



From Borderlands and New Mestizas to Nepantlas and Nepantleras Anzaldúan Theories for Social Change

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Abstract: Perhaps not surprisingly—given the multifaceted nature of *Borderlands* and the diversity of Anzaldúa's other writings—readers have overlooked additional, equally important dimensions of her work, leaving what Anzaldúa might call “blank spots” that prevent us from grasping the radical nature of her vision for social change and the crucial ways her theories have developed since the 1987 publication of *Borderlands*. Even as scholars continue exploring *Borderlands*, it is my hope that we will also investigate and write about Anzaldúa's pre- and post-*Borderlands* ideas, especially a variety of interlinked theories she was working on at the time of her death—including, but not limited to: “new tribalism;” “geography of selves;” “el mundo zurdo;” “spiritual activism;” “la naguala, or watcher;” “the Coyolxauhqui imperative;” “the imaginal;” “autohistoria/autohistoria-teoría;” “nos/otras;” “conocimiento;” “nepantla;” and “nepantleras.” These Anzaldúan theories (as well as others) have not yet received the attention they merit. These concepts are crucial for those scholars hoping to understand the development of her thinking and the complexity of her work. More importantly for my argument here, these theories offer very useful tools for social change. In this article, I briefly discuss five of these theories: nepantla and nepantleras, nos/otras, conocimiento, and spiritual activism.

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a
crossroads inhabited by whirl-
winds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria
the mediator, straddling the walls
between abysses. ‘Your allegiance
is to La Raza, the Chicano move-
ment,’ say the members of my race.
‘Your allegiance is to the Third

World,’ say my Black and Asian
friends. ‘Your allegiance is to your
gender, to women,’ say the femi-
nists. Then there’s my allegiance to
the Gay movement, to the socialist
revolution, to the New Age, to
magic and the occult. And there’s
my affinity to literature, to the

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world of the artist. What am I? A
*third world lesbian feminist with
 Marxist and mystic leanings. ...Who,
 me confused? Ambivalent? Not so.
 Only your labels split me.*
 —Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “La Prieta”
 (her italics)

I begin with this quotation, drawn from one of Gloria Anzaldúa’s earliest published essays, because it so effectively illustrates Anzaldúa’s personal integrity, inclusionary politics, and expansive theorizing. The oldest child of seventh-generation mexicanos from the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, Anzaldúa participated in a number of different worlds: the public, often specialized spaces of academia, art, and publishing; the private spaces of family, spirits, and friends; and the political spaces of Chicana@s, Latina@s, feminists, U.S. women of colors, queers, and other progressive social actors. Moving among these diverse worlds, Anzaldúa would not be contained within any single group or location. Although each group tried to make membership contingent on its own exclusionary set of demands, Anzaldúa refused their rules without rejecting the people or groups themselves. At great personal risk, she exposed the limitations in the labels and the flaws in the various forms of group-think on which such labels rely. Thus, for example, in the opening epigraph Anzaldúa positions herself on the thresholds—simultaneously inside and outside a number of groups—and uses her threshold perspective to challenge the status quo. By so doing, she replaces restrictive identity politics with a broader call for new forms of communities or what she describes in “La Prieta” and “now let us shift” as “el mundo zurdo”—a visionary place where people from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and concerns co-exist and work together to bring about revolutionary change.

Anzaldúa’s experiences moving within, between, and among multiple worlds

inform her theoretical perspectives and shape her work. Her movements among worlds influenced the projects she adopted, the theories she invented, her critiques of rigid identity categories, and her lifelong efforts to develop inclusionary transcultural movements for social justice. Anzaldúa was not naive; she realized how difficult transformation could be, and she was aware of the many insidious ways resistance to change can paralyze social actors. However, she remained what Chela Sandoval describes as a “resolute theorist of hope” (xiii).

Anzaldúa was a nepantlera—a term she coined to describe a unique type of visionary cultural worker.¹ Nepantleras are threshold people: they move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual, group, or belief system. This refusal is not easy; nepantleras must be willing to open themselves to personal risks and potential woundings which include, but are not limited to, self-division, isolation, misunderstanding, rejection, and accusations of disloyalty. Yet the risk-taking has its own rewards, for nepantleras use their movements among divergent worlds to develop innovative, potentially transformative perspectives. They respect the differences within and among the diverse groups and, *simultaneously*, posit commonalities. As Anzaldúa explains in “now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts,” nepantleras recognize “the deep common ground and interwoven kinship among all things and people” (567-68) and attempt to awaken this recognition in others. By so doing, they make possible new forms of community and new types of social action.

A versatile author, Anzaldúa published in a variety of genres: theoretical essays, poetry, short stories, autobiographical narratives, interviews, children’s books, and multigenre edited and co-edited collections. (See the appendix at the end of this

article for a list of her publications.) As one of the first openly lesbian Chicana writers, Anzaldúa played a major role in defining Chicana/o, queer, and female identities. And as editor or co-editor of three multicultural, multigenre feminist anthologies, she played an equally crucial role in developing inclusionary movements for social justice. Although she worked outside the university system (except for selective teaching engagements and conference “speaking gigs”), her impact on many academic disciplines—including (but not limited to) American studies, Chicana/o studies, composition studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, feminism/feminist theory, literary studies, queer theory, and women’s studies—has been immense. Her words speak to many people on a variety of levels. Her writings have been included in over 100 anthologies to date²—and I predict that this number will grow much larger during the twenty-first century.

The Third Annual Social Theory Forum, “Human Rights, Borderlands, and the Poetics of Applied Social Theory: Engaging with Gloria Anzaldúa in Self and Global Transformations,” represents an exciting milestone in the development of Anzaldúan studies. Although Anzaldúa’s theories and writings have impacted many disciplines (especially in the humanities), few “mainstream” sociologists or other social scientists have taken up her works.³ As the rich diversity of papers presented at the 2006 Social Theory Forum indicates, Anzaldúa’s theories have much to offer social scientists—especially those scholars interested in combining cutting-edge theory with social justice.

In this article, I hope to contribute to this growing interest in Anzaldúa’s work by summarizing a few of her recent theories. Although I focus specifically on Anzaldúa’s post-*Borderlands* writings, I want to emphasize that I do so not out of disrespect for *Borderlands/La frontera*. This book, which is frequently anthologized and often

cited, has challenged and expanded previous views in many academic disciplines, ranging from American studies to queer theory.⁴ As Sonia Saldívar-Hull notes, *Borderlands* is “[a] transfrontera, transdisciplinary text [which has] “traveled between” many disciplines (12-13). Scholars have used Anzaldúa’s theories of the “new mestiza,” the “Borderlands,” and “mestiza consciousness” to critique and revise their disciplinary paradigms and contemporary identity-based issues.

But perhaps not surprisingly—given the multifaceted nature of *Borderlands* and the diversity of Anzaldúa’s other writings—readers have overlooked additional, equally important dimensions of her work, leaving what Anzaldúa might call “blank spots” that prevent us from grasping the radical nature of her vision for social change and the crucial ways her theories have developed since the 1987 publication of *Borderlands*.⁵ As Anzaldúa points out in an interview, *Borderlands* is not a self-enclosed entity but rather part of a larger, life-long project: “[It’s] just one project of this overall umbrella project that is my life’s work, my life’s writing. *Borderlands* is just one hit on it. ...All of my books are parts of this project” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 268).

Even as scholars continue exploring *Borderlands*, it is my hope that we will also investigate and write about Anzaldúa’s pre- and post-*Borderlands* ideas, especially those she was working on at the time of her death. In fact, I feel passionate about this. Gloria devoted her life to her writing. La musa bruja was her lover, her intimate companion. If we stop with *Borderlands*, we waste a large portion of her life. At the time of her departure, Anzaldúa was working on a variety of interlinked theories, including (but not limited to) the following: “new tribalism;” “geography of selves;” “el mundo zurdo;” “spiritual activism;” “la naguala, or watcher;” “the Coyolxauhqui imperative;” “the imaginal;” “autohistoria/autohistoria-teoría;” “nos/otras;” “cono-

cimiento;" "nepantla;" and "nepantleras."⁶

These Anzaldúan theories (as well as others) have not yet received the attention they merit. These concepts are crucial for those scholars hoping to understand the development of her thinking and the complexity of her work. These theories-in-the-making interact with, expand on, and in other ways enrich Anzaldúa's better-known theories of the borderlands, *mestizaje*, and *mestiza consciousness*. More importantly for my argument here, these theories offer very useful tools for social change. In the following pages, I discuss five of these theories: *nepantla* and *nepantleras*, *nos/otras*, *conocimiento*, and *spiritual activism*. Reader beware! I do not offer fully developed analyses of these terms. I hope that readers of this journal will explore Anzaldúa's theories and find ways to apply them to their own research and life.

NEPANTLA & NEPANTLERAS

Living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. Removed from that culture's center you glimpse the sea in which you've been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it. From the in between place of *nepantla* you see through the fiction of the monoculture, the myth of the superiority of the white races. And eventually you begin seeing through your ethnic culture's myth of the inferiority of *mujeres*. As you struggle to form a new identity a demythologization of race occurs. You begin to see race

as an experience of reality from a particular perspective and a specific time and place (history), not as a fixed feature of personality or identity. (Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "now let us shift")

"Nepantla" is Nahuatl word meaning "in-between space." Anzaldúa adopted this term, and used it to represent psychic/spiritual/material points of potential transformation. In Anzaldúa's writings, "nepantla" represents both an extension of and an elaboration on her theories of the Borderlands and the Coatlicue state (described in *Borderlands*). Like her theory of the Borderlands, *nepantla* indicates liminal space where transformation can occur, and like her theory of the Coatlicue state, *nepantla* indicates space/times of great confusion, anxiety, and loss of control. But with *nepantla*, Anzaldúa underscores and expands the "spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous" dimensions. As she explains in *Interviews/Entrevistas*,

I found that people were using "Borderlands" in a more limited sense than I had meant it. So to elaborate on the psychic and emotional borderlands I'm now using "nepantla." ...With the *nepantla* paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of *mestizas* living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined. (176)

Nepantla—as process, liminality, and change—occurs during the many transitional stages of life and can be used to describe a variety of issues related to identity and epistemology. At times Anzaldúa associates *nepantla* with identity-related issues.

For instance, in the interview with Debra Blake, she describes it as a “birthing stage where you feel like you’re reconfiguring your identity and don’t know where you are. You used to be this person, but now maybe you’re different in some way. You’re changing worlds and cultures and maybe classes, sexual preferences” (*Interviews/Entrevistas 225-26*). At other times, she associates nepantla with the mind’s creative faculty. In “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together,” for example, she describes nepantla as her “symbol for the transitional process, both conscious and unconscious, that bridges different kinds of activities by moving between and among different parts of the brain” (252).

During nepantla, our worldviews and self-identities are shattered. Nepantla is painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic; it signals unexpected, uncontrollable shifts, transitions, and changes. Nepantla hurts!!!! But nepantla is also a time of self-reflection, choice, and potential growth—what Anzaldúa describes as opportunities to “see through” restrictive cultural and personal scripts. As I understand the term, then, nepantla includes both radical dis-identification and transformation. We dis-identify with existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity; by so doing, we are able to transform these existing conditions.

Some people who experience nepantla states become what Anzaldúa calls “nepantleras”: (“in-betweeners,” “those who facilitate passages between worlds” (“(Un)natural Bridges” 1). Like Anzaldúa herself, nepantleras are threshold people; they live within and among multiple worlds, and develop what Anzaldúa describes as a “perspective from the cracks.” Nepantleras use their views from these cracks-between-worlds to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist. Nepantleras have a global consciousness. As Anzaldúa explains in a 2003 inter-

view,

Nepantleras are the supreme border crossers. They act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality. ...They serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater *conocimiento*, serve as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being. (“Speaking Across the Divide” 20)

Although it might be tempting to celebrate nepantleras for their ability to move among so many divergent worlds, it’s important to recognize the painful dimensions of this world-traveling. Their inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes them vulnerable to rejection, ostracism, and other forms of isolation.

NOS/OTRAS

Living in a multicultural society, we cross into each other’s worlds all the time. We live in each other’s pockets, occupy each other’s territories, live in close proximity and in intimacy with each other at home, in school, at work. We are mutually complicitous—us and them, white and colored, straight and queer, Christian and Jew, self and Other, oppressor and oppressed. We all of us find ourselves in the position of being simultaneously insider/outsider. The Spanish word ‘nosotras’ means ‘us.’ In theorizing insider/outsider I write the word with a slash between nos (us) and otras (others). Today the division between the majority of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is still in tact. This country does not want to acknowledge its walls or limits, the

places some people are stopped or stop themselves, the lines they aren't allowed to cross. ...[But] the future belongs to those who cultivate cultural sensitivities to differences and who use these abilities to forge a hybrid consciousness that transcends the 'us' vs. 'them' mentality and will carry us into a *nosotras* position bridging the extremes of our cultural realities. (Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*)

Anzaldúa's theory of "nos/otras" offers a unique way to discuss commonalities among differently situated individuals and peoples. "Nosotras," the Spanish word for the feminine "we," indicates a collectivity, a type of group identity or consciousness. By partially dividing this word into two, Anzaldúa affirms this collectivity yet also acknowledges the divisiveness so often felt in contemporary life: *nos* implying "us," *otras*, implying otherness. Joined together, *nos + otras* holds the promise of healing: We contain the others, the others contain us. Significantly, Anzaldúa's theory of *nos/otras* does not imply sameness; the differences among "us" still exist, but they function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections or what she describes as "an unmapped common ground" ("now let us shift").

With *nos/otras*, Anzaldúa offers an alternative to binary self/other constellations, a philosophy and praxis enabling us simultaneously to acknowledge and to bridge the distances between self and other. Drawing "us" and "them" closer together, this theory makes possible forms of unity that do not demand sameness but rather posit commonalities.

CONOCIMIENTO

Conocimiento es otro modo de

conectar across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses and traumas of daily life, and develop a spiritual-imaginal-political vision together. Conocimiento shares a sense of affinity with all things and advocates mobilizing, organizing, sharing information, knowledge, insights, and resources with other groups. (Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "now let us shift")

Conocimiento is a holistic epistemology that incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-directed action, and social-justice concerns. With her theory of *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa expands the potentially transformative elements of her better-known theories of *mestiza consciousness* and *la facultad* described in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Like them, *conocimiento* represents a nonbinary, connectionist mode of thinking; it, too, often develops within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perception. But with *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa underscores and develops the imaginal, spiritual-activist, and political dimensions implicit in her previous theories. An intensely personal, fully embodied epistemological process that gathers information from context, *conocimiento* describes the various ways we gather information from events, emotions, memories, dreams, and other elements of personal experience. *Conocimiento* is profoundly relational, and enables those who enact it to make insightful connections among apparently disparate events, persons, experiences, and realities. These connections, in turn, lead to action.

Anzaldúa offers her fullest discussion of *conocimiento* to date in her 2002 essay, "now let us shift...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts," where she describes a synergistic seven-stage theory: "*el*

arrebato...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning;” “*nepantla...torn between ways;*” *the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing;* “*the call...el compromiso...the crossing and conversion;*” *putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective ‘stories;’*” “*the blow-up...a clash of realities;*” and “*shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism.*” Significantly, these stages (or what Anzaldúa sometimes refers to as “spaces”) are recursive and nonlinear. Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento* is especially useful for those readers interested in the systemic dimensions of Anzaldúan theory. As Kelli Zaytoun asserts, “Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento* best encapsulates her perspectives on the growth of consciousness and indicates pathways toward multiple individual/collective visions” (153).

SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings—*somos todos un país*. Love swells in your chest and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything. ... You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This *conocimiento* motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. (Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “now let us shift”)

In many ways, Anzaldúa’s theory of spiritual activism⁷ is the most comprehensive of her theories because it could be said to contain them all. With all of her theories—ranging from *El Mundo Zurdo* to

conocimiento—Anzaldúa develops a holistic worldview that synergistically combines social activism with spiritual vision, creating what she calls “spiritual activism.” As I define the term, spiritual activism is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics—a way of life and a call to action. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation. To be sure, the phrase “spiritual activism” seems like a contradiction in terms: On the one hand, the word “spiritual” is often assumed to indicate an other-worldly, inward-looking worldview that encourages escape from and at times even denial of social injustices. On the other hand, the word “activism” is often assumed to indicate outward-directed engagement with and action in the material world, the very world that spirituality seems to reject or downplay. Yet for Anzaldúa, these two worlds and worldviews are not separate. The spiritual/material, inner/outer, individual/collective dimensions of life are parts of a larger whole—interjoined in a complex, interwoven pattern.

This synergistic synthesis of apparent opposites distinguishes spiritual activism both from mainstream “New Age”⁸ movements and from conventional organized religions. Whereas “New Age” belief systems focus almost, if not entirely, on the personal and thus leave the existing oppressive social structures in place,⁹ spiritual activism requires both the personal and the structural; it starts with each individual but moves outward as we challenge and transform unjust social structures. And, whereas conventional organized religions impose authority on individuals through external teachings, texts, standards, and leaders, spiritual activism locates authority within each individual, individuals often scarred by oppressive contacts with those they have encountered. As Anzaldúa explains in

her discussion of the ways U.S. women of colors have used spirituality to develop new forms of resistance, “Our spirituality does not come from outside ourselves. It emerges when we listen to the ‘small still voice’ (Teish) within us which can empower us to create actual change in the world” (“El Mundo Zurdo” 195).

Although spiritual activism begins at the level of the individual, it does not result in egocentrism, self-glorification, or other types of possessive individualism. Rather, spiritual activists combine self-reflection and self-growth with outward-directed, compassionate acts designed to bring about material change. Look for instance at the way Anzaldúa describes the closely entwined dynamics of oppression, resistance, and transformation in *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

[t]he struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (87)

Note the ways Anzaldúa shifts back and forth between inner struggle, outer awareness, and social change.

For Anzaldúa and other spiritual activists, self-change and social transformation are mutually interdependent. In one of her earliest published writings, “La Prieta,” Anzaldúa describes this intricate reciprocal process linking self-exploration with social-justice actions:

I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world, that traveling El Mundo Zurdo path is the path of a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society. And yet, I am confused as to how to accomplish this.

I can’t discount the fact that thousands go to bed hungry every night. The thousands that do numbing shitwork eight hours a day each day of their lives. The thousands that get beaten and killed every day. The millions of women who have been burned at the stake, the millions who have been raped. Where is the justice to this? (208)

I have quoted this passage at length because it so effectively illustrates several important dimensions of Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism. For Anzaldúa, self-change (or what some might call “personal growth”) is never an end in itself but instead must be part of a larger process requiring back-and-forth action on individual and collective levels. As Anzaldúa’s frank question (“Where is the justice to this?”) indicates, this transformative process is a difficult, complicated endeavor, filled with uncertainty and unanswered questions. Significantly, Anzaldúa does not deny the pain and suffering that so often occur in this world. She acknowledges this suffering without flinching and, by so doing, confronts the paradox of personal agency and structural determinacy. Rather than ignore, downplay, or even resolve this contradiction, she chooses to live with it:

I can’t reconcile the sight of a battered child with the belief that we choose what happens to us, that we

create our own world. I *cannot resolve* this in myself. I don't know. I can only speculate, try to integrate the experiences that I've had or have been witness to and try to make some sense of why we do violence to each other. In short, I'm trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be. (208, her italics)

Fully acknowledging the suffering, as well as the ambiguities, paradoxes, and uncertainties, Anzaldúa maintains her confidence in the political effectiveness of her relational worldview. As I have argued elsewhere, she posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and insists on the interrelatedness of all life forms.¹⁰ Drawing on indigenous philosophies, eastern thought, and her own experiences, she describes a fluid, cosmic spirit/energy/force that embodies itself throughout—and *as*—all existence.¹¹ As she explains in a 1982 interview, “Spirit exists in everything; therefore God, the divine, is in everything...it's in the tree, the swamp, the sea.... Some people call it 'God;' some call it the 'creative force,' whatever. It's in everything” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 100).¹² Note here Anzaldúa's willingness to ascribe this interconnectivity to a variety of things. This flexibility is a common trait among spiritual activists and enables them to develop nonoppositional approaches to social change. The point here is not Anzaldúa's metaphysics but rather the fact of interconnectivity itself.

(IN)CONCLUSION

When I first met Gloria in 1991, I was struck by her vulnerability, her open-mindedness, and her sensitivity to other people's alienation and pain. Deeply spiritual and

intensely political, she believed in each human being's basic goodness and potential wisdom. As I grew to know her over the subsequent years, I became increasingly impressed with the ways Gloria's faith shaped her work. Despite the various forms of discrimination, oppression, and rejection she experienced throughout her life, she maintained her belief in people's ability to change. This belief made her an exceptionally generous person and fueled her work for social change. She consistently challenged feminists of all colors and other social justice actors and organizations to recognize and rectify their racism, homophobia, classism, and other “desconocimientos.”¹³ Significantly, she exposed the hypocrisies and limitations without rejecting the people or the organizations themselves.

Anzaldúa's visionary, sophisticated, hope-inflected theories—coupled with her resistance to rigid labels and her interest in developing new alliances and identities based on affinity (or what she refers to in her preface to *this bridge we call home* as a “new tribalism”)—make her work vital for twenty-first-century scholars and educators interested in social change. Her writings challenge the conventional views that lead to stereotyping, over-generalizations, and arbitrary divisions among peoples; her theories open new spaces where innovative, sometimes shocking connections can occur. Her words encourage us, her readers, to reexamine and perhaps change our perspectives; her words invite us to adopt broader, larger, deeper modes of seeing and responding. As she asserts in her preface to *this bridge we call home*, “Empowerment comes from ideas—our revolution is fought with concepts, not with guns, and it is fueled by vision. By focusing on what we want to happen we change the present. The healing images and narratives we imagine will eventually materialize” (5).

Anzaldúa's writings offer us healing narratives and encourage us to create radi-

cal visions for transformation. In these times of relentless US American imperialism when the multifaceted potential of democracy seems to be drained of all complexity and used almost exclusively as a form of group-think harnessed to corporate greed, it is crucial that we accept *and extend* Anzaldúa's invitation to transformation.

NOTES

I have been working on the ideas presented in this article for many years; thanks Suzanne Bost, Kavitha Koshy, Irene Lara, Carrie McMaster, Harry McMaster, and the students in my Gloria Anzaldúa seminars for commenting on my earlier attempts to describe Anzaldúan theories. Thanks to Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, Jorge Capetillo-Ponce, Estelle Disch, Glenn Jacobs, and Panagiota Gounari for focusing the 2006 Social Theory Forum on Anzaldúa. Special thanks to Gloria Anzaldúa for developing such bold theories and for commenting on my earlier discussions of these theories. Portions of this essay were published in different form in my introduction to *EntreMundos*.

¹ Anzaldúa offers her most extensive discussion of nepantleras, to date, in "now let us shift." See also my essay "Shifting Worlds, una entrada."

² Anzaldúa's writings have been included in highly influential, canon-building anthologies in literature, feminist theory, Chicana writers, and composition. See, for instance, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*; *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*; *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*; *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*; *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*; *The Latino/a Condition*; *Living Chicana Theory*; *Border Texts*; *Feminism and 'Race'*; and other leading anthologies.

³ See writings by Teresa Martinez and Aída Hurtado for examples of social scientists who have explored Anzaldúa's theories.

⁴ I believe that *Borderlands* and Anzaldúa's other early writings (like "La Prieta") played a

formative, though rarely acknowledged, role in queer theory's inception.

⁵ Look for instance at Teresa Martinez's description of Anzaldúa's theory of mestiza consciousness as "perhaps the culmination of her work, a bequest to the multiple faces and voices in the 'borderlands.'" While I agree that Anzaldúa's theory of mestiza consciousness is of great importance, to describe it as the *high-point* of her career automatically dismisses Anzaldúa's more recent theorizing and whatever work she will produce in the future.

⁶ For additional information on these Anzaldúan theories and others, see the introduction to and the articles in my edited collection, *EntreMundos/AmongWorlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*.

⁷ Although I first encountered the phrase "spiritual activism" in Anzaldúa's work, the term is now very common term (my recent Google search turned up 108,000 "hits"). The term has become especially popular since Rabbi Michael Lerner began using the term in the early twenty-first century. Although Anzaldúa has been talking about "spiritual activism" for over ten years (see for example *Interviews/Entrevistas* 38, 178), I have no idea whether she actually coined the term. How would one prove such a thing, and does it matter? My hunch is that she, along with others, began using the term simultaneously, illustrating what Anzaldúa herself might refer to as a zeitgeist. I should also note that my discussion of spiritual activism represents a blending of my thoughts and Anzaldúa's.

⁸ I put "New Age" in quotation marks to emphasize my belief that this so-called "New Age" is not really new but simply represents the most recent manifestation of longstanding movements and traditions.

⁹ As Joel Kovel insightfully notes, "Since New Age thinking does not challenge fundamental social structures, its spirituality remains self-preoccupied, even as it attempts to get beyond the self: thus soul, whose essence is self-abandonment, is cultivated as a project of self-fulfillment" (209).

¹⁰ I discuss this metaphysics of interconnectedness in more detail in the introduction to Anzaldúa's *Interviews/Entrevistas*.

¹¹ Anzaldúa was especially influenced by Aztec and Toltec indigenous philosophies and

by the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. For another example of Anzaldúa's metaphysics of interconnectedness, see her statement in "now let us shift": "Spirit infuses all that exists—organic and inorganic—transcending the categories and concepts that govern your perception of material reality" ("now" 558).

¹² For an in-depth discussion of spiritual activism's individual and collective dimensions and uses, see my "Shifting Perspectives: Spiritual Activism, Social Transformation, and the Politics of Spirit."

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APPENDIX:

PUBLISHED WRITINGS BY
GLORIA EVANGELINA ANZALDÚA

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