interpretive Communities (1980) and in a book, Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (1972), Fish generalizes his theory and shows that it applies to other works, indeed to all works of literature. The "artifact" of the literary work does not, he argues, contain its own meaning. The meaning emerges as a result of the act of reading, which therefore ought to be the focus of the critic's attention.

Fish is himself one of the severest critics of the theory he put forward at this time. In the introduction to Is There a Text in This Class?, he points out the flaw of his method and of much reader-response criticism, namely, that of presuming to know how reading works in some universal sense (at least for all educated readers) and to be able to describe it. Moreover, he notes, in a book like Surprised by Sin, the critic assumes that the effects achieved are the effects intended by the author, which simply transfers responsibility for the meaning to the text itself. In the essays collected in Is There a Text in This Class?, Fish argues that the reader "creates" the text by deciding which of its features are relevant or significant. But how does the reader decide? Fish was not content (as were other reader-response critics) to allow mere individual preference to rule. Instead, he puts forward the enormously influential idea of the interpretive community (later to appear as "discourse community" in rhetorical scholarship) that maintains the values and conventions that always