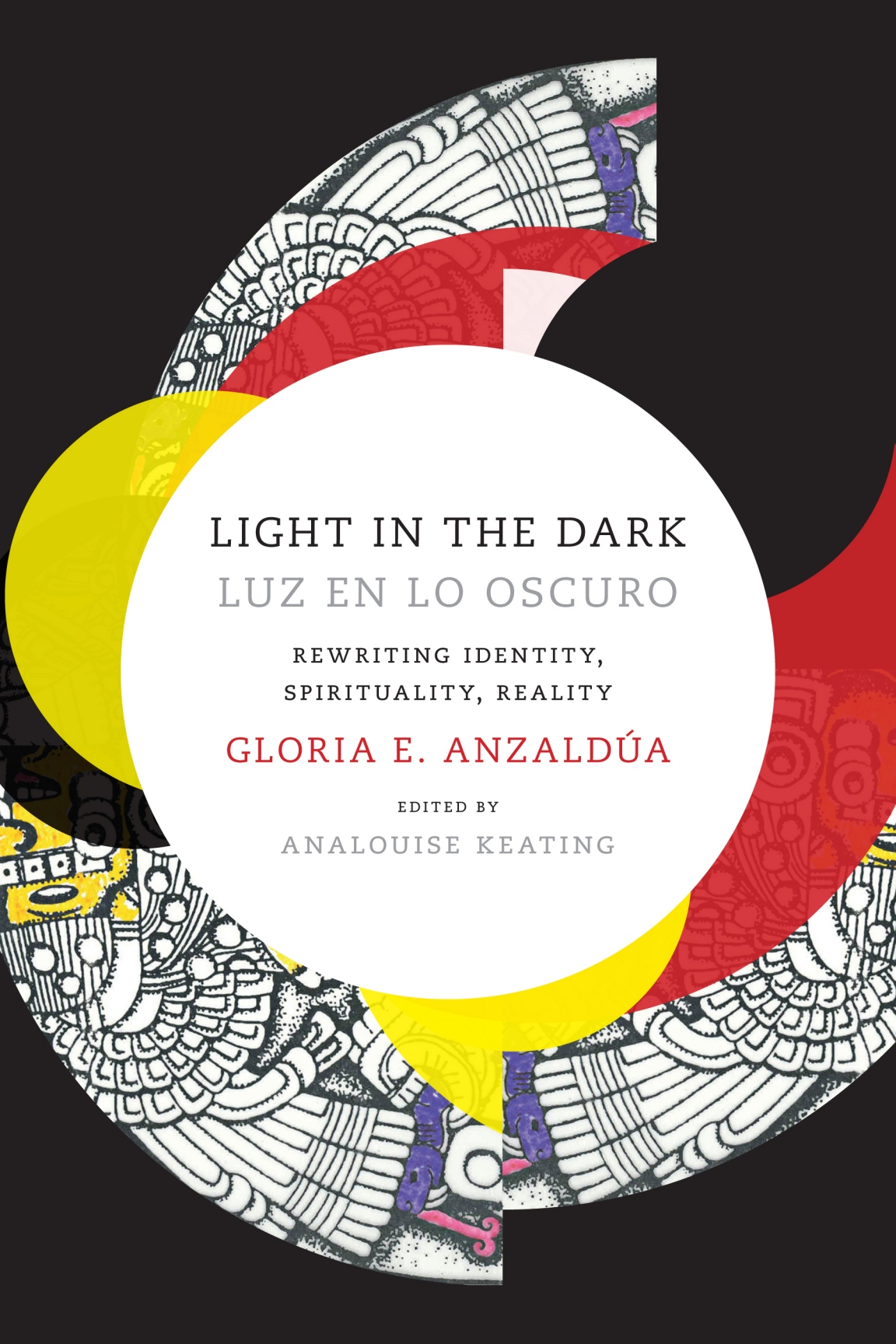

LIGHT IN THE DARK
LUZ EN LO OSCURO

REWRITING IDENTITY, SPIRITUALITY, REALITY

GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA

EDITED BY

ANALOUISE KEATING

LIGHT IN THE DARK

LUZ EN LO OSCURO

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LATIN AMERICA OTHERWISE: LANGUAGES, EMPIRES, NATIONS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Re-envisioning Coyolxauhqui, Decolonizing Reality

Anzaldúa's Twenty-First-Century Imperative

AnaLouise Keating

> For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out. My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought.
>
> GLORIA ANZALDÚA, "PREFACE: GESTURES OF THE BODY"

> What is the theme of my life's work? Is it accessing other realities?
>
> GLORIA ANZALDÚA, WRITING NOTAS

In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro—Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, Gloria Anzaldúa excavates her creative process (her "gestures of the body") and uses this excavation to develop an aesthetics of transformation, grounded in her metaphysics of interconnectedness.[1] From the late 1980s, when she entered the doctoral program in literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), until her death in 2004, Anzaldúa aspired to write a book-length exploration of aesthetics and knowledge production as they are inflected through, and shaped by, issues of social justice, identity (trans)formation, and healing.[2] She viewed this project both as her dissertation and as a publishable monograph, although, as explained in more detail later, she did not follow a typical dissertation process. Thoroughly researched and repeatedly

revised, this manuscript underwent numerous shifts in title, table of contents, and chapter organization; it exists in numerous partial iterations—handwritten notes, outlines, chapter drafts, e-mail communication, conversations with writing comadres, and computer files.[3] Because of her meticulous revision practices and various complicated life issues (including financial pressures, multiple simultaneous writing projects, philosophical changes in worldview, and diabetes-related health complications), Anzaldúa did not see this book through to publication. However, she was in the final stages of its completion at the time of her death.

Focusing closely on aesthetics, ontology, epistemology, and ethics, *Light in the Dark* investigates a number of intertwined issues, including the artist-activist's struggles; imagination as an embodied intellectual faculty that, with careful attention and specific strategies, can effect personal and social transformation; the creative process; decolonial alternatives to conventional nationalism; and more. *Light in the Dark* also contains important developments in Anzaldúa's theories of nepantla and nepantleras, spiritual activism, new tribalism, nos/otras, conocimiento, autohistoria, and autohistoria-teoría, as well as additional insights into her writing practice and her intellectual-physiological experiences with diabetes.[4] In this introduction, I showcase Anzaldúa as a multifaceted artist-scholar and offer background information about the complicated history of this book.[5] I summarize Anzaldúa's recursive writing and revision process and situate *Light in the Dark* within the context of her oeuvre; describe the state of the manuscript at the time of her passing; explore Anzaldúa's potential contributions to twenty-first-century continental philosophy and feminist thought (especially neo-materialisms, object-oriented ontology, and debates concerning the so-called linguistic turn); and speculate on some of the ways this book might affect Anzaldúan scholarship. I begin by summarizing Anzaldúa's complex recursive writing and revision process because this process is key to the history of her book.

Anzaldúa's writing process

Through a serendipitous series of events, I met Gloria Anzaldúa in 1991 and was fortunate to become one of her "writing comadres." I had known her only a few days when she gave me a draft of one of her Prieta stories to read and critique. She treated me not as an awestruck

fan but, rather, as a colleague with valuable insights.[6] I was amazed by her gesture. There I was: an unknown, a nobody, stumbling through the very early stages of my career, and yet the creator of three groundbreaking books (*Borderlands/La Frontera*, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *Making Face, Making Soul*) was giving *me* her manuscripts, asking *me* for feedback—for detailed, very specific commentary about her work. I was struck by Anzaldúa's intellectual-aesthetic humility, by her willingness to share her unfinished writings with others, and by the partial state of the manuscript itself. To be sure, it was a captivating story (good plot line, great characterization, interesting ideas, powerful metaphors, captivating dialogue, and so on); however, the draft was uneven and needed more work. (In fact, Anzaldúa had interspersed revision-related questions throughout the draft.) Because I had assumed that Anzaldúa's words flowed effortlessly and perfectly from her pen and keyboard, I was startled to realize the extent of her revision process. I am not alone in this type of Anzaldúan encounter. If you look through her archival materials, you'll see that she regularly shared work in progress with others.[7]

As this anecdote suggests, Anzaldúa's approach to writing was dialogic, recursive, democratic, spirit-inflected, and only partially within her conscious control. She relied extensively on intuition, imagination, and what she describes in this book as her "naguala." As she explains in the preface,

> I'm guided by the spirit of the image. My naguala (daimon or guiding spirit) is an inner sensibility that directs my life—an image, an action, or an internal experience.[8] My imagination and my naguala are connected—they are aspects of the same process, of creativity. Often my naguala draws to me things that are contrary to my will and purpose (compulsions, addictions, negativities), resulting in an anguished impasse. Overcoming these impasses becomes part of the process.

And what a process it was! Anzaldúa's writing process entailed multiple simultaneous projects; numerous drafts of each piece; extensive revisions of each draft; excruciatingly painful writing blocks; linkages and repetition among various writing projects; and peer critiques from her "writing comadres," editors, and others.[9]

Generally, Anzaldúa began a new project by meditating, visualizing, freewriting, and collecting diverse source materials; these materials

were often hybrid and apparently random, including some or all of the following: dreams, meditations, journal entries, films she had seen, thoughts scribbled in notebooks and on pieces of paper, article clippings, scholarly books, observations from her interactions with human and nonhuman others, lecture notes, transcripts from previous lectures and interviews, and other "writing notas."[10] To create a first draft (or what she describes in chapter 5 as her first "pre-draft"), she would pull together various assemblages of these materials, following a few key headers or topic points as revealed through her free writes. This pre-draft was often quite rough, containing very short paragraphs and lacking transitions, logical organization, and other conventional writing elements. After completing several pre-drafts, Anzaldúa developed her first draft, which she would then begin to revise. She reread this draft multiple times, making extensive changes that involved some or all of the following acts: rearranging individual words, entire sentences, and paragraphs; adding or deleting large chunks of material; copying and repeating especially significant phrases; and inserting material from other works in progress.

Throughout this process, Anzaldúa focused simultaneously on content and form. She wanted the words to move in readers' bodies and transform them, from the inside out, and she revised repeatedly to achieve this impact. She revised for cadence, musicality, nuanced meaning, and metaphoric complexity. Anzaldúa repeated this revision step numerous times, at some point re-saving the draft under a new name and sharing it with one or more of her "writing comadres," requesting both specific and general comments, which she then selectively incorporated into future revisions. After revising multiple times, Anzaldúa moved on to proofreading and editing the draft. At some point, she would either send the draft out for publication or put it away, to be worked on at a later date.[11]

As this serpentine process suggests, for Anzaldúa, writing was epistemological, intuitive, and communal. Like many authors, she did not sit down at her keyboard with a fully developed idea and a logically organized outline. She generated her ideas as she wrote; the writing process was, itself, a co-creator of the theories—a co-author of sorts. As she explained in a 1991 interview, "I discover what I'm trying to say as the writing progresses."[12] She often began with a question, a personal experience, or a feeling; she worked through these seedling ideas as

she wrote and revised, and she did so in ways only partially under her conscious control. The words took on lives of their own, morphing in ways that Anzaldúa didn't expect when she sat down to write. In short, she learned as she wrote; she developed her ideas as she revised. And for Anzaldúa, revision could be endless. One could argue that completion—final satisfaction—never exists in Anzaldúa's writing process. She has her own version of what Ralph Waldo Emerson calls "the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands . . . can never meet, at once the inspirer and the condemner of every success." Even after publishing her work, she continued to revise it.[13]

Nowhere is this process more evident (and more confounding) than in Anzaldúa's creation of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*.

History of the Book(s)

Because Anzaldúa described *Light in the Dark* as her dissertation and viewed it as a continuation of her earlier dissertation work, I anchor this book's history in the story of her doctoral education. From 1974 to 1977, Anzaldúa was enrolled in the doctoral program in comparative literature at the University of Texas, Austin, where she focused on "Spanish literature, feminist theory, and Chicano literature."[14] Disappointed by the program's restrictions and determined to devote her life to her writing, she left before advancing to candidacy.[15] Fast-forward twelve years to 1988, when Anzaldúa, then living in San Francisco, decided to return to graduate school and complete her degree. She believed that enrolling in a doctoral program would enable her to prioritize her intellectual growth while offering protection from being overused as a resource (guest speaker, consultant, editor, and so on) for others. As she explained in an unpublished 1989 interview with Kate McCafferty, "Being back in school gives me access to more books, the latest theories and fellowship, while getting credit for it. I need this kind of environment to get a handle on my life. After *Borderlands* I was very much in demand in terms of attending a class or a reading. . . . Being too much out in the world was not balanced by my time at home."[16] Returning to graduate school—a location designed to foster the life of the mind—enabled Anzaldúa to prioritize her writing, obtain scholarly resources at a first-class university library, access a community of scholars who could give her critical feedback on her

work, and hone her academic writing skills.[17] And so in 1988, Anzaldúa enrolled in the doctoral program in literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz.[18]

Even before she began taking classes, Anzaldúa had a sense of her dissertation topic, which would focus on literary representation, ethnic identity, and knowledge production. As she asserts in a 1990 interview with Hector Torres, "My goal was to put together this book on the mestiza and how she deals with space and identity."[19] Anzaldúa moved quickly through the program requirements and in fall 1991 began drafting her dissertation/book project. I describe this project as "dissertation/book" to underscore its liminality—its position "betwixt and between" conventional genres. Although Anzaldúa called it a dissertation and even selected a dissertation committee and chair, she did not follow conventional procedures, which typically include finalizing, submitting, and receiving faculty feedback on a prospectus; discussing the project with a dissertation committee; submitting chapter drafts to committee members and receiving feedback from them on these drafts; and revising drafts based on this feedback. In no point in her writing process did Anzaldúa interact with her dissertation committee in any of these ways.[20] Yet the fact that she viewed this project as both her dissertation and a publishable book subtly shaped her authorial decisions and voice.[21]

Anzaldúa viewed her dissertation/book project as an opportunity to return to and expand on several aesthetic-related themes from her previous work (especially *Borderlands/La Frontera* and "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers"). As she explained in a 1995 interview with Ann Reuman:

> Chapter Six [of *Borderlands*], on writing and art, was put together really fast. . . . I felt like I was still regurgitating and sitting on some of the ideas and I hadn't done enough revisions and I didn't have enough time to unravel the ideas fully. Chapter Six . . . is an extension of "Speaking in Tongues" in *This Bridge*, and what I'm writing now in *Lloronas*, some of the concepts I'm working with, of which one is nepantla, is kind of a continuation of these other two. . . . [M]y writing is always in revision . . . The theoretical work in process, *Lloronas*, builds on all those that came before.[22]

Variously titled *Lloronas—Women Who Wail: (Self)Representation and the Production of Writing, Knowledge and Identity*; *Lloronas, mujeres que leen*

y escriben: Producing Writing, Knowledge, Cultures, and Identities; and *Lloronas—Writing, Reading, Speaking, Dreaming,* Anzaldúa's projected dissertation/book focused on writing as personal and collective knowledge production by the "female post-colonial cultural Other (particularly the Chicana/mestiza)."[23] As these titles imply, la Llorona played a significant role in the 1990s versions. In chapter drafts, notes, conversations about the project, and public lectures from this time period, Anzaldúa explored diverse interpretations of Llorona's historical, mythic, and rhetorical manifestations. She aspired to include and go beyond the existing stories and analyses to offer both an archeology and a phenomenology of this multifaceted figure. As she writes in a chapter draft titled "Llorona, the Woman Who Wails: Chicana/Mestiza Transgressive Identities":

> As myth, the nocturnal site of [Llorona's] ghostly "body" is the place, el lugar, where myth, fantasy, utterance, and reality converge. It is the site of intersection, connection, and cultural transgression. Her "body" is comprised of all four bodies: the physical, psychic (which I explore in the chapter "*Las Pasiones de la Llorona*"), mythic/symbolic, and ghostly. La Llorona, the ghostly body, carries the nagual possessing la facultad, the capacity for shape-changing and shape-shifting of identity.[24]

Anzaldúa's shifting, mobile Llorona is especially significant as we consider her project's evolution from the twentieth-century to the twenty-first-century versions, where Llorona becomes partially eclipsed by Coyolxauhqui, Mexica lunar goddess and Coatlicue's eldest daughter.[25]

Anzaldúa worked intermittently throughout the 1990s on her "Lloronas book." Despite her extensive research, her passion for the project, and her commitment to completing her doctoral degree, she did not finish this manuscript—or even finalize her prospectus or meet with her dissertation committee. Instead, she has left us with a lengthy table of contents, lots of ideas, jotted notes, interview comments, and chapter drafts in various stages of completion.[26] As she observes in an e-mail from June 2002, "I finished all but dissertation in 3 years but then took a huge sabbatical & didn't return to [the] dissertation until last Oct."[27]

There are many reasons for this "huge sabbatical," including Anzaldúa's health, financial concerns, commitment to multiple writing

projects (including some with fixed deadlines for completion), her complicated revision process, and her unrealistically high aesthetic standards. In 1992, Anzaldúa was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.[28] This diagnosis altered her life on almost every level, forcing her to re-examine her self-definition, her relationship to her body, her writing process, and her worldview. Like many people diagnosed with a chronic illness, Anzaldúa first reacted with disbelief, denial, anger, and self-blame.[29] Gradually she shifted into a more complex understanding and pragmatic acceptance of the disease. However, processing the diagnosis, researching diabetes, learning treatment options, and securing adequate health insurance to pay for treatment and medicine consumed much of Anzaldúa's energy during the mid-1990s.

Indeed, managing the diabetes was an enormous drain on Anzaldúa for the remainder of her life. She often spent hours each day researching the latest treatments and diligently working to manage the disease. She kept up to date on medical and alternative health breakthroughs and recommendations; ate healthy food, exercised regularly, and monitored her blood glucose (sugar) levels repeatedly throughout the day; carefully coordinated her exercise and her food intake with her blood levels and insulin injections; and kept a detailed daily log of her blood sugar levels and necessary dosages, making minute adjustments as necessary. In addition to following a conventional treatment plan (insulin injections and regular medical visits), Anzaldúa explored a variety of alternative healing techniques, including meditation, herbs, acupuncture, affirmations, subliminal tapes, and visualizations. Despite these strenuous efforts, her blood sugar often careened out of control, leading to additional complications, including severe gastrointestinal reflux, charcoat foot, neuropathy, vision problems (blurred vision and burst capillaries requiring laser surgery), thyroid malfunction, and depression. Constant worry about her declining health put additional strains on Anzaldúa, intensifying the insomnia that had plagued her for much of her life. This insomnia clouded her thinking and interfered with her work, leading to even more delays.[30]

Anzaldúa's financial concerns—which were, themselves, made more challenging and dire by her costly medical needs—also contributed to her delayed completion of the Lloronas book.[31] As a full-time, self-employed author, Anzaldúa did not have a steady source of income but instead relied on publication royalties and speaking engagements to support herself. Because she did not have an agent or

manager, Anzaldúa generally organized her own speaking engagements, which entailed booking the gigs, negotiating rates, making travel plans, and coordinating all related details with the conference organizers. This, too, took a lot of time.

Anzaldúa's complicated multitasking further contributed to her "huge sabbatical." Throughout the 1990s, Anzaldúa worked on multiple writing projects simultaneously, moving back and forth among manuscripts, often juggling more than a dozen projects. Thus, for example, in a journal entry dated August 20, 1990 (written at 4:20 in the morning), she lists her current "Writing Projects": ten books, six papers, six additional pieces (short stories, autohistorias, and essays) she had been invited to submit for publication, and five grant proposals.[32] Even during a single night, Anzaldúa typically shifted among several projects. On February 19, 1989, for instance, she wrote in her journal,

> I feel good @ myself today. Last night I did some work; had phone conf. with N[orma] Alarcón for 1–1/2 hrs; worked on *Theories by chicanas* notebook, making holes & putting in articles; then I spent a couple of hours on *Entremuros*, *Entreguerras*, *Entremundos*, also punching holes, switching stories from one section to another, consolidating editing suggestions on "The Crossing" and "Sleepwalker." Of course this was time spent away from [completing the] intro to *Haciendo caras*—my rebelling again.[33]

This journal entry captures so much about Anzaldúa's multitasking. In addition to juggling various projects in a single evening, she demonstrates a stubborn resistance to externally imposed deadlines. At a time that she had a specific due date for one project (the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*), Anzaldúa worked instead on *other* projects, including some with no deadlines at all. As her reference to this divergence as "rebelling again" indicates, this mobile writing practice, organized by desire rather than deadlines, was typical.[34] Moreover, Anzaldúa consistently underestimated the hours required to complete a piece (especially the time her revisions would take) while overestimating her energy levels. She got lost in the revision process and held open so many projects at once that finishing *anything* to her complete satisfaction was impossible. The final chapter in *Light in the Dark* represents the closest approximation to completion that Anzaldúa achieved, and this achievement was possible

only because she took an extra year for her revisions.[35] Is it any wonder, then, that Anzaldúa was so delayed in finishing this book?

In 2001, Anzaldúa recommitted herself to completing her doctoral degree. In the fall of this year, she initiated a writing group, "las comadritas"; reconstituted her doctoral committee; and looked into the UCSC Graduate School's paperwork and other graduation requirements.[36] Although she met regularly with las comadritas, worked diligently on the chapters, and aspired to finish in Winter 2002 or Spring 2003 quarter, she did not meet these deadlines. Nor did she send her dissertation committee any chapters of her project or communicate with them. In spring 2004, Rob Wilson, director of the UCSC Literature Department's graduate program, contacted Anzaldúa and, explaining that the department had a precedent for this procedure, expressed the view that she be awarded the degree for work completed (specifically, for *Borderlands/La Frontera*).[37] After much deliberation and consultation with friends, Anzaldúa declined the offer, both because she felt that it would be unfair to most doctoral students (who must write a traditional dissertation) and because she believed she was within months of completing her book. As she explained in an e-mail to Wilson:

> Though going the non-dissertation route would be easier I think it's unfair to other grad students who have to fulfill all the requirements. I also don't want a "free" ride. But I also feel that the dissertation has to be quality work and I have reservations about pulling it off this quarter. I'll try my best, but my health is shaky (I suffer from diabetes and kidney and other complications) so I can't push myself too hard. I do agree with you that we should work on this while the energy/focus is present.
>
> Contigo, gloria

Anzaldúa passed away in mid-May and was awarded the doctoral degree posthumously.

When Anzaldúa returned to the dissertation/book project in fall 2001, she looked over but did not directly take up her Lloronas book (which at this point was titled *Lloronas—Writing, Reading, Speaking, Dreaming*).[38] Instead, she expanded the focus to encompass ontological investigations while maintaining several previous themes, particularly those related to aesthetics, nepantla, shifting identities, and knowledge transformation as a decolonizing process. The book's table

of contents changed multiple times between 2001 and 2004 as Anzaldúa wrote, revised, and rethought her project. In fall 2001, she planned to include three previously published essays (revised to reflect her most recent thinking and the book's themes), several new pieces designed to pull the collection together, and "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts," an extended essay she was writing for our co-edited collection, *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*.[39] By fall 2003, Anzaldúa had come closer to determining the book's table of contents but was still reorganizing the chapters and making other alterations, and by January 2004, she had finalized the table of contents' organization, although she was still considering various chapter and book titles.[40] Chapters 1, 3, 5, and 6 had been previously published in different form. Anzaldúa revised chapters 3 and 5 considerably to align them with her current thinking about Coyolxauhqui and other key themes in this book; she made fewer changes to chapters 1 and 6, which she had drafted entirely in the twenty-first century and (in the case of chapter 6) written with her dissertation/book project in mind.

As mentioned previously, Anzaldúa did not focus exclusively on *Light in the Dark* during the last years of her life. From 2001 to 2004, she worked on other projects, as well, including her foreword to the third edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*; her preface to *this bridge we call home*; another co-edited, multi-genre collection tentatively titled *Bearing Witness, Reading Lives: Imagination, Creativity, and Social Change*; an essay for her friend Liliana Wilson's art exhibition; several short stories; an e-mail interview on indigeneity for *SAILS: American Indian Literatures*; an essay on the "geographies of latinidad identity" (based on a talk she gave in 1999 and promised for a volume on Latinidad); and a testimonio about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.[41] During this time, Anzaldúa's health continued to decline. Torn in so many directions, she missed her self-imposed deadlines for completing *Light in the Dark*.[42] However, at the time of her death in May 2004, Anzaldúa seemed to believe that she would finish the dissertation within the year.

In editing *Light in the Dark* for publication, I assumed that my tasks would focus primarily on proofreading the manuscript and finalizing the bibliographical material, which I knew, from conversations with Anzaldúa, to be in disarray.[43] I worked with the chapter drafts and notes she had saved on her MacBook hard drive, her handwritten

revisions on paper copies of these drafts, and her extensive e-mail communication concerning the dissertation. I began with the most recent version(s) of each chapter, as indicated by Anzaldúa's numbering system and the date stamp on each computer file. However, as I delved into her computer files and examined them in dialogue with her writing notas (also located on her computer hard drive), the editorial process became more complex than I had expected, especially concerning chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 included several unfinished sections and authorial notes, indicating places where Anzaldúa had planned to expand and revise, and chapter 4 existed in numerous versions, which Anzaldúa was still collating and revising at the time of her death.

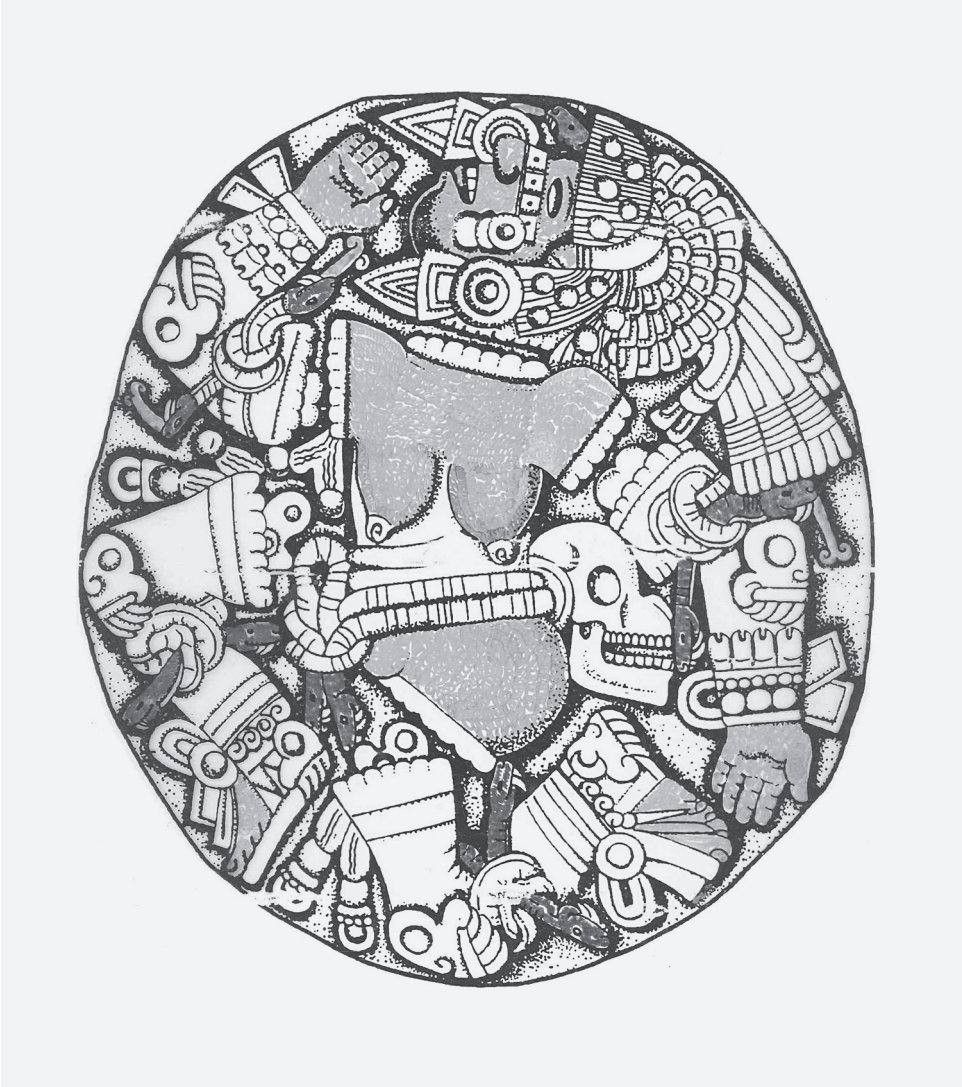
I had two editorial goals which shaped my process. First, to adhere to Anzaldúa's intentions as closely as possible—both by following her most recent revisions and by upholding her high aesthetic standards (including her desire to ensure that her book was "quality work").[44] Second, to provide readers with information about the manuscript that would facilitate their analyses, interpretations, and investigations. Because I'd been working on various writing and editing projects with Anzaldúa for more than a decade, I had a solid understanding of her personal aesthetics—the emphasis she placed on *how* a piece sounds and feels.[45] Anzaldúa took exceptional pride in her work, equally valuing form and content; as I explained earlier, she revised each piece numerous times, honing the images to achieve specific cadences and affects. While I did not attempt to replicate Anzaldúa's revision process, I used her standards as I sorted through her chapters and evaluated them for publication. Drawing on my knowledge of Anzaldúa's writing process, I identified the sections in chapters 2 and 4 that would not have met her publication standards but would have been further revised or entirely deleted. Rather than revise or delete this material, I moved it to the endnotes and appendixes because it contains important clues about Anzaldúa's theories (especially the directions she might have pursued had she been given more time) and about the concepts she was drawing from but in the process of rejecting. I have also included discursive endnotes throughout *Light in the Dark* to assist readers interested in tracking the development of Anzaldúa's theories or other aspects of her writing process, including some aspects of the choices she made as she produced this text.

Tracing Coyolxauhqui . . . chapter overviews

One of the most pronounced differences between the twentieth-century and twenty-first-century versions of Anzaldúa's dissertation/book project is the shift from Llorona to Coyolxauhqui. According to Aztec mythic history, when Coyolxauhqui tried to kill her mother, her brother, Huitzilopochtli (Eastern Hummingbird and War God), decapitated her, flinging her head into the sky and throwing her body down the sacred mountain, where it broke into a thousand pieces. Depicted as a "huge round stone" filled with dismembered body parts, Coyolxauhqui serves as Anzaldúa's "light in the dark," representing a complex holism—both the acknowledgment of painful fragmentation and the promise of transformative healing. As she explains in chapter 3: "Coyolxauhqui represents the psychic and creative process of tearing apart and pulling together (deconstructing/constructing). She represents fragmentation, imperfection, incompleteness, and unfulfilled promises as well as integration, completeness, and wholeness" (see figure FM.1).

Drawing from Coyolxauhqui's story, Anzaldúa develops a complex healing process and a theory of writing that she variously named "The Coyolxauhqui imperative," "Coyolxauhqui consciousness," and "Putting Coyolxauhqui together."[46] She offers one of her most extensive discussions of this theoretical framework in chapter 6, where she describes Coyolxauhqui as "both the process of emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering." The product of multiple colonizations, Coyolxauhqui also embodies Anzaldúa's desire for epistemological and ontological decolonization.[47] As the following chapter summaries suggest, Coyolxauhqui hovers over *Light in the Dark*. Appearing in every chapter, "Ella es la luna and she lights the darkness."[48]

In a short preface, "Gestures of the Body—Escribiendo para idear," Anzaldúa introduces her book by explaining its multilayered focus and inviting readers to participate in her literary desires. Reflecting on her own experiences and struggles as an author, Anzaldúa calls for a new aesthetics, an entirely embodied artistic practice that synthesizes identity formation with cultural change and movement among multiple realities. As she interweaves theory with practice, Anzaldúa



FM.1 | Coyolxauhqui

briefly touches on issues developed in the chapters that follow: She defines writing as "gestures of the body"; offers a preliminary definition of her theory of the "Coyolxauhqui imperative"; provides an overview of her aesthetics; introduces her genre theories of autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría; expands her previous definitions of nepantla to include aesthetic and ontological dimensions; and posits the imagination as an intellectual-spiritual faculty. "Gestures of the Body" sets the tone for the entire book and reveals the driving force behind it: Anzaldúa's aspiration to evoke healing and transformation, her desire to go beyond description and representation by using words, images, and theories that stimulate, create, and in other ways facilitate radical physical-psychic change in herself, her readers, and the various worlds in which we exist and to which we aspire.

First drafted shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, chapter 1 elaborates on and enacts Anzaldúa's theory of the Coyolxauhqui imperative, illustrating one form the embodied "gestures" she calls for in her preface can take. Encapsulating Anzaldúa's aesthetic journey, "Let us be the healing of the wound: The Coyolxauhqui imperative—La sombra y el sueño" also explores key elements in her onto-epistemology ("desconocimientos," "the path of conocimiento"); her aesthetics ("the Coyolxauhqui imperative"); and her ethics ("spiritual activism"). Interweaving the personal with the collective, Anzaldúa uses these concepts to bridge the historical moment with recurring political-aesthetic issues, such as U.S. colonialism, nationalism, complicity, cultural trauma, racism, sexism, and other forms of systemic oppression. She calls for expanded awareness (conocimiento) and develops an ethics of interconnectivity, which she describes as the act of reaching through the wounds—wounds that can be physical, psychic, cultural, and/or spiritual—to connect with others. In its intentionally non-oppositional approach, the chapter offers a provocative alternative to portions of *Borderlands/La Frontera* and some of Anzaldúa's other work. While acknowledging her intense anger, Anzaldúa converts it into a sophisticated theory of relational change. Thus, "Let us be the healing of the wound" can be read as Anzaldúa's invitation to move through and beyond trauma and rage, transforming it into social-justice work. Anzaldúa simultaneously illustrates and instructs, offering readers guidelines (a methodology of sorts) for how to enact this difficult transformative work, how to heed the Coyolxauhqui imperative.

Chapter 2, "Flights of the Imagination: Rereading/Rewriting Realities," contains Anzaldúa's most sustained discussion of the imagination as an epistemological-political tool and the most direct statement of her metaphysical framework. Likening the Coyolxauhqui process to "shamanic initiatory dismemberment," Anzaldúa draws on curanderismo, chamanismo/shamanism, transpersonal psychology, anthropology, fiction, and her childhood experiences to develop her theories of art's transformational power and imagination's role in (re) creating reality.[49] I bracket the prefix to underscore Anzaldúa's complex speculations about ontological issues; she posits multiple, interlayered worlds which we discover and co-create, "decolonizing reality." This chapter also provides the ontological foundation for Anzaldúa's innovative theory of spiritual activism, which she further develops in the chapters that follow. As she defines the term, "spiritual activism" is neither a naïve, watered-down version of religion nor some kind of "New Age" fad that facilitates escape from existing conditions. It is in many ways the reverse: For Anzaldúa, spiritual activism is a completely embodied, highly political endeavor. While Anzaldúa did not coin the term "spiritual activism," she introduced the term and the concept into feminist scholarship.[50] As she connects her theory of spiritual activism with her transformational aesthetics, Anzaldúa returns to her earlier definition of writing as "making soul" and expands it, linking it both with mainstream canonical British literature and with Mexican indigenous traditions. Other topics covered are "shamanic imaginings"; "nagualismo" as epistemology and writing practice; her theories of the "nepantla body" and "spiritual mestizaje"; the relationship between writing, reading, and social change; and her personal aspirations as a writer.

Structured around Anzaldúa's visit in 1992 to an exhibition of Mesoamerican culture and art at the Denver Museum of Natural History, chapter 3, "Border Arte: Nepantla, el lugar de la frontera," builds on and expands the previous chapter's discussion of spiritual mestizaje and aesthetics, grounding them in a theory of "border arte"—a disruptive, potentially transformative, decolonizing creative practice, or what Anzaldúa calls "the Coyolxauhqui process." As she retraces her journey through the museum's exhibition, she explores issues of colonialism, neocolonialism, and the subjugated artist's role in the decolonization process. Emphasizing both the personal and collective dimensions of border arte, Anzaldúa connects her aesthetics to the

work of other border artists—particularly visual artists such as Santa Barraza, Liliana Wilson, Yolanda M. López, and Marcia Gómez. For Anzaldúa, the term "border artist" goes beyond geographical boundaries to include other types of risk takers: artists who straddle multiple (often oppressive, colonized, neo-colonized) worlds and use their negotiations to decolonize the various spaces in which they exist. Anzaldúa connects her revisionist mythmaking with her epistemology while expanding her previous definitions of the borderlands, mestizaje, and her own mestiza identity. This chapter explores other identity-related issues as well, including questions of authenticity, appropriation, and the commodification of indigenous art; debates between indigenous and Chican@ authors;[51] and the possibilities of developing identities that are simultaneously ethnic-specific and transcultural. "Border Arte" also contains an important discussion of "el cenote," a term Anzaldúa uses to describe the imagination's source of previously untapped, collective knowledge. Anzaldúa concludes the chapter by introducing her innovative theory of "nos / otras"—a theory she takes up in the chapter that follows.

In chapter 4, "Geographies of Selves—Reimagining Identity: Nos / Otras (Us / Other), las Nepantleras, and the New Tribalism," Anzaldúa expands the previous chapter's analysis of border art and artist-activists to explore nationalism, identity formation, "Raza studies," decolonizing education, and conflict resolution—especially as these are enacted by her nepantlera "escritoras, artistas, scholars, [and] activistas." Focusing on "Raza Studies y la raza," she applies the Coyolxauhqui process to individual and collective identity (re)formation and develops her theory of "the new tribalism." Anzaldúa's new tribalism represents an innovative, rhizomatic theory of affinity-based identities and a provocative alternative to both assimilation and separatism.[52] As she explains in an earlier draft of this chapter: "The new tribalism disrupts categorical and ethnocentric forms of nationalism. By problematizing the concepts of who's *us* and who's *other*, or what I call nos / otras, the new tribalism seeks to revise the notion of "otherness" and the story of identity. The new tribalism rewrites cultural inscriptions, facilitating our ability to forge alliances with other groups."[53] With her theories of the new tribalism and nos / otras, Anzaldúa develops a careful, sophisticated critique of narrow nationalisms and other conservative versions of collective identity while remaining sympathetic to the identity-related concerns that generate, motivate, and

drive nationalist-inflected politics and desires. These theories represent both an expansion of and a return to her earlier theory of El Mundo Zurdo—a theory she further develops in chapter 6.[54] Significantly, Anzaldúa challenges yet does not entirely reject conventional concepts of identity and racialized social categories, thus offering important interventions into postnationalist thought.[55] This chapter also contains extensive discussions of her innovative theories of "nepantleras" and "geographies of selves."[56]

As the title suggests, in chapter 5, "Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: A Creative Process," Anzaldúa presents her most detailed, extensive discussion of the Coyolxauhqui process. The chapter invites readers inside Anzaldúa's mind; as she writes in her dissertation notes, "This chapter is my creation story. It depicts the psychological dimensions of the writing process and the angst of creativity."[57] Here we see another aspect of Anzaldúa's aesthetics: her own writing practice, played out on the page. This chapter demonstrates—in careful detail, giving us intimate glimpses into Anzaldúa's daily life—the deeply embodied, extremely intentional nature of her work. Anzaldúa takes us through her entire creative process, from the original call (in this particular instance, an invitation to contribute to an edited collection), idea generation, and the pre-drafting phase (or what she terms "componiendo y des-componiendo"); through writing blocks and multiple revisions; to (non)completion and submission of the essay.[58] Because writing's embodiment includes a complex emotional dimension, Anzaldúa also discloses the "shadow side of writing": periods of extreme depression, dissatisfaction, and despair, coupled with self-doubt and feelings of complete inadequacy. Shot through the entire writing process, however, is Anzaldúa's deep love of writing. For Anzaldúa, the personal is always also collective, so in typical Anzaldúan fashion, she uses her experiences to further develop her theories of the Coyolxauhqui imperative, nepantla, el cenote, and the imaginal.[59] Particularly important is Anzaldúa's expansion of nepantla to include additional epistemological dimensions; here and elsewhere in *Light in the Dark*, nepantla also functions as form of consciousness, an actant of sorts. As I suggest later, this expansion has the potential to open new directions in Anzaldúan scholarship.

The final chapter, "now let us shift . . . conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts," represents the culmination of Anzaldúa's personal intellectual-ontological-political journey, a powerful example of her

theory of autohistoria-teoría and her aesthetics, as well as the "sister" to chapter 5. Anzaldúa wrote the chapter with her dissertation in mind, viewing it as closely related to "Putting Coyolxauhqui Together,"[60] and thus underscoring the intimate interconnections she posits between aesthetics, ontology, and transformation. Anzaldúa builds on her earlier theories of "El Mundo Zurdo" (1970s), "the new mestiza" (1980s), "nepantla" (1990s), and "nepantleras" (2000s), synergistically expanding them into her relational onto-epistemology, or what she names "conocimiento." While a literal translation of the word *conocimiento* from Spanish to English is "knowledge," Anzaldúa redefines the term, incorporating imaginal, spiritual-activist, and ontological dimensions. An intensely personal, fully embodied process that gathers information from context, Anzaldúa's conocimiento is profoundly relational and enables those who enact it to make connections among apparently disparate events, people, experiences, and realities. These connections, in turn, lead to action.[61] Drawing on her own experiences—her episodes of deep depression, her diabetes diagnosis, her declining health, her literary desires, and her engagements with various progressive social movements—Anzaldúa presents a nonlinear healing journey, or what she calls "the seven stages of conocimiento." A series of recursive iterations, Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento queers conventional ways of knowing and offers readers a holistic, activist-inflected onto-epistemology designed to effect change on multiple interlocking levels. As Anzaldúa writes in her annotations for this chapter, "The aim of the essay is to transform my personal life into a narrative with mythological or archetypal threads, not in the confessional tone of a participant in the drama who is seeking another form of order. And to do it representing myself without victimization or sentimentality."[62]

Following these chapters are six appendixes that I have added to the original manuscript to provide readers with background information on Anzaldúa's writing process and the history of this book. Appendix 1 contains a draft of Anzaldúa's *Lloronas* dissertation proposal, *Lloronas—Women Who Wail: (Self)Representation and the Production of Writing, Knowledge, and Identity*, and the table of contents for a version of her 1990s dissertation/book, *Lloronas—Writing, Reading, Speaking, Dreaming*. While Anzaldúa's 1990s proposal and table of contents exist in numerous drafts, Anzaldúa viewed the material in this appendix as most representative of her earlier project.[63] I include them here to give readers a sense of the similarities and differences between the

Lloronas book and *Light in the Dark*. Appendix 2 consists of several e-mails that Anzaldúa wrote to her writing comadres during the final years of her life, at a time when she was working consistently on *Light in the Dark*. Because these e-mails were composed quickly (as shown by her use of lower-case letters), they offer a less censored, more immediate entry into Anzaldúa's life, illustrating the severity of her health-related struggles and their impact on her writing practice. Appendix 3 contains additional material (unfinished sections and writing notas) related to chapter 2. Appendix 4 is an alternative opening section that Anzaldúa considered using in chapter 4. Appendix 5 offers historical notes on each chapter's development. Appendix 6 consists of the call for papers and personal invitation that influenced the development of chapter 1. The appendixes are followed by a glossary with brief discussions of key Anzaldúan terms and topics developed in *Light in the Dark*. I hope that this material will enable scholars to retrace Anzaldúa's thinking, develop rich analyses and interpretations of Anzaldúa's words, and in other ways build on her work—creating new Anzaldúan theory.

While some chapters were previously published, Anzaldúa updated and revised them in other ways before her death.[64] As her writing notes indicate, she made these revisions with her dissertation / book project in mind. Thus, they offer additional insights into the development of her thinking and open new avenues into her work. And because context matters, when we read these chapters as parts of the larger whole, each chapter functions synergistically, conversing with, influencing, and building on its sister chapters. Even the book's title—with its Coyolxauhqui-inspired focus on rewriting identity, spirituality, and reality—gives us another lens with which to consider the ideas presented throughout the book. In the next section, I highlight several key innovations in *Light in the Dark* and consider their potential implications. Because Anzaldúa's theories take multiple, interconnected forms; occur in a variety of contexts (contexts that often subtly reshape the theories themselves); and invite readers' collaboration, the following is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. I intentionally focus on those theories that risk being the most marginalized and ignored; I especially highlight Anzaldúa's potential contributions to twenty-first-century philosophical thought because I believe that her outsider status leads many scholars to ignore this dimension of her work.[65]

"Decolonizing reality": Implications for the scholarship

Written during the final decade of her life, *Light in the Dark* represents Anzaldúa's most sustained attempt to develop a transformational ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics. Through intense self-reflection, Anzaldúa creates an autohistoria-teoría articulating her complex theory and practice of the artist-activist's creative process; she enacts what Sarah Ohmer describes as "a decolonizing ritual"[66] that she invites her readers to share and enact for ourselves. As Ohmer, Norma Alarcón, Ernesto Martínez, and several other scholars have observed, Anzaldúa participates in the twentieth-century and twenty-first-century "decolonial turn." In *Borderlands / La Frontera*, for example, her theories of mestiza consciousness, border thinking, and la facultad decolonize western epistemologies by moving partially outside Enlightenment-based frameworks. Anzaldúa does not simply write *about* "suppressed knowledges and marginalized subjectivities";[67] she writes from *within* them, and it's this shift from writing about to writing within that makes her work so innovatively decolonizing.

In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa takes this "decolonial turn" even further and includes a groundbreaking ontological component (my pun is intentional). Through empirical experience, esoteric traditions, and indigenous philosophies, she valorizes realities suppressed, marginalized, or entirely erased by the narrow versions of ontological realism championed by Enlightenment-based thought—versions that most western-trained scholars (even those of us committed to facilitating progressive change) have often internalized and assumed to be true. Anzaldúa does so by writing from—and not just about—these subaltern ontologies.

I emphasize these ontological dimensions because this aspect of Anzaldúa's work has been underappreciated and often ignored. Perhaps this desconocimiento is not surprising, given the limited attention twentieth-century theorists and philosophers have paid to ontological and metaphysical issues.[68] Indeed, as Mikko Tuhkanen suggests, these "fields [have been] largely exiled from contemporary social sciences and the humanities."[69] Until recently, critical literary studies and western philosophy have focused almost entirely on epistemology, normalizing "paradigms through whose lenses Anzaldúa's metaphysical assumptions seem naive, pre-critical, or, simply, incomprehensible"—and therefore have been ignored.[70] However,

Anzaldúa explores metaphysical and ontological issues throughout her work, from "Tihueque" (her earliest publication) to the end of her career, using them to inspire, empower, and inform her radical social-justice vision.[71]

Nowhere are these explorations more evident (and more impossible to avoid) than in *Light in the Dark*. This book represents the culmination of Anzaldúa's lifelong investigations and demonstrates that, for Anzaldúa, epistemology and ontology (knowing and being) are intimately interrelated—two halves of one complex, multidimensional process employed in the service of progressive social change. She posits a spirit-inflected materialist ontology, a twenty-first-century animism of sorts. Anzaldúa offers her most extensive discussion of this fluid ontology in chapter 2, where she asserts:

> Spirit and mind, soul and body, are one, and together they perceive a reality greater than the vision experienced in the ordinary world. I know that the universe is conscious and that spirit and soul communicate by sending subtle signals to those who pay attention to our surroundings, to animals, to natural forces, and to other people. We receive information from ancestors inhabiting other worlds. We assess that information and learn how to trust that knowing.

According to Anzaldúa, the spiritual, material, physical, and psychic are inseparable aspects of a unified, infinitely complex reality. Stories, trees, metaphors, imaginal figures, and even the essays she writes are ontological beings with lives and various types of agency that at least partially exceed or in other ways escape human knowledge and control. Thus in the preface she distinguishes between "talking *with* images/stories and talking *about* them" (her emphasis), positing an epistemological-ontological dialogue between author and text; in chapter 2, she explains that images can "take on body and life"; in chapter 5, she confesses that "things whisper" to her in the night; and in chapter 6, she encounters "ensoulment in trees, in woods, in streams." To borrow from European philosophical discourse, we could say that Anzaldúa is a monist, positing a reality that includes but exceeds us, existing beyond human life and outside our heads; at best, we "catch glimpses of this invisible primary reality" (chapter 2).

Anzaldúa's complex ontology invites us to situate her writings within recent work in continental philosophy and feminist thought, particularly trends in speculative realism, object-oriented ontology,

and neo-materialisms.[72] Like speculative realists and object-oriented ontologists, Anzaldúa sidesteps the Kantian injunction to "adopt an agnostic attitude toward the nature of things-in-themselves"[73] and speculates deeply about ontological and metaphysical questions. Throughout *Light in the Dark*, she employs a non-anthropocentric lens and a broad definition of reality in which spirits are as real as dogs, cats, baseball bats, methane gas, doorknobs, bookshelves, and everything else.[74] But unlike object-oriented philosophers, who generally posit an extreme hyper-individualized realism in which all objects (including human beings) are, ultimately, independent and separated ("withdrawn") from all others, Anzaldúa insists on the radical interrelatedness, interdependence, and sacredness of all existence. Like twenty-first-century neo-materialists, who "tak[e] matter seriously," Anzaldúa posits "the ongoing, mutual, co-constitution of mind and matter" and defines nature as "material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological."[75] However, unlike these theorists, who often sharply distinguish their work from post-structuralism's "linguistic turn" and thus underestimate (or deny) the concrete, material reality of language, Anzaldúa closely associates language with matter. In her ontology, language does not simply refer to or represent reality; nor does it become reality in some ludic post-modernist way. Words, images, and material things are real, embodying different aspects of reality—ranging from the "ordinary reality" of everyday life (in its physical, nonphysical, and semi-physical iterations) to what Anzaldúa describes in chapter 2 as "the hidden spirit worlds."

Language is a critical strand in Anzaldúa's onto-epistemology and aesthetics, a linchpin of sorts. In chapter 5, for example, she refers to "a spiritual being" who "shares with you a language that speaks of what is other; a language shared with the spirits of trees, sea, wind, and birds; a language which you'll spend many of your writing hours trying to translate into words." Here's where Anzaldúa's transformational aesthetics comes in. Because language, the physical world, the imaginal, and nonordinary realities are all intimately interwoven, words and images matter and *are* matter; they can have causal, material(izing) force.[76] The intentional, ritualized performance of specific, carefully selected words has the potential to *shift* reality (and not just our perception *of* reality). Anzaldúan aesthetics enables writers and other artists to enact, materialize, and in other ways concretize