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“The godhead is unstrung”: On Gloria Anzaldúa's Celebration of the Body and the End of Patriarchy

J. Edgar Bauer, Germany

"Until there is complete Presence there can only be mythology and metaphysics. Meanwhile poetry marks the vicissitudes of the attempt at immediacy."

Lewis Thompson, 1984, p. 54

1. Indexes of resistance

U.S. American poet, essayist and cultural theorist of Chicano extraction Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) once depicted herself as "[a] *third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*" (Anzaldúa, 1983a, p. 205. Italics in the original). Accordingly, her writings were highly critical of America's political landscape and advocated resistance to sexual, racial and cultural assimilation. Anzaldúa's defiant nonconformity is discernible even at a linguistic level, inasmuch as her texts often include untranslated Castilian, Chicano Spanish, and Amerindian expressions and sentences that constitute hurdles for the English-language readership she primarily addressed (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp.55-61). As regards the contents of her writings, Anzaldúa's shamanistic self-understanding as a "shape-changer" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 66) and her full-fledged espousal of "spiritual activism" (Anzaldúa, 2000e, p. 178; Anzaldúa, 2009d, p. 292) have appealed to ethnic minority groups and academic specialists, but have failed to attract the interest of wider audiences. It is thus not surprising that although Anzaldúa's texts marked the emergence of gender and queer studies in the late eighties and early nineties, their general reception has hardly been commensurate with their theoretical and emancipatory relevancy.

2. "The mark of the Beast"

Among the late twentieth-century critics of the Western conception of sexuality, Anzaldúa took a singular stance. While her intellectual peers were mostly concerned with structural factors—socio-economical or otherwise—that hinder sexual fulfilment, Anzaldúa's focus on the sexed body reflects deep autobiographical associations with her experience of pain, suffering and shame. As Anzaldúa pointed out, she began having menstrual bleedings when she was three months old due to a rare hormonal dysfunction (Anzaldúa, 2000f, pp. 19, 23; Anzaldúa, 2000g, pp. 78, 92; Anzaldúa, 2000d, p. 169), and her adult life was marred by "very severe menstrual periods" (Anzaldúa, 2000e, p. 78). To alleviate the pain that had become her "normal way of life" (Anzaldúa, 2000g, p. 93), Anzaldúa decided in 1980 to have a hysterectomy (Anzaldúa, 2000g, p. 92). The

psychological wounds her illness left behind were however more harrowing than the immediate physical distress. Since "[t]he bleeding distanced her from others" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 43), she grew up convinced "that something was fundamentally wrong" with her (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 42-43), and eventually developed an intense sense of shame "for being abnormal" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 43). Anzaldúa encapsulated the quandaries of her condition in one of the most personal texts in her entire published corpus: "La vulva es una herida abierta / The vulva is an open wound." Drafted around 1990, the poetical piece indulges at first in reminiscence:

Tenía tres meses [She was three months old]. At three months her body started leaking small pink spots on her pavico [loincloth]. Eskimo girls start their periods early le dijo el doctor a su mamá [the doctor told her mother]. Prietita [the little dark girl, i.e., Gloria Anzaldúa] feels as though a bird with a sharp beak inhabits her belly[.]
Le pica[,] le pica [It pecks her, it pecks her]. She bleeds 10 días de cada 24 [on ten of every twenty-four days] [...]. (Anzaldúa, 2009b, p. 199)

In direct reference to the topos enunciated in its title, the poem then details:

Una herida, tenia una herida abierta [A wound, she had an open wound], a foul smelly place from where blood drips. Nalgas hediondas [fetid buttocks], she heard mother, aunts and others say, of the female private parts. Panocha apestosa [stinky cunt], verijas mugrosas [dirty pussy]—these bad words the only ones she knew [...]. (Anzaldúa, 2009b, p. 200)

A few years earlier, Anzaldúa described her predicament as "mi secreto terrible [my terrible secret], the secret I tried to conceal—la seña [the signal], the mark of the Beast" (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 42-43). Despite deploring in general that "[h]er body had betrayed her" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 43), Anzaldúa considered her having been "marked early on" (Anzaldúa, 2000d, p. 169) as a privilege that aligned her with the legacy of Aleister Crowley's (1875-1947) magical worldview. Antithetical to the "New Agers who want to transcend the body" (Anzaldúa, 2000b, p. 290), Anzaldúa remained within the bounds of her tribulated corporeality, transforming it into the vital source of her transgressive writing. Since the stigma that branded her life made it impossible for her to "ignore the body" (Anzaldúa, 2000b, p.290), Anzaldúa self-consciously decided "to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut" (Anzaldúa, 1983a, p. 208).

3. "To write from the body"

Considering her bodily tribulations, it is not surprising that Anzaldúa castigated the neglect of corporeality and its complexities not only among ancient and modern religionists, but also among the most visible exponents of feminist and lesbian theory. In an interview of 1982, she took issue with her female colleagues, asserting:

They ignore the body. It's like they're from the neck up. Even though it's about lesbian sexuality, it's like they don't have any words. No vocabulary. They don't describe the movements of the body. I don't know of anyone who writes through the body. (Anzaldúa, 2000f, p. 63)

Eventually, Anzaldúa expanded the scope of her critique, contending that the disregard of the body is a major trend of the present age with dire consequences for the life of the spirit. As she further declared, "[p]eople don't deal with the body, and yet they don't deal with the spirit. They deal with the head. The mind" (Anzaldúa, 2000f, p. 64). Against the shallowness of the unspiritual intellectualism she ascertained and assailed, Anzaldúa sought "to write from the body" (Anzaldúa, 2000f, p. 63), stressing that the meaning and worth of her texts should be measured "by how much *I* put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve" (Anzaldúa, 1983c, p. 172. Italics in the original). On these assumptions, Anzaldúa declared her willingness to mobilize the creative and transformative resources of her corporeality with the aim of unsettling the abstractive orientation of occidental thought. To expose the entanglements of mere intellectuality with the "colonialist, post-Renaissance, Euro-Western conceptions of reality" (Anzaldúa, 1997, pp. vii-viii), Anzaldúa drew attention to the intimate experience of her bleeding body, which she framed within the symbolism of sacrificial efficacy regnant in her indigenous heritage. As a result, her own authorial praxis became the privileged site of an exclusive sacral negotiation: "The Writing is my whole life, it is my obsession. This vampire which is my talent does not suffer other suitors. Daily I court it, offer my neck to its teeth" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75). Ultimately, it was by embracing her ancestral Aztec ethos of blood oblations that Anzaldúa emerged as a thoroughly embodied, auto-sacrificing Self (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75).

4. *An-zal-dúa*: A fusion of heaven and hell

Against the backdrop of Anzaldúa's indigenous sacramentality, the vulva emerges as a wound that betokens a salutary sacrifice accordant with the paradoxical wisdom encapsulated in the phrase: "[w]ounding is a deeper healing" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 140). Hence, in Anzaldúa's view, the vulva/wound symbolizes the reconstitution of a broken unity by means of the very scar the sacrificial setting implies: "When the wound forms a cicatriz [scar], the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split apart." (Anzaldúa, 2009c, p. 312). On these assumptions, Anzaldúa forgoes the idea of a *pontifex* building a bridge external to himself, and focuses, instead, on enabling her authorial subjectivity to fulfil the bridging function itself. Considering her *nomen* as her true *omen*, Anzaldúa invokes the etymology of her family name in order to reclaim and appropriate the shamanistic dimension of her calling as a mediator intent on "get[ting] out of the state of opposition and into *rapprochement*" (Anzaldúa, 1990a, p. 148. Italics in the original). After mentioning that her surname is Basque, Anzaldúa goes on to explain: "'An' means 'over,' or 'heaven'; 'zal' means 'under,' or 'hell'; and 'dua' means 'the fusion of the two.' So I get my task in this lifetime from my name" (Anzaldúa, 2000f, p. 37). In light of Anzaldúa's contentions, it becomes apparent that the title of her first edited collection of

essays—*This Bridge Called My Back*—was meant to suggest an embodied *religare* in correspondence with the *fusion* evoked by the root "dua"¹ in her name. Signally, Anzaldúa recurred twenty-one years later to the same trope in the title of the last collection of essays she published: *This Bridge We Call Home*. As she asserts in the volume's preface,

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 1)

Anzaldúa then points out that these "bridges" represent an "in-between-space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries," and thus a space whose defining feature is epitomized in "*neplanta*, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio* [middle land]" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 1. *Emphasis added*). By declaring in the very title that the *bridge*—a quintessential site of transit—constitutes the true place of human habitation, Anzaldúa seems to announce her overarching critical aim to de-realize the fixities of the habitual. Not designed to connect expanses of a landscape, but dimensions of existence, the Anzaldúan *bridge* ultimately proves to be a self-defeating metaphor for universal becoming: "Change is inevitable, no bridge lasts forever" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 1). From Anzaldúa's quasi-Heraclitean perspective, the fluidity of Being negates and dissolves even the metaphoric subsistence of connective *bridges* for the sake of a redeployment of their function through *acts of bridging*.

5. On lesbianism and queer dissidence

As a consequence of Anzaldúa's embrace of ubiquitous Becoming, sexuality reveals itself as a protean ambit necessitating the principled destabilization and dissolution of those language fixations, which divert from the perception of its intricate perplexities. Thus, despite self-identifying herself at times as a lesbian, Anzaldúa underscored that her individual sexuality could only be adequately grasped by means of more sophisticated approaches than those deemed to foster conceptual univocity. Fiercely guarding the complexities of the "worlds" she dwelled in, Anzaldúa dismissed criticism of her supposedly fluctuating commitments. In the autobiographical essay "La Prieta," for instance, she replies to unnamed objectors:

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web. Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me. (Anzaldúa, 1983a, p. 205)

Seeking to confound the classificatory tactics of her assailants, Anzaldúa was keen to convey the singular stance of her existential options at the crossroads of race, sexual and

¹ In contemporary Basque, the substantive "duo" corresponds to "bikote," meaning pair, couple, duo, doubles, dyad. (Azkarate, 1996, pp. 115, 155)

social vectors, each one of which contributed its own complexness to a life self-consciously proclaiming its insurmountable transiency. Drawing on these insights, Anzaldúa rebuts on principle the constraints inherent in heterosexual normativity or exclusive lesbianism, thereby resorting to the term *queer* to limn her sense of sexual dissidence that includes, but is not limited to, the female erotic love of women. Correspondingly, in *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Anzaldúa uses *queer* as a self-designation to signal her design to unsettle, first and foremost, the identitarian closures imposed by the dichotomous conception of sexual difference: "[...] I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19).

6. The sexual "double duality"

Anzaldúa's critical move away from the male/female binary and towards the complex fluidity of *queerness* allowed her a deeper grasp of the observable sexual diversity among individuals. Indicatively, Anzaldúa refers in this connection to the rather phantasmagorical rumours about a girl suggesting that she was "for six months [...] a woman who had a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis and she peed standing up" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). Leaving aside the issue of the girl's true physiological condition, Anzaldúa observes that this "half and half, *mitá y mitá*" was perceived as "neither one [i.e. female] nor the other [i.e. male] but [as] a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). In the case at stake, the monstrous *doubling* was organized as a temporal succession of the female and male sexes in the same individual. For this reason, the occurrence can be considered as being ultimately less perplexing than the case of someone who, at any given moment, features a dialectical interpenetration—as opposed to a mere sequence in time or formal juxtaposition—of the mutually exclusive sexes foreseen by the dichotomous scheme. In a noteworthy passage of an exchange with Anzaldúa that took place in 1991, Native American poet and scholar Inés Hernández-Ávila made the following point concerning the male/female polarity:

I never see the sun as completely male. I never see anything as completely male or female because they're both. So when I think of the sun I think of the duality and then the Earth as the duality also. It's the *double duality* I mentioned earlier [in the interview]. (Anzaldúa, 2000e, pp. 193-194. Emphasis added)

Unsurprisingly, Hernández-Ávila's contentions found Anzaldúa's full approval. As their ensuing discussion makes apparent, the critical import of the issue under consideration resides in the fact that by premising a fundamental duality inherent in both sexual poles, the traditional hiatus between the binary sexes can be overcome by a continuum of individual sexual forms, each one constellated as a unique modulation of the male/female duality. Moreover, since individuals constitute singular embodiments of humanity's general bisexual condition, there is no need to postulate a closed set of alternative sexualities designed to supplement the male/female dichotomy. In light of these precisions redolent of the ontological interpenetration of yin and yang in Taoist

philosophical discourse,² Anzaldúa's occasional references to a kind of self-contained "third" sexual form evince themselves as being, at most, provisional designations in a deconstructive process leading to the anthropological universalization of sexual intermediariness. Against the inveterate tradition of supplementary third-sex configurations, Anzaldúa's actual superseding of the binary scheme of sexual distribution is not achieved by the mere addition of categorial alternatives, but by questioning and dismantling the theoretical validity of the scheme's ground assumptions (Anzaldúa, 2000e, pp. 193-194).

7. On "wo/men and androgynes"

Based on a careful scrutiny of her own sexual complexities, Anzaldúa maintained that the male/female blending in every individual is an ineradicable component of the *conditio humana*, and by no means pathological. Moreover, she denounced in this connection the oppression of sexual minorities by the medical establishment, arguing:

Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19)

In correspondence with her insistence on sexual individuality, Anzaldúa posits that the claims of "absolute despot duality" prove to be theoretically untenable not only in view of the factual existence of the so-called sexual perverts, but also in consideration of the human future their reality foreshadows. As a passage of a poem included in the second part of *Borderlands / La Frontera* declares:

Cuando vives en la frontera [*When you live in the borderlands*]
[...]
you're a [...]
forerunner of a new race,
half and half—both man and woman, neither—
a new gender. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 194. Italics in the original)

Instead of pleading for a separate male/female synthesis along the lines foreseen by the old and new apologists of a supplementary "third sex," the passage announces a new formation of individuals that rejecting on principle the disjunctive topology of man and

² Norman O. Brown, an author with considerable influence on the American writers of Anzaldúa's generation, pointed out in his classic study on Sigmund Freud: "In the East, Taoist mysticism, as Needham [Needham, 1956, p. 58] shows, seeks to recover the androgynous self: one of the famous texts of the Tao Te Ching says: 'He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female / Becomes like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven / (Thence) the eternal virtue never leaks away. / This is returning to the state of infancy.'" (Brown, 1985, p. 134). In this connection it is also noteworthy that Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), arguably the most prominent sexologist and sexual minority rights activist before World War II, highlighted the relevancy of Lao-Tzu's thought for the critique of sexual binarity. On the issue, see Bauer, 2011.

woman, reclaims the more demanding sexual "borderlands" of the "neither." In an only recently published poem written in 1977 titled "The coming of el mundo surdo [sic]," Anzaldúa gives a sense of the profound rethinking needed as regards the articulations of sexual diversity. With its unmistakable sub-textual references to the narratives of the biblical Exodus and new-testamentary Eschatology, the poem depicts an end-historical fusion between an "I" who is not (or is not anymore) Egypt's pharaoh and a "you" who are not (or are not anymore) his slaves. Thereupon, an unprecedented "We" comes to the fore whose actual significance is revealed at the closing of the poem, when a "collective of wo/men and androgynes," resorting to the temporal blueprint of Christian *Heilsgeschichte*, proclaims: "We are the second coming" (Anzaldúa, 2009f, p. 37). Invested with an apocalyptic aura, these non-women and non-men constitute the embodied fulfilment of the Anzaldúan "new race, [and] new gender," which, subtly evoking the New Testament's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Apocalypse 21, 1), dissolve the age-old, asymmetrical sexual binary on which the creational narratives of Adam and Eve rest.³

8. Spirituality and the ontological precedence of darkness

Since according to Anzaldúa contemporary Western society is "premised on the reality described by the scientific mode of [the] observable phenomenon," spirituality—along with the kind of worldview that sustains her emancipatory project—is mostly considered a matter of mere "subjective experience" (Anzaldúa, 2000b, p. 282). To confront this pervasive trend, Anzaldúa lays stress on the responsibility of the *mestiza*—a precursor of the envisioned "new race"—to counter the predominance of "intellect, reasoning, [and] machine" by resorting to female intuition and its aptitude for "experiencing others levels of reality and other realities" (Anzaldúa, 1983b, p. 223). In accordance with her castigation of the occidental patterns of objectivization and its patriarchal underpinnings, a pregnant passage of a poem included in *Borderlands / La Frontera* conjures the *mestizas* as:

Hijas de la Chingada,
born of the violated *india*,
guerrilleras divinas—
mujeres de fuego ardiente
que dan luz a la noche oscura
dan lumbre al Mundo Zurdo. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 192. Italics in the original)

The sentence translates as:

Daughters of La Chingada [a pejorative designation corresponding in American slang to "the fucked one" and referring to "La Malinche," the mistress of Hernán Cortés and symbolic mother of the Mexican people]
born of the violated *Indian woman*,

³ For further elaborations on the critique of the Adamic conception of sexual difference in connection with Magnus Hirschfeld, see Bauer, 1998.

divine warriors—
 women of ardent fire
 who give light to the dark night,
 luster to the Left-handed World.

In Anzaldúa's visionary universe, the intuitive light of the *mestiza* illuminates what the passage designates as the "noche oscura" [dark night], a term intended to evoke associations with the oeuvre of Carmelite mystic John of the Cross (1542-1591), arguably the greatest poet in the Castilian language.⁴ As an Anzaldúan terminological concept, "noche oscura" denotes the primordial darkness that "was 'present' before the world and all things were created" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 49) and thus precedes and overrides the dark/light opposition and its derivative correspondences. Contrasting with these insights, the binary-ridden worldview of patriarchy opted for the outright denial of the ontological primacy of darkness, as it undermined the persistent attempts to establish patriarchal hegemony. Accordingly, the "noche oscura" was relegated to the subordinate dimensions of the ontic dark, where further negative predications—such as "matter, the material, the germinal, [and] the potential" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 49)—were heaped together as indisputable rejections from "the masculine order" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 49).

9. The feminine "other" and the clitoral origin of the penis

Taking as point of departure her mytho-poetic critique of patriarchy's exclusion mechanisms, Anzaldúa explores and renegotiates the conceptualization of the supernatural as being "both the undivine (the animal impulses such as sexuality, the unconscious, the unknown, the alien) and the divine (the superhuman, the god in us)" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 17). Like the distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in Greek mythology, or the Heavenly and the Infernal in Christian theology, the opposition between the *divine* and the *undivine* is never symmetrical. Since this opposition aims at enabling a covert self-assertion of male supremacy that derogates the ambit of its "other"—the feminine—to negative indeterminacy, its apologists invoke as supporting evidence of their procedural cogency the rebellious nature of women as the antithesis to the male order's rationality. Well aware that the cultural memory of patriarchy has always had weighty (albeit silenced) reasons for regarding the archetypal woman as "man's recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 17), Anzaldúa contends that the assignation of women to the alien realm of the undivine reflects the tacit acknowledgement by the patriarchal order that the disruptive forces of feminine alterity constitute an essential threat to the exclusionary logic of the phallic One. The far-reaching consequences of Anzaldúa's exposure of phallocentrism become especially apparent in a nine-page unpublished manuscript titled "La Mujer Que Tenía Un Pene / The Woman Who Had A Penis." In its central passages, the text presupposes the existence of a penis/clitoris continuity that unsettles the penis/vagina opposition and leads to the reinstatement of the "penile" plenitude of the clitoris, which patriarchy had

⁴ See especially the poems on the "Noche Oscura" in: Juan de la Cruz, 1964, pp. 363, 539.

sought to reduce to a near non-entity within vaginal emptiness. As the text further conveys, Anzaldúa did not intend to merely reverse the terms of the sexual hierarchy established by patriarchy, but to supplant the hierarchical structure itself by a conception of protean sexuality that allows for a continuous deployment of its transformations in accordance with the patterns of the sexual "double duality" already mentioned. Thus Anzaldúa infers: "There is only one sex. The penis is a mutant clit. Women can ejaculate. We are living in the age of the death of the old male cock" (Anzaldúa, n.d.).⁵ Despite its brevity, the passage brings home that Anzaldúa's critique of male hegemony implies not only demoting the phallus to the prosaic status of the penis, but also uncovering the evolutionary origins of the penis itself in the clitoris.⁶ On these assumptions, it becomes apparent that Anzaldúa's anti-phallogentrism primarily targets weltanschauungs and religions that relate self-projections of masculine power to an infertile "light" intolerant of carnal shadows. In this connection, Anzaldúa stresses that the reassessment of "undivine" womanhood does not purport a mere volte-face of existing patriarchal structures, but a thorough debunking of the core assumptions on which they rest. Since, on Anzaldúa's premises, primordial darkness remains ever unfathomable, any "luz" [light] or "lumbre" [luster] shed on it is reflected back by the very impenetrability it reveals. The critical self-limitation of the Anzaldúan *illumination* is therefore meant as an antidote against the epistemic hubris of patriarchy that degrades ontological darkness to the ontic dark and invariably seeks to consolidate its self-apotheosis within the factitious framework of the light/dark binarity.

10. Dissolving the categorial closures of sexuality

As already conveyed, Anzaldúa assailed the patriarchal regime in the name not only of "wo/men," but also of the discomfiting "half and halves"—at times designated as "mitá y mitá" and "jotas y jotos" (i.e., Chicano Spanish for "sexual inverts") (Anzaldúa, 1997, p. viii)—, the visible actualizations of the universally latent (although mostly unacknowledged) sexual complexities inherent to the human being. Since even genital anatomy contradicts the lastly ideological claims of binary sexuality, the male/female hiatus posited by patriarchy becomes for Anzaldúa the actual locus where "duality is transcended" (Anzaldúa, 1990b, p. 379) by the "double duality" that constellates the individual's unique sexual imprint. At this point it becomes apparent that the Anzaldúan "massive uprooting of dualistic thinking" (Anzaldúa, 1990b, p. 379) targets not only sexual binarity, but also the historical suppletions that were meant to remedy its taxonomic

⁵ With thanks to Mr. Christian Kelleher, archivist of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, for providing a copy of Anzaldúa's manuscript.

⁶ Given Anzaldúa's contentions in this regard, it is pertinent to remind that the evolutionary dismantlement of sexual binarity that ensues from Charles Darwin's core theses confirms and explicates his early insights into sexual difference. As his *Notebooks* reveal, Darwin unambiguously premised around 1838 not only that "[e]very animal surely is hermaphrodite" (Darwin, 1987, p. 380 [Notebook D (1838), No. 154]), but, more to the point, that "[e]very man & woman is hermaphrodite" (Darwin, 1987, p. 384 [Notebook D (1838), No. 162]). For a treatment of Darwin's critique of dichotomous sexuality, see Bauer, 2012.

insufficiencies by means of ad hoc alternative constructs within the sexual continuum. In view of the age-old constrictions and distortions that any finite compartmentation of the sexual entails, it is well to call to mind that Anzaldúa advocated in general "a continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (Anzaldúa, 1990b, p. 379). Accordantly, Anzaldúa underscored the role of critical reason in conveying the quintessential provisoriness of sexual taxonomies, when she points out:

There's no such thing as pure categories any more. [...] Categories contain, imprison, limit, and keep us from growing. We have to disrupt those categories and invent new ones. [...] To me these categories are very much in transition. They're impermanent, fluid, not fixed. That's how I look at identity and race and gender and sexual orientation. It's not something that's forever and ever true. (Anzaldúa, 2000a, p. 215)

Well aware of the scope and relevancy of the issues at stake, Anzaldúa at times strengthens her arguments against the tenability of closed schemes of sexual subsumption by drawing attention to the way her divergent genitility escaped the grip of reductive conceptualizations. As she declares in a stunning line of a poem from the mid-1970:

A cock's growing out of my cunt
[...]. (Anzaldúa, 2009g, p. 22)

11. The pervasiveness of life's "blendings"

Anzaldúa's contrarian *queer* contributes to dissipating the illusion of homogenous sexual groups for the sake of a symbolic order of continuous sexualities that contravenes taxonomic segmentations and the ensuing exclusion of individuals resistant to categorial subsumption. Accordantly, Anzaldúa was especially appreciative of *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit*, at the time, a trailblazing project meant to underwrite the efforts by "*jotas y jotos* and all others who seek to recover, re-inscribe, and revision myths and symbols of gender metamorphosis and same-sex desire" (Anzaldúa, 1997, p. viii). The encyclopaedic project clearly concurred with Anzaldúa on her endeavours to preserve and analyse the traces of traditions tolerant of sexual dissidence that regnant patriarchy has always sought to ban from collective memory. Moreover, the volume's editorial design converged with Anzaldúa's assessment of the interrelatedness of sexual deviancy and the societal status of racial minorities in the present global culture. Anzaldúa's views in this regard are grounded in the assumption that the sexually marked figure of the queer and the racially marked figure of the *mestizo/a* constitute paradigmatic reminders of the quintessential fabric of life. As she pointed out,

The *mestizo* and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls. (Anzaldúa, 1990b, p. 283. Italics in the original)

While mostly considered as mere victims of crudely ideological exclusions, both figures are, in Anzaldúa's view, the actual harbingers of a critical universality that unsettles artificial compartmentalizations in the name of the "blendings" that pervade life's innermost make-up.⁷ From this vantage point, the thoughtless and nuance-blind segmentations of vital continuities signal a form of human alienation coextensive with the inveterate cultural atavisms inherited from prehistory.⁸

12. Patriarchy in Western religion and indigenous traditions

Considering the world-historical ravages brought about by the patriarchal order, Anzaldúa emphasizes that the Catholic Church and other institutionalized religions belong to those highly insidious embodiments of Western culture that "impoverish all life, beauty, pleasure" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). Accusing them of always siding with those in power and oppressing people who are not easily categorizable, Anzaldúa contends in the main that "religions are bad" (Anzaldúa, 2000g, p. 95) and "have to be gotten rid of" (Anzaldúa, 2000g, p. 97). Although she once went as far as to assert: "I hate Protestantism, I hate Christianity, I hate Judaism," Anzaldúa nuanced her rejection by adding: "Not the spirituality of [them], but the establishment, the bureaucracy, the dogma" (Anzaldúa, 2009e, p. 94). Her inner reserve toward church religions in general, and Christianity in particular (Anzaldúa, 2000e, p. 180), however, did not bring Anzaldúa any closer to the Amerindian and Chicano socio-religious realities of her upbringing. On the contrary, Anzaldúa soon acknowledged that the forms of indigenous religion she was acquainted with resorted to the same kind of derogatory exclusions of women and sexual dissidents that she had encountered in Western mainstream religions. As she admitted, "[t]he privileging of the male has been passed down to us from both the indigenous culture—or some of the indigenous cultures—and the Western civilization" (Anzaldúa, 2000e, pp. 193-194). More specifically, she pointed out that in her autochthonous culture, "[t]he symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the 'higher' masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 5). This sober, if highly critical assessment of the pre-Conquista plight of Amerindian women resonates with Anzaldúa's depiction of the rejection and oppression she went through during her childhood and youth:

⁷ It seems safe to assume that Anzaldúa, a voracious reader, was acquainted with the work of Alfred Kinsey and that she drew inspiration from his critique of categorial sexual compartmentations for her own deconstructive project. For a study on Kinsey's views on the issue, see Bauer, 2007; Bauer, 2008.

⁸ As regards the opposition between finite schemes of sexual distribution and those foreseeing potentially infinite sexualities, as in the case of Magnus Hirschfeld's "doctrine of sexual intermediary stages" (*sexuelle Zwischenstufenlehre*), see Bauer, 2005; Bauer, December 2002. Between Hirschfeld's sexual *doctrine* and views on race, on the one hand, and Anzaldúa's critique of sexual and racial categorizations, on the other, there are noteworthy correspondences that still have to be analysed and assessed.

"[n]othing in my culture approved of me. *Había agarrado malos pasos* [*I had lost the right path*]. Something was 'wrong' with me. *Estaba más allá de la tradición* [*I was beyond the tradition*]." (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 16. Italics in the original)

Bearing in mind that in her own ethnic world "[w]omen are at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 18), Anzaldúa depicts the sexual and gender prejudices in present-day Chicano, *mexicano*, and Native-American cultures as stemming from their overrating of kinship relationships and their inability to cope with critical approaches of societal consensus and cohesiveness:

The welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual. The individual exists first as kin—as sister, as father, as *padrino* [*godfather*— and last as self. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 18. Italics in the original)

13. Reclaiming demythologized goddesses

Anzaldúa's critical views of her own autochthonous heritage seem at first to be at odds with her declared devotion to several divine personages of the Amerindian pantheon. This discrepancy is all the more worthy of scrutiny, as her treatment of the actors in the Christian salvational drama is characterized by emotional reserve,⁹ while her approach of Aztec or Mayan goddesses is always exultant. Anzaldúa's religious predilections are apparent even when an indigenous goddess has morphed into a heroine of popular culture—as exemplified by *La Llorona* [i.e., *The Crying Woman*—or into a central figure of Roman Catholic belief—as is the case of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, originally the Indian divinity *Coatlalopeuh* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 27). It is significant, however, that Anzaldúa's enthusiasm for indigenous deities does not index a wholeheartedly embracement of the religious worldview of her upbringing. As a closer examination of the theoretical framing of her statements in this connection shows, Anzaldúa had no fiducial relationship to the heathen deities she invoked. At times, Anzaldúa indeed professes that she fulfils the "task – to be a bridge, to be a fucking crossroads for goddess' sake" (Anzaldúa, 1983a, p. 206), but she promptly subdues her feminist-religious rhetoric, re-interpreting the mythological contents of her religious stance as encapsulations of sapiential discernment. Thus, corresponding to her secular recasting of mythical lore, Anzaldúa candidly concedes: "I hate to call them 'goddesses,' I like to call them 'cultural figures' [...]" (Anzaldúa, 2000a, p. 225). More importantly, the sacral personifications that inhabit Anzaldúa's personal pantheon function lastly as "metaphors" (Anzaldúa, 2009a, p. 180) of the unifying source of meaning that sustains her vocation as a writer. Thus, preventing any narrowly creedal or mythical understanding of her stance, Anzaldúa avows:

The power in my inner self, the entity that is the sum total of all my reincarnations, the godwoman in me I call Antigua [Ancient Woman], mi Diosa

⁹ See on this issue, for instance, Anzaldúa, 2000e, p. 180, where she declares: "[...] I never had a relationship with Cristo."

[my Goddess], the divine within, Coatlicue-Cihuacoatl-Tlazolteotl-Tonantzin-Coatlalopeuh-Guadalupe—they are one. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 50)

Advisedly, Anzaldúa underpins her de-mythologizing re-absorption of female divinities into her writerly Self by depicting the aforementioned *La Llorona* as "a shorthand for me" (Anzaldúa, 2000a, p. 221).

14. Corporeal ciscendence

Past the patriarchal illusions of translucent transcendence, the religion Anzaldúa creates in her "gut" remains true to its ineradicable ciscendence, thereby urging the body to rejoice in the mystery of its own opacity:

The godhead is unstrung.
He has a grudge against me and all flesh.
He rejects the dark within the flame.
[...]
The filth you relegate to Satan,
I absorb. I convert.
When I dance it burgeons out
as song. (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 197-198)

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