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From Borderlands to In-Between Spaces

A Chronological Analysis of Anzaldúa's Ontology

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the chronological development of Anzaldúa's nepantla concept in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* out of the borderlands concept presented in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the degree to which the two texts enact these concepts themselves. The analysis serves as a first attempt to extend the arguments by Bornstein-Gómez and Yarbrow-Bejarano on Anzaldúa's form, by demonstrating the degree to which some of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*'s elements are informed by the theoretical concepts introduced in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. The enactment of the borderland concept is analysed through Anzaldúa's frequent switching of codes, voice and narrative mode within *Borderlands/La Frontera*. For *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, the imagery of the Guadalupe tree is considered as a direct enactment of the nepantla concept. It is argued, that the linguistic crossings that occur within *Borderlands/La Frontera* reveal a third space, outside of the insufficient binary opposition of the border, and that *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* itself is written directly from this space.

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From Borderlands to In-Between Spaces
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1. Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in understanding Anzaldúa's wider ontology involves coming to terms with the degree to which she is willing to combine science, belief-systems and personal experience in various voices, forms and codes. This challenge is already present on the level of a singular Anzaldúaian text. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera* she continuously connects, and shifts between, spiritual, psychological and sociological lenses of looking at border identity, such as when she moves from describing the experience of the coatlicue state (63-73), to describing the impact of language politics from both a historic perspective and lived experience (75-83), all while juggling both essayistic, narrative and poetic registers as well as both English and Spanish codes. From both a thematic and formal perspective, Anzaldúa's texts are always moving from one perspective to the next.

Transitional processes occupy a central position within Anzaldúa's narrative and theoretical writing. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the mestiza is forced to come to terms with ambiguity: "She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (101). In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* the "ability to meditate and move between identities and positions" constitutes the greatest strength the nepantlera has at her disposal (93). This suggests a progression within Anzaldúa's ontology: The mestiza of *Borderlands/La Frontera* manages to break with binary cultural identities but is left with a relative uncertainty when it comes to situating her new mestiza identity: if neither side of the border can contain her, then where to situate her newfound position? *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* synthesizes the mestiza's newfound position of ambiguity into the nepantla concept, situating

her as a nepantlera, occupying the space between cultures and identities. Acceptance of ambiguity eventually turns into the nepantlera's greatest asset.

In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* Anzaldúa's writings have expanded upon the "psychic and emotional borderlands", in a response to what she perceived to be a misplaced emphasis on the material aspects of the borderlands (*Light in the Dark*, xxxiv). In this posthumous work, Anzaldúa introduces the concept of nepantla. According to Keating, "nepantla represents temporal, spatial, psychic and intellectual point(s) of crisis (among other things). Nepantla occurs during the many *transitional stages of life* and can describe issues and concerns related to identity, aesthetics, epistemology, and/or ontology" (*Light in the Dark*, 245; emphasis mine). This renewed emphasis on psychic and emotional borderlands reinforces that transition, especially in relation to border crossings, lies at the core of Anzaldúa's argument in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and serves as the foundation for Anzaldúa's theory building around the concept of nepantla in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*: "By disrupting binary oppositions that reinforce relations of subordination and dominance, *nos/ostras* suggests a position of being simultaneously insider/outsider, internal/external exile [...]" (*Light in the Dark*, 79).

Both Keating and Anzaldúa have emphasised that the nepantla concept in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* serves as an expansion on the borderlands concept introduced in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (*Light in the Dark*, xxxiv). It is interesting then in light of analysis such as those by Bornstein-Gomez and Scott and Tuana, which emphasise the relationship between Anzaldúa's textual forms and the theoretical concepts she introduces in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, that *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* has not yet been considered along similar lines by scholars of Anzaldúa's work. While Scott and Tuana claim

that the concept of nepantla originates largely through the Coyolxauhqui process¹ (6-9), a larger attempt to situate the nepantla concept in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* in terms of its chronological development out of the borderland concept presented in *Borderlands/La Frontera* has not been undertaken. More importantly, the precise relationship between Anzaldúa's use of language and this particular aspect of her ontology, which proved so fruitful for *Borderlands/La Frontera*, has not been explored either. So far there have been no attempts to situate *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* into a reading that considers the chronological development of the nepantla concept. Such a reading would consider *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*'s formal and structural elements, extending Bornstein-Gómez's analysis of form in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (51). Furthermore, such a reading might also continue some of the preliminary analytical work of Scott and Tuana of the nepantla concept presented in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.

This thesis will attempt to explore to what extent Anzaldúa's concept of nepantla in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* can be seen as a continuation of borderlands concept presented in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and to what extent the two texts exhibit these respective concepts in terms of both form and content. In terms of its chronological analysis, this thesis will argue that *Borderlands/La Frontera* navigates the binary to construct a third element and that *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* takes this third element as the direct object for its theory and form, in an attempt to extend Yarbrow-Bejarano's argument in her

¹ The Coyolxauhqui process functions as an approach of identity building facilitated by the "disintegration and reconstruction" of old identities (*Light in the Dark*, 74) which is in turn made possible through the shifting of perspectives (*Light in the Dark*, 2-3). It is worth noting that Anzaldúa also connects the figure of Coyolxauhqui to her writing process, ostensibly positioning her as the embodiment of her written text (*Light in the Dark*, 95-116).

analysis of *Borderlands/La Frontera*'s formal elements. It will be argued that both texts actively enact their respective theoretical concepts of borderlands and nepantla, through various textual and formal strategies. This will be demonstrated through close analysis of two key elements of Anzaldúa's writing. These are: Anzaldúa's switching of codes and her usage of natural imagery. It will be argued that *Borderlands/La Frontera* actively exhibits its concepts directly through Anzaldúa's continuously shifting stylistic strategies in terms of the forms and codes she uses, whereas the enactment of the nepantla concept in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* occurs largely through Anzaldúa's use of natural imagery, particularly trees and physical bodies.

2. Theoretical Background

In order to analyse the relation between Anzaldúa's use of form and the theoretical concepts of the borderlands and nepantla, this theoretical background will be organized into two sections. The first section will introduce several of Anzaldúa's theoretical concepts, in particular the borderlands and nepantla concepts respectively. This brief overlook of Anzaldúa's theoretical concepts will serve to inform both the analysis of language in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as well as the analysis of the la Virgen's tree imagery in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*. Secondly, Anzaldúa's approach to form within the two texts will be discussed using the analysis by Berila, Bornstein-Gomez and Yarbrow-Bejarano, in order to demonstrate some of the ways in which the formal aspects of Anzaldúa's work will later be considered.

According to Berila: "Anzaldúa links aesthetics, politics, nation and identity by moving between forms, languages, and themes, building a hybrid narrative that progresses through disjunctures" (122). In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa explicitly states that she is not content in describing or theorizing a singular, physical borderland, but that she seeks to establish "the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands

[...]” (pref., n.p.). A borderland is determined as the place “where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (pref., n.p.). According to Anzaldúa, the new mestiza sustains “a tolerance for ambiguity” due to her continuous exposure to such spaces (*Borderlands*, 101). Cultures are put into constant interaction and conflict with one another within the mestiza, “she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, [...] nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (*Borderlands*, 101). This act of transforming ambivalence is in itself part of the creative process for Anzaldúa (*Borderlands*, 102-103). It is this same aspect that is crucial to even a cursory reading of Anzaldúa’s nepantla concept in *Light in the Dark*.

According to Keating, “it’s as if nepantla shoves us partially outside of our previously comfortable frameworks; pushes us into a frictional, contradictory clash of worldviews; challenges us to make some sort of meaning from chaos; and thus force us to change” (*Light in the Dark*, xxxv). These clashes of worldviews are for all intents and purposes: borderlands. As Anzaldúa describes: “Nepantlas are places of constant tension” because they serve as the place where different perspectives clash and merge (2). By becoming aware of the binary nature of traditional cultural positions through crossing between these positions continuously, the mestiza learns to embrace ambiguity (*Borderlands*, 101) revealing the third element of nepantla (*Light in the Dark*, 2).

Scott and Tuana emphasize the transitional aspect of nepantla in their analysis of the concept (7). According to Scott and Tuana, nepantla constitutes “a zone of questionability where sensibilities, that is, basic senses of meaning, identity, and purpose, come into unresolved conflict” (7). *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* tries to both describe and make manifest the transformative, in what Scott and Tuana call: “a way to develop a nonbinary connectionist mode of thinking” (12), by describing the central concept of nepantla in such a

mode. Anzaldúa revisits the aspect of in-between space both by shifting between theoretical and narrative modes² and by letting “different worlds coalesce” in her writing (*Light in the Dark*, 2).

As Bornstein-Gómez notes: “*Borderlands/La Frontera* is in itself an act of reading at the border considering that it straddles at least two genres, essay and poetry, and multiple linguistic registers. The text is a hybrid space, an imbrication of metaphorical and factual narrative as a discursive strategy” (51). For Anzaldúa, language constitutes one of the central aspects of her identity construction process (*Borderlands*, 81). In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* Anzaldúa draws attention to her considerations for the formal elements of the text and its content:

I ‘speak in tongues’ – understand the languages, emotions, thoughts, fantasies of the various sub-personalities inhabiting me and the various grounds they speak from. To do so, I must figure out which person [...], which tense [...], which language and register, and which voice or style to speak from. Identity formation (which involves ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ oneself and the world) is an alchemical process that synthesizes the dualities, contradictions, and perspectives from these different selves and worlds (3).

² One of the more striking examples of Anzaldúa’s textual shifts are the moments where she moves from describing the nepantla concept in a theoretical mode to invoking the concept through the imagery of the tree in a narrative parable, such as for example near the end of chapter four (*Light in the Dark*, 93).

To Anzaldúa, identity formation involves a reconciliation of different selves, each with a voice and language of their own. The forms, registers and voices of a text, are not just an expression of different identities, but an enactment of identity in and of itself. This essentially mirrors the mestiza's need for ambiguity: only by becoming aware of the dualities and sustaining the contradictions they bring is the mestiza able to find a new consciousness (*Borderlands*, 101-102).

In her analysis of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Yarbro-Bejarano argues, that Anzaldúa's formal textual approaches mirror the movement of border consciousness itself (24). She focuses specifically on Anzaldúa's construction of border consciousness through her emphasis on the figure of Coatlicue (14-15). Yarbro-Bejarano suggests that *Borderlands/La Frontera* exhibits a serpentine pattern, which effectively mirrors the Coatlicue concept (17). Here too, the direct connection to language is made: "The first six essays of the book inscribe a serpentine movement through different kinds of *mestizaje* that produce a third thing that is neither this nor that but something else: the blending of Spanish, Indian, and African to produce *mestiza*, of Spanish and English to produce Chicano language [...]" (Yarbro-Bejarano, emphasis Yarbro-Bejarano, 17). This interplay of the various essays can be understood as a direct representation of the linguistic borderlands (Yarbro-Bejarano, 22). "[T]he language of the border [...] transgresses the boundaries between Spanish and English, high and low decorum, insider and outsider speech. Anzaldúa claims her language [...] as part of the serpentine movement that mediates the binary split to construct the third element" (22). Anzaldúa's combined thematic and structural navigation of the binary in *Borderlands/La Frontera* serves as the strategy through which her borderland theory emerges. From a chronological standpoint, by having made the binary visible in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa is able to take the third element as the direct object of her theory building in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.

As Barnard argues, Anzaldúa's writing in *Borderlands/La Frontera* inherently tries to affect transpositions (40). "By inviting us to transpose our knowledges and understandings in one realm to another apparently unconnected and alien one of a different order, Anzaldúa displaces and defers any final or single meaning from a particular identification [...] and imbues each identifying moment with particular new meanings as a result of the transpositions" (40). Barnard in particular manages to highlight an important distinction for the role that language plays to Anzaldúa. The language of the border "refers [...] to more than the English/Spanish linguistic border, or even the boundaries between various Spanish and English languages, dialects, and registers; it also describes a new way of (un)gendering language, and of thinking through the meanings of race, gender, and sexuality" (Barnard, 42). As Barnard argues, this is demonstrated within the text in large part due to Anzaldúa's willingness to blend together different languages and textual forms: "It seems to encompass, for instance, poetry, theory, autobiography, criticism, narrative, history and political science, while suggesting the limitations of these delimitations and, ultimately, of delimitation itself" (45-46). *Borderlands/La Frontera* argues against any sort of fixed binary by utilizing and mixing these different forms and categories in an active way. As Barnard demonstrates, *Borderlands/La Frontera* deconstructs any ideas we may have on concepts like identity and language, by actively deconstructing itself as a text (45-46). The various textual forms and Anzaldúa's switching between them constitute a direct enactment of the borderland concept: much like the mestiza cannot occupy either side of the border indefinitely (*Borderlands*, 101), *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a text cannot remain in any one singular textual form, voice or code, mirroring the experience of living in a borderland. By putting different cultural positions into contact through the use of different voices and codes, Anzaldúa reveals a third element: the cracks that exist between these different positions where nepantla is situated (*Light in the Dark*, 108).

In her analysis of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Kaup specifically mentions Anzaldúa's attention to her use of language (105). She describes *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a text divided into two parts: "the first consisting of cultural description, the second poetry, the first concerned with fact, the second with fiction" (105). This divide in *Borderlands/La Frontera* reveals another formal element that the text exhibits:

In order to reverse the hierarchy between Western and native sources of knowledge, the general pattern of part one is to juxtapose academic information on a subject with either autobiographical or mythic native knowledge on the same subject. Anzaldúa then uses the meaning of linear sequence – "narrative time" in academic texts – which commonly signifies an advance in learning, to raise the status of native Chicano sources. (Kaup, 105).

This particular aspect of *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of the ways in which "the text's experimental format *enacts* an interrogation of national identity" (Berila, 122; emphasis Berila). More importantly, by legitimizing such sources through juxtaposition Anzaldúa enacts the mestiza's ambiguity (*Borderlands*, 101). This ambiguity in turn is what allows for the mestiza's new perspectives to "push up through the cracks and later grow into trees with roots, dislodging foundations of previous beliefs" within the in-between space of *nepantla* (*Light in the Dark*, 84).

3. Language in Borderlands/La Frontera

As will be demonstrated within this chapter, *Borderlands/La Frontera* formally enacts the borderland concept by crossing linguistically between different codes, voices and narrative modes. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa emphasises the process and importance of expressing identity through language. “The switching of ‘codes’ in this book from English to Castilian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language – the language of the Borderlands” (pref., n.p.). Within *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the very first thing that Anzaldúa puts forward is an invitation to the reader, after she explains her usage of a variety of different codes including Chicano Spanish within *Borderlands/La Frontera* (pref., n.p.).

Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture – to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurring out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you – from the new mestizas. (pref., n.p.)

Within the preface Anzaldúa weaves an intimate connection between the experience of life within the borderlands and the various languages that exist within the borderlands. The suggestion that Chicano Spanish speakers have hereto had to “beg entrance” (pref., n.p.) brings to mind the physical border dividing the United States and Mexico that Anzaldúa invokes immediately afterwards (24). This, in turn, is quickly contrasted with the reality of psychological and emotional borderlands: “A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. *It is in a constant state of transition*” (25; emphasis mine). It is

precisely this element of transition that *Borderlands/La Frontera*'s form reflects upon through the adoption of continuously shifting voices and codes. As a text, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is always in a state of transition by repeatedly crossing linguistic borders.

Anzaldúa's emphasis on the transitional, or shifting nature of the borderland and the continuous process of crossing borders is precisely the element within Anzaldúa's theory building that is enacted and reflected upon repeatedly by the shifting of form and code. By switching between the poetic, narrative and essayistic forms throughout the text, such as her inclusion of poems as headers for many of the text's subchapters (102), Anzaldúa is essentially always crossing borders within *Borderlands/La Frontera* itself. Her switching between English as well as Spanish codes constitute direct linguistic crossings of borders between the various languages. The mestiza in *Borderlands/La Frontera* after all, is forced to exist across multiple languages and to shift between these languages and aspects of her identity fluidly (99-102). As Anzaldúa argues about the mestiza: "She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be mexican 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 [...]" (101). Anzaldúa's claim, that *Borderlands/La Frontera* is meant to serve as an invitation from the new mestizas (pref., n.p.) emphasises that these recurring linguistic crossings may allow the reader to cross the binary herself. *Borderlands/La Frontera* describes and enacts the act of crossing, in order to reveal the binary as insufficient and to make the in-between space visible. *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* not only describes this in-between space through its concept of nepantla, it is also written from that space itself. From a chronological perspective, the linguistic crossings begin to take on a crucial role in situating the nepantla concept in Anzaldúa's wider ontology, as they represent a recurring formal strategy to actually make the in-between space visible.

When reading the transitional aspects of Anzaldúa's views on language, it's compelling to consider her views on the writing process as well. To Anzaldúa, writing serves as the application of her particular language(s): "To write, to be a writer, I have to trust and believe in myself as a speaker, as a voice for the images. I have to believe that I can communicate with images and words and that I can do it well" (*Borderlands*, 95). As has been demonstrated above, languages, particularly the legitimacy of languages (81), constitute a linguistic borderland to Anzaldúa. By utilizing a variety of codes and voices that represent delegitimized identities, Anzaldúa is able to reveal the associated linguistic borders. Writing serves as the medium where Anzaldúa herself is forced to cross these borders, allowing her own mestiza consciousness to take root (93-95). Anzaldúa emphasises the transitional and transformational quality of the writing process as well: "When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm carving my own face, my own heart [...] my soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body" (95). This positioning of the text as a body by Anzaldúa is a piece of imagery that she repeats within *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (107). In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* she connects the ideal body of text to the structure of trees. From a chronological perspective, the writing process described in *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of continuous crossing, carving a new identity "through the creative act" (95), the writing process in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* on the other hand is one where that identity is already present as a separate entity in the physical, psychological and spiritual world, outside of the insufficient binary oppositions. In this sense, the descriptions of the writing process in both texts serve as representations of the borderlands and nepantla concepts respectively.

To Anzaldúa, the writing process is intimately interwoven with her (cultural) identity (96). "Blocks (*Coatlicue* states) are related to my cultural identity. The painful periods of confusion that I suffer from are symptomatic of a larger creative process: cultural shifts. The

stress of living with cultural ambiguity both compels me to write and blocks me” (96; emphasis Anzaldúa). As Anzaldúa describes, these blocked states are a crucial component to her writing (96). To her they appear to function as physical walls, blocking her from crossing over in her writing. Eventually, during the process of writing, she becomes aware of these blocked states and “the light of awareness melts the block and I accept the deep and the darkness” (96). This sudden shift into what Anzaldúa calls consciousness reveals that blocks are resolved by Anzaldúa through the act of crossing. As Anzaldúa describes: “Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing” (70; emphasis Anzaldúa).

4. Natural Imagery in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*

If *Borderlands/La Frontera* enacts border crossings through direct linguistic crossings in terms of codes and writing modes, then the nepantla concept within *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* can be considered a directly enacted continuation of the borderlands concept: whereas the crossing of physical, cultural and spiritual borders in *Borderlands/La Frontera* makes a new consciousness available to the mestiza (*Borderlands*, 101), in *Light in the Dark*, the nepantlera must synthesize this new conscious and learn to occupy the nepantla, an in-between space, for she essentially belongs to neither side of the border (*Light in the Dark*, 93). The act of crossing in *Borderlands/La Frontera* is what makes this in-between space visible to the nepantlera³. As Anzaldúa puts it: “To become nepantleras, we must *choose* to occupy

³ It is also worth noting that *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* also visually depicts the in-between space of nepantla through its recurring use of the slash symbol, utilizing it to mark both the difference as well as the ambiguous point of contact within binary oppositions (*Light in the Dark*, 66-94).

intermediary spaces between worlds, [...] *choose* to speak from the cracks between the worlds, from las rendijas (rents). We must *choose* to see through the holes in reality, *choose* to perceive something from multiple angles” (*Light in the Dark*, 93; emphasis Anzaldúa).

Anzaldúa makes explicit, that “[s]truggling with a ‘story’ (a concept or theory), embracing personal and social identity, is a *bodily* activity” (*Light in the Dark*, 66; emphasis Anzaldúa). This claim not only emphasizes the physical reality of language that Anzaldúa is trying to bring across (Keating qtd. in *Light in the Dark*, xxxi), it also evokes the connection that Anzaldúa establishes between trees and bodies throughout *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (66-69). Whereas the borderlands concept in *Borderlands/La Frontera* is enacted within Anzaldúa’s writing through switching between various codes, in *Light in the Dark* the nepantla concept is enacted primarily through the imagery of roots, trees and similar natural elements that fuel Anzaldúa’s imagination (*Light in the Dark*, 66). This is particularly noticeable in her recursive use of the imagery of la Virgen’s tree (*Light in the Dark*, 67). When she first describes the cypress tree in chapter 2, Anzaldúa claims la Virgen’s tree as what first appears to be only a conversational partner (23). Anzaldúa frequently invokes the tree as a force that is almost synonymous with her own body: “With my back against its trunk, I meditate, allowing it to absorb my body into its being; my arms become its branches, my hair its leaves, its sap the blood that flows in my veins” (67). While it may be tempting to visualize this particular passage as one where Anzaldúa’s body is absorbed into the tree, the frequency with which Anzaldúa situates bodies within trees suggests that the implied transformation should be considered as moving in the opposite direction (23). It is made clear to the reader early on, that the tree is not just a silent listener and stoic figure of comfort to Anzaldúa, but rather a living and dynamic structure. During Anzaldúa’s first encounter with the tree she at first glance perceives the tree to actually be the figure of La Virgen de Guadalupe: “I suddenly saw her coming out of the hollowed trunk: [...] head tilted, arms

extended, halo spread all around. From a distance, the bright live tans and browns of the raw newly cut wood and dangling trunk fibers looked like the folds of her robe” (23). The fact of having seen la Virgen within the tree however remains with Anzaldúa, “her imagination picks her out every tune [...] no matter how age, storm or sea alters the cypress’s trunk” (23). The hidden presence of La Virgen de la Guadalupe’s body within the structure of the tree itself evokes the sense that Anzaldúa must occupy a creative in-between place, or *nepantla* when channelling inspiration from the body within the tree in order to find the natural language she seeks to make manifest (101), as it requires her to shift her perspective. She can only reveal the figure of la Virgen within the tree when she perceives as a *nepantlera*: from multiple angles (93).

This way of observing the tree is essentially connected with Anzaldúa’s attempt to perceive and write from multiple perspectives and positions, outside of “official theoretical/philosophical language” (6). Anzaldúa makes this especially clear when she describes how she points out the figure of la Virgen within the tree to her friends: “It’s sort of like hunting for hidden animals in children’s coloring books; it requires a slight shift in perspective to bring them up from the foliage. It feels like the tree is teaching me how to perceive not only with the physical eyes but also with the whole body [...]” (24). In order to spot the body hidden within the form of the tree, which as will be argued later, can be considered synonymous with Anzaldúa’s writing process, the viewer cannot rely on the tree itself, Anzaldúa has to make her friends shift their perspective to match hers. From a chronological standpoint, this utilizing of different perspectives is a reiteration of the new *mestiza*’s newfound ambiguity in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (101). Just as any one theoretical or philosophical position does not suffice for a description of the *nepantla* concept (3), neither can the reality of la Virgen’s tree be fully perceived by a viewer who only views it from one perspective (24).

The imagery of trees that occurs through *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro* is also closely related to Anzaldúa's conceptualizing of the world tree (25) and the archetypal tree of life (66-67). Anzaldúa divides these trees into three sections: Roots, trunk as well as branches and leaves (the latter two occupying the same section) (67). "Roots represent ancestral/racial origins and biological attributes; branches and leaves represent the characteristics, communities, and cultures that surround us, that we've adopted [...]" (67). The trunk then, serves as the direct physical world that we inhabit and also serves as the medium onto which Anzaldúa intends to attach her ontology (67). These three dimensions reflect Anzaldúa's approach to textual structure throughout *Light in the Dark*: "The tree is a link between worlds. Just as the cosmic tree connects under, middle, and upper world, I'll connect this essay's sections: from the roots to the ground and up its trunk to the branches and onto the sky [...]" (25). In this sense, the la Virgen's tree not only visually evokes the concept of physical nepantlas, it occupies a spiritual nepantla as well: occupying the in-between space of the world tree's tripartite (25). This particular aspect can be seen as a direct continuation of the borderland concept in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as it brings the spiritual components of the border back into focus and reiterates the need to accept the ambiguity that the binary opposition of the border reveals.

Anzaldúa intimately connects the writing process with the creation of a physical, humanoid body (107). This emphasizes the "material reality of language" which causes Anzaldúa to consider words and images as physical entities (Keating qtd. in *Light in the Dark*, xxxi) and also connects back to the body of la Virgen within the cypress as well: "Searching for analogies to your budding ideas, you scan cypress trees with twisted trunks [...]" (100). The reason that Anzaldúa's gaze continuously looks to the cypress as a potential element for imagery, is because the hidden presence of La Virgen de Guadalupe's body within the cypress evokes Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the writing process as the construction of a human

body: Throughout *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa describes her writing process as involving “the formation of bone” (104). When she reviews her drafts, Anzaldúa experiences flaws within her writing as the malformed body of Coyolxauhqui, “a grotesque figure with arms sticking out of her back, her skull hanging between her legs. She has eye sockets for knees. [...] You will have to take the text apart bone by bone” (107). The cypress tree, through the concealed presence of La Virgen de La Guadalupe’s body, offers to Anzaldúa precisely that “language shared with the spirits of trees, sea, wind, and birds” which she seeks to translate for her reader (101): The ideal textual structure when compared to the “Frankenstein-like monster” of the actual text itself which appears at some point within the writing process (107). This positioning of the body of la Virgen within the tree and the conceptualization of the text as a physical body suggest that to Anzaldúa, becoming *nepantlera* and writing from *nepantla* are synonymous both can only be achieved by adopting and shifting between different perspectives. It also demonstrates that the conceptualization of the writing process in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (95-116) is a direct continuation of the writing process described in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (87-97). The blocked states described in *Borderlands/La Frontera* reveal the binary and force her to accept the *mestiza*’s position of ambiguity (96). By enacting this ambiguity through shifting her perspective in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa can distinguish the body of la Virgen within the tree, and ostensibly, the body of the text, dismantling the binary opposition (100-101).

As Anzaldúa describes, to situate oneself between worlds inevitably involves “disrupting binary oppositions” (*Light in the Dark*, 79). In this sense, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* ostensibly continues in synthesizing the in-between space that crossings in *Borderlands/La Frontera* have rendered visible (*Borderlands*, 101). The disruptions of the binary oppositions revealed through the act of crossing are in turn achieved by utilizing language: “las *nepantleras* ‘speak in tongues’ – grasp the thoughts, emotions, languages, and

perspectives associated with varying individual and cultural positions” (*Light in the Dark*, 82). The natural language of “what is other” that Anzaldúa seeks to share with the reader (101) is essentially the ideal realization of speaking in tongues. According to Anzaldúa: “There is a difference between talking *with* images/stories and talking *about* them. In this text I attempt to talk *with* images/stories, to engage with creative and spiritual processes and their ritualistic aspects” (*Light in the Dark*, 5; emphasis Anzaldúa). The imagery of the cypress tree then serves as a clear example, of how Anzaldúa is attempting to talk with images. The tree at once embodies the theoretical concepts that Anzaldúa is seeking to describe as well as serving as a direct structural strategy within her writing. Her situating of the object of her ontology as being a body hidden within the tree invokes an in-between space all of its own.

5. Conclusion

Whereas *Borderlands/La Frontera* exhibits its borderland concepts through recurring acts of linguistic crossing, both in terms of codes and narrative modes, in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* nepantla is enacted through the recursive use of specific imagery. From a chronological perspective, this development makes sense: In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* the border is already crossed, after the new mestiza consciousness has been attained, the nepantlera must find a position from which her identity construction can commence, one that moves beyond the binary. While this particular analysis has limited itself to the formal aspect of language shifts in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the use of the la Virgen’s tree imagery in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa’s use of the slash symbol as a textual strategy of depicting the in-between space of nepantla has not been considered due to space constraints (*Light in the Dark*, 66-94). An analysis of this particular formal aspect in both *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* may prove valuable for

future analysis that consider the relation of Anzaldúa's form and her development of the nepantla concept.

In conclusion, the nepantla concept can be seen as a continuation of the borderlands concept in terms of chronological development in the sense that the border crossings that the mestiza undertakes within the borderlands serve as the foundation for the mestiza's newfound ambiguity (*Borderlands*, 101). This mestiza consciousness is what facilitates the shifting of perspectives in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, which ultimately reveals the in-between space of nepantla (93). The borderlands can be considered as the contact points where different cultures and identities meet, contrast and conflict, resulting in a border that the mestiza must cross. Nepantla on the other hand, is situated within this contact point (*Light in the Dark*, 2). In this sense, through "[c]onstant trafficking, negotiating, and dialoguing across borders" (*Light in the Dark*, 73) the nepantlera is able to navigate and occupy the space within the border: "Nepantleras function disruptively. Like tender green shoots growing out of the cracks [...]" (*Light in the Dark*, 84). The continuous crossing of borders results in a newfound awareness of such cracks, revealing nepantla as the location for the mestiza where her identity construction freed from binary oppositions can occur: A root that manages to exist amid the pressure of two sides of a border.

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