

eighty

**now let us shift . . . the path of
conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts¹**

Gloria E. Anzaldúa

an offering

As you walk across Lighthouse Field a glistening black ribbon undulates in the grass, crossing your path from right to left. You swallow air, your primal senses flare open. From the middle of your forehead, a reptilian eye blinks, surveys the terrain. This visual intuitive sense, like the intellect of heart and gut, reveals a discourse of signs, images, feelings, words that, once decoded, carry the power to startle you out of tunnel vision and habitual patterns of thought. The snake is a symbol of awakening consciousness—the potential of knowing within, an awareness and intelligence not grasped by logical thought. Often nature provokes un “aja,” or “conocimiento,”² one that guides your feet along the path, gives you el ánimo to dedicate yourself to transforming perceptions of reality, and thus the conditions of life. Llevas la presencia de éste conocimiento contigo. You experience nature as ensouled, as sacred. Éste saber, this knowledge, urges you to cast una ofrenda of images and words across the page como granos de maíz, like kernels of corn. By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered. You stop in the middle of the field and, under your breath, ask the spirits—animals, plants, y tus muertos—to help you string together a bridge of words. What follows is your attempt to give back to nature, los espíritus, and others a gift wrested from the events in your life, a bridge home to the self.

the journey: path of conocimiento

You struggle each day to know the world you live in, to come to grips with the problems of life. Motivated by the need to understand, you crave to be what and who you are. A spiritual hunger rumbles deep in your belly, the yearning to live up to your potential. You question the doctrines claiming to be the only right way to live. These ways no longer accommodate the person you are, or the life you're living. They no longer help you with your central task—to determine what your life means, to catch a glimpse of the cosmic order and your part in that cosmovisión, and to translate these into artistic forms. Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid

(desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades.

At the crack of change between millennia, you and the rest of humanity are undergoing profound transformations and shifts in perception. All, including the planet and every species, are caught between cultures and bleed-throughs among different worlds—each with its own version of reality. We are experiencing a personal, global identity crisis in a disintegrating social order that possesses little heart and functions to oppress people by organizing them in hierarchies of commerce and power—a collusion of government, transnational industry, business, and the military all linked by a pragmatic technology and science voracious for money and control. This system and its hierarchies impact people's lives in concrete and devastating ways and justify a sliding scale of human worth used to keep humankind divided. It condones the mind theft, spirit murder, exploitation, and genocide de los otros. We are collectively conditioned not to know that every comfort of our lives is acquired with the blood of conquered, subjugated, enslaved, or exterminated people, an exploitation that continues today. We are completely dependent on consumerism, the culture of the dollar, and the colossal powers that sustain our lifestyles.

We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness, caught in the remolinos (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge. The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing. Living in nepantla,³ the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete. Though these markings are outworn and inaccurate, those in power continue using them to single out and negate those who are “different” because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity. You know that the new paradigm must come from outside as well as within the system.

Many are witnessing a major cultural shift in their understanding of what knowledge consists of and how we come to know, a shift from the kinds of knowledge valued now to the kinds that will be desired in the twenty-first century, a shift away from knowledge contributing both to military and corporate technologies and the colonization of our lives by TV and the Internet, to the inner exploration of the meaning and purpose of life. You attribute this shift to the feminization of knowledge, one beyond the subject-object divide, a way of knowing and acting on ese saber you call *conocimiento*. Skeptical of reason and rationality, *conocimiento* questions conventional knowledge's current categories, classifications, and contents.

ued form of knowledge, and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality. A form of spiritual inquiry, *conocimiento* is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity). Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself. To understand the greater reality that lies behind your personal perceptions, you view these struggles as spiritual undertakings. Your identity is a filtering screen limiting your awareness to a fraction of your reality. What you or your cultures believe to be true is provisional and depends on a specific perspective. What your eyes, ears, and other physical senses perceive is not the whole picture but one determined by your core beliefs and prevailing societal assumptions. What you live through and the knowledge you infer from experience is subjective. Intuitive knowing, unmediated by mental constructs—what inner eye, heart, and gut tell you—is the closest you come to direct knowledge (*gnosis*) of the world, and this experience of reality is partial too.

Conocimiento comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms—that persistent scalp itch, not caused by lice or dry skin, may be a thought trying to snare your attention. Attention is multileveled and includes your surroundings, bodily sensations and responses, intuitive takes, emotional reactions to other people and theirs to you, and, most important, the images your imagination creates—images connecting all tiers of information and their data. Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness—with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges. These *conocimientos* challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions.

Information your sense organs register and your rational mind organizes coupled with imaginal knowings derived from viewing life through the third eye, the reptilian eye looking inward and outward simultaneously, along with the perceptions of the shapeshifting *naguala*,⁴ the perceiver of shifts, results in *conocimiento*. According to Christianity and other spiritual traditions, the evil that lies at the root of the human condition is the desire to know—which translates into aspiring to *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness). Your reflective mind's mirror throws back all your options, making you aware of your freedom to choose. You don't need to obey the reigning gods' laws (popular culture,

commerce, science) and accept fate as decreed by church and culture. To further the self you choose to accept the guidance and information provided by symbology systems like the Tarot, I Ching, dowsing (pendulum), astrology, and numerology.

Throughout millennia those seeking alternative forms of knowledge have been demonized. In the pursuit of knowledge, including carnal knowledge (symbolized by the serpent), some female origin figures “disobeyed.” Casting aside the status quo of edenic conditions and unconscious “being,” they took a bite of awareness—the first human to take agency. Xochiquetzal, a Mexican indigenous deity,⁵ ascends to the upperworld to seek knowledge from “el árbol sagrado,” the tree of life, que florecía en Tamoanchan.⁶ In another garden of Eden, Eve snatches the fruit (the treasure of forbidden knowledge) from the serpent's mouth and “invents” consciousness—the sense of self in the act of knowing.⁷ Serpent Woman, known as Cihuacoatl, the goddess of origins, whom you think of as la Llorona⁸ and sketch as a half-coiled snake with the head of a woman, represents, not the root of all evil, but instinctual knowledge and other alternative ways of knowing that fuel transformation.

These females are expelled from “paradise” for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and for taking individual agency. Their “original sin” precipitates the myth of the fall of humankind, for which women have been blamed and punished. The passion to know, to deepen awareness, to perceive reality in a different way, to see and experience more of life—in short, the desire to expand consciousness—and the freedom to choose, drove Xochiquetzal, Eve, and Cihuacoatl to deepen awareness. You too are driven by the desire to understand, know, y saber how human and other beings know. Beneath your desire for knowledge writhes the hunger to understand and love yourself.

seven stages of *conocimiento*

You're strolling downtown. Suddenly the sidewalk buckles and rises before you. Bricks fly through the air. Your thigh muscles tense to run, but shock holds you in check. Dust rains down all around you, dimming your sight, clogging your nostrils, coating your throat. In front of you the second story of a building caves into the ground floor. Just as suddenly the earth stops trembling. People with pallid faces gather before the collapsed building. Near your feet a hand sticks out of the rubble. The body of the woman attached to that hand is pulled out from the debris. A bloody gash runs down one side of her face and one arm sticks out unnaturally. As they place her on the sidewalk, her skirt rides up to her waist, exposing a plump thigh. You fight the urge to pull her skirt down, protect her from all eyes.

The first aftershock hits. Fear ripples down your spine, frightening your soul out of your body. You pick your way through the rubble, dodging bricks, and reach your car; except for a few dents on the hood it's still in one piece. Coasting over the cracked bridge and pits in the pavement, you drive home at five miles an hour. One street over from your apartment, a fire spews smoke and flames into the sky. You unlock the door of your home to find it won't budge. Putting shoulder to wood you shove back books, plants, dirt, and broken pottery the earthquake has flung to the floor.

Every few minutes an aftershock rattles the windows, drying the spit in your mouth. Each time the walls sway, you run to a doorway, brace yourself under its frame, holding your breath and willing your house not to fall on top of you. The apartment manager comes to check and tells you, "No te puedes quedar aquí. You have to evacuate, the gas lines are not secure, there's no electricity, and the water's contaminated." You want to salvage your books, your computer, and three years' worth of writing. "I'm staying home," you reply as you watch your neighbors gather sleeping bags, blankets, food, and head for the sports field nearby. Soon most of the city and county keep vigil from makeshift tents.

You boil water, sweep up the broken cups and plates. Just when you think the ground beneath your feet is stable, the two plates again grind together along the San Andreas Fault. The seismic rupture moves the Monterey Peninsula three inches north. It shifts you into the crack between the worlds, shattering the mythology that grounds you. You strive for leverage in the fissures, but Tonan, la madre tierra, keeps stirring beneath you. In the midst of this physical crisis, an emotional bottom falls out from under you, forcing you to confront your fear of others breaching the emotional walls you've built around yourself. If you don't work through your fear, playing it safe could bury you.

Éste arrebato, the earthquake, jerks you from the familiar and safe terrain and catapults you into nepantla, the second stage. In this liminal, transitional space, suspended between shifts, you're two people, split between before and after. Nepantla, where the outer boundaries of the mind's inner life meet the outer world of reality, is a zone of possibility. You experience reality as fluid, expanding and contracting. In nepantla you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to "see through"⁹ them with a mindful, holistic awareness. Seeing through human acts both individual and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions violate other people's ways of knowing

When overwhelmed by the chaos caused by living between stories, you break down, descend into the third space, the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness. Dysfunctional for weeks, the refusal to move paralyzes you. In the fourth space a call to action pulls you out of your depression. You break free from your habitual coping strategies of escaping from realities you're reluctant to face, reconnect with spirit, and undergo a conversion.

In the fifth space your desire for order and meaning prompts you to track the ongoing circumstances of your life, to sift, sort, and symbolize your experiences and try to arrange them into a pattern and story that speak to your reality. You scan your inner landscape, books, movies, philosophies, mythologies, and the modern sciences for bits of lore you can patch together to create a new narrative articulating your personal reality. You scrutinize and question dominant and ethnic ideologies and the mind-sets their cultures induce in others. And, putting all the pieces together, you reenvision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story.

In the sixth space you take your story out into the world, testing it. When you or the world fail to live up to your ideals, your edifice collapses like a house of cards, casting you into conflict with self and others in a war between realities. Disappointed with self and others, angry and then terrified at the depth of your anger, you swallow your emotions, hold them in. Blocked from your own power, you're unable to activate the inner resources that could mobilize you. In the seventh, the critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances. You include these practices in your daily life, act on your vision—enacting spiritual activism.

The first stages of *conocimiento* illustrate the four directions (south, west, north, east), the next, below and above, and the seventh, the center. They symbolize los siete "ojos de luz" or seven chakras of the energetic, dreambody, spirit body (counterpart of the physical body), the seven planes of reality¹⁰ the stages of alchemical process (*negredo*, *albedo*, and *rebedo*), and the four elements: air, fire, water, and earth. In all seven spaces you struggle with the shadow, the unwanted aspects of the self. Together, the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external changes. All seven are present within each stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not. Zigzagging from ignorance (*desconocimiento*) to awareness (*conocimiento*), in a day's time you may go through all seven stages, though you may dwell in one for months. *Verónica Schild*

but partially in one, partially in another, with *nepantla* occurring most often—as its own space and as the transition between each of the others. Together, these stations constitute a meditation on the rites of passage, the transitions of life from birth to death, and all the daily births and deaths in-between. Bits of your self die and are reborn in each step.

1. *el arrebatado* . . . rupture, fragmentation . . . an ending, a beginning

The assailant's hands squeeze your throat. Gasping for breath, your scream eeks out as a mewling sound. You kick and scratch him as he drags you across the Waller Creek bridge. He shoves you against the rail. Heart in your throat, you peer at the wet rocks below lapped by the gurgling stream. If he throws you off the bridge bones will break, maybe your neck. He finally wrestles your bag from you and sprints away. Anger pulses through you. You snatch up a big rock and run after him. You survive *este arrebatado* and witness his capture, but every night for months when safe in your bed, his snarl echoes in your head, "I'm going to get you, bitch." Footsteps behind you, people's sudden movements, stop your breath and your body responds as though he's attacking you again. Your relationship to the world is irrevocably changed: you're aware of your vulnerability, wary of men, and no longer trust the universe.¹¹

This event pulled the linchpin that held your reality/story together and you cast your mind to find a symbol to represent this dislocation. In 1972 you first saw the huge round stone of the dismembered moon goddess Coyolxauhqui in Mexico City. She's lived in your imaginal life since then and this *arrebatado* embeds her and her story deeper in your flesh. When Coyolxauhqui tried to kill her mother, Coatlicue, her brother Huitzilopochtli, the war god, sprang out from the womb fully armed. He decapitated and flung her down the temple, scattering her body parts in all directions, making her the first sacrificial victim. Coyolxauhqui is your symbol for both the process of emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering. Seven years after the attack, a psychic gives you a reading, telling you to find the scattered, missing parts of yourself and put them back together.

Every *arrebatado*—a violent attack, rift with a loved one, illness, death in the family, betrayal, systematic racism and marginalization—rips you from your familiar "home," casting you out of your personal Eden, showing that something is lacking in your queendom. Cada *arrebatada* (snatching) turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality, resulting in a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness, leaving behind dreams, hopes, and

goals. You are no longer who you used to be. As you move from past pre-suppositions and frames of reference, letting go of former positions, you feel like an orphan, abandoned by all that's familiar. Exposed, naked, dis-oriented, wounded, uncertain, confused, and conflicted, you're forced to live *en la orilla*—a razor-sharp edge that fragments you.

The upheaval jars you out of the cultural trance and the spell of the collective mind-set, what Don Miguel Ruiz calls the collective dream and Charles Tart calls consensus reality. When two or more opposing accounts, perspectives, or belief systems appear side by side or intertwined, a kind of double or multiple "seeing" results, forcing you into continuous dialectical encounters with these different stories, situations, and people. Trying to understand these convergences compels you to critique your own perspective and assumptions. It leads to re-interpreting the story you imagined yourself living, bringing it to a dramatic end and initiating one of turmoil, being swallowed by your fears, and passing through a threshold. Seeing through your culture separates you from the herd, exiles you from the tribe, wounds you psychologically and spiritually. Cada *arrebatamiento* is an awakening that causes you to question who you are, what the world is about. The urgency to know what you're experiencing awakens *la facultad*, the ability to shift attention and see through the surface of things and situations.

With each *arrebatamiento* you suffer un "susto," a shock that knocks one of your souls out of your body, causing estrangement.¹² With the loss of the familiar and the unknown ahead, you struggle to regain your balance, reintegrate yourself (put Coyolxauhqui together), and repair the damage. You must, like the shaman, find a way to call your spirit home. Every paroxysm has the potential of initiating you to something new, giving you a chance to reconstruct yourself, forcing you to rework your description of self, world, and your place in it (reality). Every morning in ritual you turn on the gas stove, watch the flame, and, as you wait for the teapot to boil, ask Spirit for increased awareness. You honor what has ended, say goodbye to the old way of being, commit yourself to look for the "something new," and picture yourself embracing this new life. But before that can happen you plunge into the ambiguity of the transition phase, undergo another rite of passage, and negotiate another identity crisis.

2. *nepantla* . . . torn between ways

Pero, ay, como Sor Juana, como los transterrados españoles, como tantos mexicanos no repuestos aún de la conquista, yo vivía nepantla—un aislamiento espiritual.

But, oh, like Sor Juana, like the land-crossing Spanish, like so many Mexicans who have not recovered from the conquest, I lived nepantla—a spiritual isolation. (Trans. GEA)

There's only one other Chicana in your Ph.D. program at UT Austin, Texas, a state heavily populated with Chicanos, and you're never in the same class. The professors dislike the practice of putting yourself in the texts, insisting your papers are too subjective. They frown on your unorthodox perspectives and ways of thinking. They reject your dissertation thesis, claiming Chicana/o literature illegitimate and feminist theory too radical.

Bereft of your former frame of reference, leaving home has cast you adrift in the liminal space between home and school. In class you feel you're on a rack, body prone across the equator between the diverse notions and nations that comprise you. Remolinos (whirlwinds) sweep you off your feet, pulling you here and there. While home, family, and ethnic culture tug you back to the tribe, to the chicana indigena you were before, the anglo world sucks you toward an assimilated, homogenized, whitewashed identity. Each separate reality and its belief system vies with others to convert you to its worldview. Each exhorts you to turn your back on other interpretations, other tribes. You face divisions within your cultures—of class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. You face both entrenched institutions and the oppositional movements of working-class women, people of color, and queers. Pulled between opposing realities, you feel torn between “white” ways and Mexican ways, between Chicano nationalists and conservative Hispanics. Suspended between traditional values and feminist ideas, you don't know whether to assimilate, separate, or isolate.

The vortices and their cacophonies continuously bombard you with new ideas and perceptions of self and world. Vulnerable to spiritual anxiety and isolation, suspended on the bridge between rewind and fast-forward, swinging between elation and despair, anger and forgiveness, you think, feel, and react in extremes. Now you flounder in the chaos, now feel cradled en la calma. In the transition space of nepantla you reflect critically, and as you move from one symbol system to another, self-identity becomes your central concern. While the opposing forces struggle for expression, an inner impasse blocks you. According to Jung, if you hold opposites long enough without taking sides a new identity emerges. As you make your way through life, nepantla itself becomes the place you live in most of the time—home. Nepantla is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between

changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it.

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.

According to nagualismo, perceiving something from two different angles creates a split in awareness. This split engenders the ability to control perception. You will yourself to ground this doble saber (double knowing) in your body's ear and soul's eye, always alerta y vigilante of how you are aware. Staying despierta becomes a survival tool. In your journal you doodle an image of a double-headed, double-faced woman, una cara in profile and the other looking ahead. The twin-faced patlache of your indigenous queer heritage is also the symbol of la otra tú, the double or dreambody (energetic body). La naguala connects you to these others and to unconscious and invisible forces. In nepantla you sense more keenly the overlap between the material and spiritual worlds; you're in both places simultaneously—you glimpse el espíritu—see the body as inspirited. Nepantla is the point of contact where the “mundane” and the “numinous” converge, where you're in full awareness of the present moment.

You can't stand living according to the old terms—yesterday's mode of consciousness pinches like an outgrown shoe. Craving change, you yearn to open yourself and honor the space/time between transitions. Coyolxauhqui's light in the night ignites your longing to engage with the world beyond the horizon you've grown accustomed to. Fear keeps you exiled between repulsion and propulsion, mourning the loss, obsessed with retrieving a lost homeland that may never have existed. Even as you listen to the old consciousness's death rattle, you continue defending its mythology of who you were and what your world looked like. To and fro you go, and just when you're ready to move you find yourself resisting the changes. Though your head and heart decry the mind/body dichotomy, the conflict in your mind makes your body a battlefield where beliefs fight each other.

3. the Coatlicue state . . . desconocimiento and the cost of knowing

There is an underbelly of terror to all life. It is suffering, it is hurt.

—Ming-Dao

Three weeks after the doctor confirms your own diagnosis you cross the trestle bridge near the wharf, your shortcut to downtown Santa Cruz. As you listen to your footsteps echoing on the timber, the reality of having a disease that could cost you your feet . . . your eyes . . . your creativity . . . the life of the writer you've worked so hard to build . . . life itself . . . finally penetrates, arresting you in the middle del puente (bridge). You're furious with your body for limiting your artistic activities, for its slow crawl toward the grave. You're infuriated with yourself for not living up to your expectations, not living your life fully. You realize that you use the whip of your ideals to flagellate yourself, and the masochist in you gets pleasure from your suffering. Tormented by self-contempt, you reproach yourself constantly and despair. Guilt and bitterness gnaw your insides and, blocked by your own grand expectations, you're unable to function. You double over. Clinging to the rail, you look down. Con tus otros ojos you see the black hole of anger sucking you into the abode of the shadow. Qué desgracia.

Tú, la consentida, the special one, thought yourself exempt from living like ordinary people. Self-pity swamps you, que suerte maldita! Self-absorbed, you're unable to climb out of the pit that's yourself. Feeling helpless, you draft the script of victimization and retreat from the world, withdraw from your body, losing kinesthetic consciousness. You count the bars of your cage, refusing to name your demons. You repel intrusions, rout off friends and family by withholding attention. When stress is overwhelming, you shut down your feelings, plummet into depression and unremitting sorrow. Consciousness diminished, your body descends into itself, pulled by the weight, mass, and gravity of your desconocimientos. To escape emotional pain (most of it self-imposed) you indulge in addictions. These respites from reality allow you to feel at one with yourself and the world, gaining you brief sojourns in Tamoanchan (paradise). When you surface to the present your unrelenting consciousness shrieks, "Stop resisting the truth of what's really happening, face your reality." But salvation is elusive like the scent of a dim memory. De éste lugar de muerte viva the promise of sunlight is unreachable. Though you want deliverance you cling to your misery.

You look around, hoping some person or thing will alleviate the pain. Pero virgen santísima, you've purposely cut yourself off from those who

from all your tribes, estás en exilio en un destierro, forced to confront your own desconocimientos. Though you choose to face the beast depression alone you have no tools to deal with it. Overwhelmed, you shield yourself with ignorance, blanking out what you don't want to see. Yet you feel you're incubating some knowledge that could spring into life like a childhood monster if you paid it the slightest attention. The last thing you want is to meditate on your condition, bring awareness to the fore, but you've set it up so you must face reality. Still, you resist. You close your eyes to the ravaging light waiting to burst through the cracks. Once again you embrace desconocimientos's comfort in willful unawareness. Behind your isolation is its opposite—a smouldering desire for love and connection. You pour ice water on that fire.

Last night cramps in your legs jerked you awake every few minutes. The lightest touch of the sheet burned your legs and feet. Finally you fell asleep, only to be roused out of your dreams by a hypo, a hypoglycemic incident—not enough sugar in the blood. Heart pounding, dripping sweat, confused, you couldn't remember what to do. Listing from side to side, you staggered to the kitchen and gulped down orange juice with two teaspoons of sugar. The thought of one night sleeping through a hypo and slipping into a coma te espanta.

Now you sag against the bridge rail and stare at the railroad tracks below. You swallow, tasting the fear of your own death. You can no longer deny your own mortality, no longer escape into your head—your body's illness has taken residence in all your thoughts, catapulting you into the Coatlicue state, the hellish third phase of your journey. You listen to the wind howling like la Llorona on a moonless night. Mourning the loss, you sink like a stone into a deep depression, brooding darkly in the lunar landscape of your inner world. In the night mind of the night world, abandoned to a maelstrom of chaos, you dream of your own darkness, a surrealist sueño of disintegration.

Beating your breast like a gothic heroine, you burst into the melodramatic histrionics of the victim. Cast adrift from all that's familiar, you huddle deep in the womb cave, a stone repelling light. In the void of your own nothingness, you lie in a fetal curl clutching the fragmented pieces and bits of yourself you've disowned. As you listen to the distant waves slapping the cliffs, your shadow-beast rises from its dark corner and mounts you, punishing you with isolation. Eres cuentista con manos amarradas, poeta sin saliva sin palabra sin pluma. Escondida en tu cueva no puedes levantar cabeza, estás cansada y decepcionada. Los días vuelan como hojas en el viento. Impaled bats infest your dreams and dark clouds move through your soul like shadows. You wallow in the ruins of your

On the edge of awareness, you seek comfort by blanking out reality and retreating into fantasies. You succumb to your addiction of choice—binge reading. During these gray foggy endless days and nights, you lose yourself in Lucha Corpi mysteries. Sucked into Laurell Hamilton's stories of Anita Blake killing and loving vampires and werewolves, you turn pagina after page to drown out la Llorona's voice, the voice of your musa bruja. Pero el viento keeps blowing and your black angelos (daemon) whispering, "Why aren't you writing?" But you have no energy to feed the writing. Getting out of bed is a Sisyphean task. Like the ghost woman you become a pale shade of your former self, a victim of the internalized ideals you've failed to live up to.

When first diagnosed with diabetes, your response was denial. This couldn't be happening, hadn't your body paid its dues? Why now, when you had the time and means to do good work? Digging in your heels you refused the reality—always your first line of defense to emotional pain. But the reality intruded: your body had betrayed you. You no longer had the agility to climb up to the roof to check the leak over the living room. Were you being punished for having been found wanting? No, it is you, not an external force, punishing yourself.

Back on the timber bridge, the wind shifts, whipping your hair away from your eyes. La Llorona's wail rises, urging you to pay heed. All seven ojos de luz blink "on." Your body trembles as a new knowing slithers up like a snake, stirring you out of your stupor. You raise your head and look around. Following the railroad tracks to the horizon, you note the stages of your life, the turning points, the rips in your life's fabric. Gradually the pain and grief force you to face your situation, the daily issues of living laid bare by the event that has split your world apart. You can't change the reality, but you can change your attitude toward it, your interpretation of it. If you can't get rid of your disease, you must learn to live with it. As your perception shifts, your emotions shift—you gain a new understanding of your negative feelings. By seeing your symptoms not as signs of sickness and disintegration but as signals of growth, you're able to rise from depression's slow suicide. By using these feelings as tools or grist for the mill, you move through fear, anxiety, anger, and blast into another reality. But transforming habitual feelings is the hardest thing you've ever attempted.

As you begin to know and accept the self uncovered by the trauma, you pull the blinders off, take in the new landscape in brief glances. Gradually you arouse the agent in this drama, begin to act, to dis-identify with the fear and the isolation. You sit quietly and meditate, trance into an altered state of consciousness, temporarily suspending your usual frames of reference and beliefs while your creative self seeks a solution to your problem by

trigger responses from your body and how these reactions function. You urge yourself to cooperate with the body instead of sabotaging its self-healing. You draw a map of where you've been, how you've lived, where you're going. Sorting and resorting, you go through the trauma's images, feelings, sensations. While an internal transformation tries to keep pace with each rift, each reenactment shifts your ground again.

A paradox: the knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them. Seeing through these cracks makes you uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of yourself (shadow-beasts) you don't want to own. Admitting your darker aspects allows you to break out of your self-imposed prison. But it will cost you. When you woo el oscuro, digging into it, sooner or later you pay the consequences—the pain of personal growth. Conocimiento will not let you forget the shadow self, greedy, gluttonous, and indifferent, will not let you lock the cold "bitch" in the basement anymore. Though modern therapies exhort you to act against your passions (compulsions), claiming health and integration lie in that direction, you've learned that delving more fully into your pain, anger, despair, depression will move you through them to the other side, where you can use their energy to heal. Depression is useful—it signals that you need to make changes in your life, it challenges your tendency to withdraw, it reminds you to take action. To reclaim body consciousness tienes que moverte—go for walks, salir a conocer mundo, engage with the world.

Periods of being lost in chaos occur when you're between "stories," before you shift from one set of perceptions and beliefs to another, from one mood to another. By realizing that it's negative thoughts (your reactions to events) that rouse the beast and not something "real" or unchangeable out there in the outer world, you avert being hijacked by past trauma and the demons of self-pity and doomsday ruminations. But you also know that grief and depression may originate in the outside world. You still grieve for this country's original trauma—the most massive act of genocide in the world's history, the mass murder of indigenous peoples. Before the European colonizers came to the "new world" there were five to seven-and-a-half million Indians in the territory between Mexico and Canada. By 1900 there were less than 250,000 left (Stiffarm). You descended from the world's oldest "races," thirty or forty thousand years old, and you cry out at the injustice, the waste. You mourn the devastation that the slave trade cost Africa and the United States. You lament the loss of connection to the Earth, a conscious being that keens through you for all the trees felled, air poisoned, water polluted, animals slaughtered into extinction.

Above, Coyolxauhqui's luz pulls you from the pit of your grief. Realizing that you always use the same tactics, repeat the same behaviors

in each stage, breaks your paralysis. What you most desire is a way up, a way out. You know that you've fallen off a metaphorical bridge and into the depths. You look up toward la luna casting light in the darkness. Its bouncing light filters through the water. You want to heal; you want to be transformed. You begin the slow ascent, and as you rise feel as though you're passing through the birth canal, the threshold *nepantla*. Only when you emerge from the dead with soul intact can you honor the visions you dreamed in the depths. In the deep fecund cave of gestation lies not only the source of your woundedness and your passion, but also the promise of inner knowledge, healing, and spiritual rebirth (the hidden treasures), waiting for you to bear them to the surface.

During the Coatlicue phase you thought you'd wandered off the path of *conocimiento*, but this detour is part of the path. You bodymind/soul is the hermetic vessel where transformation takes place. The shift must be more than intellectual. Escaping the illusion of isolation, you prod yourself to get out of bed, clean your house, then yourself. You light la virgen de Guadalupe candle and copal, and, with a bundle of *yierbitas* (*ruda y yerba buena*), brush the smoke down your body, sweeping away the pain, grief, and fear of the past that's been stalking you, severing the cords binding you to it.

You realize you've severed mind from body and reversed the dichotomy—in the beginning you blamed the body for betraying you, now you blame your mind. Affirming they're not separate, you begin to own the bits of yourself you've disowned, take back the projections you've cast onto others, and relinquish your victim identity. *Ésta limpia* unclogs your ears, enabling you to hear the rustling of *los espíritus*; it loosens the constriction in your throat, allowing you to talk with them. Claiming the creative powers and processes of the unconscious (*Coyolxauhqui*), you thank your soul for the intense emotions y *los desconocimientos* that wrung consciousness from you. Though you try to thank the universe for your illness, emotional trauma, and habits that interfere with living fully, you still can't accept these, may never be fully present with the pain, never fully embrace the parts of self you ousted from consciousness, may never forgive the unconscious for turning hostile. Though you know change will happen when you stop resisting the dark side of your reality, still you resist. But despite the dread and spiritual emptying, the work you do in the world is not ready to release you.

4. the call . . . el compromiso . . . the crossing and conversion

At four in the morning, the pounding of your heart wakes you. It's bang-

fumble for the bed light, and pull the switch. Your arms are livid and swollen like sausages. Your face feels puffy and so hot it scorches your fingertips. Something slithers and swooshes against the inside walls. Bile rises, your stomach heaves. It feels like you've giving birth to a huge stone. Something pops out, you fall back onto the mattress in blessed relief. Is this what it feels like to die?

Cool and light as a feather, you float near the ceiling looking down at your body spread-eagle on the bed, a bed that's in the wrong place and reversed—the room is oddly elongated, the walls curved, the floor sloped. Though it's deep night and the light's off—but didn't you just turn it on?—you see everything like it was high noon in the desert. As you float overhead you bob into a white light—the lightbulb or the sun? You could glide out the window and never return. The instant you think this, you swoop back into the body. The re-entry feels like squeezing ten pounds of chorizo through a keyhole.

You get out of bed, stretch cramped limbs and stumble across the room like an arthritic patient. Soon energy zings up *tu cuerpo* (body) in an ecstasy so intense it can't be contained. You twirl around, hugging yourself, picking up speed and kicking the walls. Later you wonder if you made up an out-of-body story in an attempt to explain the inexplicable. It dawns on you that *you're not contained by your skin*—you exist outside your body, and outside your dreambody as well. If the body is energy, is spirit—it doesn't have boundaries. What if you experienced your body expanding to the size of the room, not your soul leaving your body? What if freedom from categories occurs by widening the psyche/body's borders, widening the consciousness that senses self (the body is the basis for the conscious sense of self, the representation of self in the mind)? It follows that if you're not contained by your race, class, gender, or sexual identity, the body must be more than the categories that mark you.

Leaving the body reinforces the mind/body, matter/spirit dichotomy you're trying to show does not exist in reality. The last thing you want to uphold is the Cartesian split, but thus far you haven't a clue how to unknot *el nudo de cuerpo/mente/alma* despite just having had an experience that intellectually unknots it. If *el conocimiento* that body is both spirit and matter intertwined is the solution, it's one difficult to live out, requiring that this knowledge be lived daily in embodied ways. Only then may the split be healed.¹³

What pulled you out of your body? Was the seven-seven you drank at the party still in your system when you took the Percodan? You know that mixing booze with drugs can end in death, so why did you do it? So that *el jaguar, tu doble, que vigila por la noche* could come from the south to

ferent kind of knowledge? In the deepest part of night you followed the jaguar through the transparent wall between the worlds. Shapes shifted. Did you assume another pair of eyes, another pair of ears, another body, another dreambody? Maybe you took your physical body, and in this other place it metamorphosed into a jaguar.

Acts of self-abuse may lead to insight—or so you rationalize your experimenting with mind-expanding drugs. Insight originates from the light of the moon (Coyolxauhqui consciousness), enabling you to see through your identifications, through the walls that your ethnic cultural traditions and religious beliefs have erected. The lechuza eyes¹⁴ of your naguala open, rousing you from the trance of hyper-rationality induced by higher education. An image flickers—nonverbal, brief, and subtle—signaling otro conocimiento: besides the mortal body you have a transtemporal, immortal one. This knowing prompts you to shift into a new perception of yourself and the world. Nothing is fixed. The pulse of existence, the heart of the universe is fluid. Identity, like a river, is always changing, always in transition, always in nepantla. Like the river downstream, you're not the same person you were upstream. You begin to define yourself in terms of who you are becoming, not who you have been.

These states of awareness, while vital, don't last. Yet they provide the faith that enables you to continue la lucha. When feeling low, the longing for your potential self is an ache deep within. Something within flutters its feathers, stretches toward the sky. You try to listen more closely, bringing all your faculties to bear on transforming your condition. Using these insights to alter your current thoughts and behavior, you reinterpret their meanings. As you learn from the different stages you pass through, your reactions to past events change. You re-member your experiences in a new arrangement. Your responses to the challenges of daily life also adjust. As you continually reinterpret your past, you reshape your present. Instead of walking your habitual routes you forge new ones. The changes affect your biology. The cells in your brain shift and, in turn, create new pathways, rewiring your brain.

On the path ahead you see otro puente, a footbridge with missing planks, broken rails. You walk toward it, step onto the threshold, and freeze, right hand clutching the past, left hand stretching toward the unknown. Behind, the world admonishes you to stick to the old-and-tried dominant paradigm, the secure relationships within it. Adelante, la Llorona whispers, "You have a task, a calling, only you can bring forth your potential." You yearn to know what that ever-present inner watcher is asking of you. Loosening your grip on the known and reaching for the

its. By now you've found remnants of a community—people on a similar quest/path. To transform yourself, you need the help (the written or spoken words) of those who have crossed before you. You want them to describe las puertas, to hold your hand while crossing them. You want them to mentor your work within the Chicana, queer, artistic, feminist, spiritual, and other communities.

To learn what to transform into you ask, "How can I contribute?" You open yourself and listen to la naguala and the images, sensations, and dreams she presents. (La naguala's presence is so subtle and fleeting it barely registers unless tracked by your attention's radar.) Your inner voice reveals your core passion, which will point to your sense of purpose, urging you to seek a vision, devise a plan. Your passion motivates you to discover resources within yourself and in the world. It prompts you to take responsibility for consciously creating your life and becoming a fully functioning human being, a contributing member of all your communities, one worthy of self-respect and love. You want to pursue your mission with integrity, to honor yourself and to be honored. Holding these realizations in mind, you stand at the brink and reconsider the crossing.

Are you sure you're ready to face the shadow-beast guarding the threshold—that part of you holding your failures and inadequacies, the negativities you've internalized, and those aspects of gender and class you want to disown? Recognizing and coming to terms with the manipulative, vindictive, secretive shadow-beast within will take the heaviest toll. Maybe this bridge shouldn't be crossed. Once crossed, it can't be uncrossed. To pass over the bridge to something else, you'll have to give up partial organizations of self, erroneous bits of knowledge, outmoded beliefs of who you are, your comfortable identities (your story of self, tu autohistoria¹⁵). You'll have to leave parts of yourself behind.

The bridge (boundary between the world you've just left and the one ahead) is both a barrier and point of transformation. By crossing, you invite a turning point, initiate a change. And change is never comfortable, easy, or neat. It'll overturn all your relationships, leave behind lover, parent, friend, who, not wanting to disturb the status quo nor lose you, try to keep you from changing. Okay, so cambio is hard. Tough it out, you tell yourself. Doesn't life consist of crossing a series of thresholds? Conocimiento hurts, but not as much as desconocimiento. In the final reckoning it comes down to a matter of faith, trusting that your inner authority will carry across the critical threshold. You must make the leap alone and of your own will. Having only partial knowledge of the consequences of crossing, you offer la Llorona, who regulates the passage, a token. You pray, repeat affirmations, take a deep breath, and step through the gate. Immediately a moving crackle the facade of your former self

and its entrenched beliefs: you are not alone; those of the invisible realm walk with you; there are ghosts on every bridge.

You stand on *tierra sagrada*—nature is alive and conscious; the world is ensouled. You lift your head to the sky, to the wingspread of pelicans, the stark green of trees, the wind sighing through their branches. You discern faces in the rocks and allow them to see you. You become reacquainted with a reality called spirit, a presence, force, power, and energy within and without. Spirit infuses all that exists—organic and inorganic—transcending the categories and concepts that govern your perception of material reality. Spirit speaks through your mouth, listens through your ears, sees through your eyes, touches with your hands. At times the sacred takes you unaware; the desire to change prompts it and then discipline allows it to happen.

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 body and shoots out of your heart *chakra*, linking you to everyone/everything—the aboriginals in Australia, the crows in the forest, the vast Pacific Ocean. 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. *Te entregas a tu promesa* to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives.

Knowing that something in you, or of you, must die before something else can be born, you throw your old self into the ritual pyre, a passage by fire. In relinquishing your old self, you realize that some aspects of who you are—identities people have imposed on you as a woman of color and that you have internalized—are also made up. Identity becomes a cage you reinforce and double-lock yourself into. The life you thought inevitable, unalterable, and fixed in some foundational reality is smoke, a mental construction, fabrication. So, you reason, if it's all made up, you can compose it anew and differently.

5. putting Coyolxauhqui together . . . new personal and collective “stories”

Returning from the land of the dead, you wake up in the hospital bed minus your ovaries and uterus. Scattered around you *en pedazos* is the old story's corpse with its perceptions of who you used to be.¹⁶ *Como luciérnaga* a light crosses your dark inner landscape awakening *un saber* (a knowing). You've passed a turning point—decided not to drag the dead self into the present and future just to preserve your history. Instead you've chosen to compose a new history and self, to rewrite your auto-

historia. You want to be transformed again; you want a keener mind, a stronger spirit, a wiser soul. Your ailing body is no longer a hindrance but an asset, witnessing pain, speaking to you, demanding touch. *Es tu cuerpo que busca conocimiento*; along with dreams your body's the royal road to consciousness.

Before rewriting the disintegrating, often destructive “stories” of self constructed by psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, and religion you must first recognize their faulty pronouncements, scrutinize the fruit they've borne, and then ritually disengage from them. Reflexive awareness and other aspects of *conocimiento* if practiced daily overrule external instructions transmitted by your ethnic and dominant cultures, override the internal mandates of your genes and personal ego. Knowing the beliefs and directives your spiritual self generates empowers you to shift perceptions, *te capacita a soñar otros modos* of conducting your life, revise the scripts of your various identities, and use these new narratives to intervene in the cultures' existing dehumanizing stories.

After examining the old self's stance on life/death, *misma/otra*, individual/collective consciousness, you shift the axis/structure of reference by reversing the polarities, erasing the slash between them, then adding new aspects of yourself. To make meaning from your experiences you look through an archetypal psycho-mytho-spiritual lens, charting the various shifts of consciousness as they play out in your daily activities. You use your imagination in mediating between inner and outer experience. By writing about the always-in-progress, transformational processes and the constant, on-going reconstruction of the way you view your world, you name and ritualize the moments/processes of transition, inserting them into the collective fabric, bringing into play personal history and fashioning a story greater than yourself.

You shed your former bodymind and its outworn story like a snake its skin. Releasing traumas of the past frees up energy, allowing you to be receptive to the soul's voice and guidance. Taking a deep breath, you close your eyes and call back *tu alma*—from people, ideas, perceptions, and events you've surrendered it to. You sense parts of your soul return to your body. Another inhalation, more tendrils of spirit re-enter the places where it went missing. The lost pieces draw to you like filaments to a magnet. With a tender newly-formed sense of self you stand, wobbly. Sensing *los espíritus* all around, you face east, the direction of the visionary, offering a dream of the possible. Challenging the old self's orthodoxy is never enough; you must submit a sketch of an alternative self. As a modern-day Coyolxauhqui, you search for an account that encapsulates your life, and finding no ready-made story, you trust her light in the darkness to help you bring forth /from remnants of the old personal/collective autohistoria-

ria) a new personal myth.

After dismantling the body/self you re-compose it—the fifth stage of the journey, though reconstruction takes place in all stages. When creating a personal narrative you also co-create the group/cultural story. You examine the description handed to you of the world, picking holes in the paradigms currently constructing reality. You doubt that traditional western science is the best knowledge system, the only true, impartial arbiter of reality. You question its definition of progress, whose manifest destiny imperializes other peoples' energies and snuffs out their realities and hopes of a better life. You now see the western story as one of patriarchal, hierarchical control; fear and hatred of women; dominion over nature; science/technology's promise of expanding power; seduction of commerce, and, to be fair, a celebration of individual rights—freedom, creativity, and ingenuity. You turn the established narrative on its head, seeing through, resisting, and subverting its assumptions. Again, it's not enough to denounce the culture's old account—you must provide new narratives embodying alternative potentials. You're sure of one thing: the consciousness that's created our social ills (dualistic and misogynist) cannot solve them—we need a more expansive *conocimiento*. The new stories must partially come from outside the system of ruling powers.

You examine the contentions accompanying the old cultural narratives: your ethnic tribe wants you to isolate, insisting that you remain within race and class boundaries. The dominant culture prefers that you abandon your roots and assimilate, insisting that you leave your Indianness behind and seek shelter under the Hispanic or Latino umbrella. The temptation to succumb to these assimilationist tactics and escape the stigma of being Mexican stalls you on the bridge between isolation and assimilation. But both are debilitating. How can you step outside ethnic and other labels while cleaving to your root identity? Your identity has roots you share with all people and other beings—spirit, feeling, and body make up a greater identity category. The body is rooted in the earth, *la tierra* itself. You meet ensoulment in trees, in woods, in streams. The roots *del árbol de la vida* of all planetary beings are nature, soul, body.

Reframing the old story points to another option besides assimilation and separation—a “new tribalism.”¹⁷ An image of your *tío's* dying orange tree comes to mind, one still possessed of a strong root system and trunk. *Tu tío* grafted a sturdier variety of orange to it, creating a more vigorous tree. In similar fashion you “grow into” an identity of *mestizaje* you call the new tribalism by propagating other worldviews, spiritual traditions, and cultures to your *árbol de la vida*. You pick and choose views, cultures with transformational potential—a partially conscious selection, not a *mestizaje* imposed on you, but one whose process you can control. (You

distinguish this *mestizaje* from acts of hybridization such as genetically engineering and modifying live organisms without their consent or consideration of their existence as integrated beings, or from acts resulting in cyborgian animal/machine hybrids.) A retribalizing *mestizaje* becomes your coping mechanism, your strategy of resistance to both acculturating and inculturating pressures.

Tussling *con remolinos* (whirlwinds) of different belief systems builds the muscles of *mestiza* consciousness, enabling it to stretch. Being Chicana (indigenous, Mexican, Basque, Spanish, Berber-Arab, Gypsy) is no longer enough, being female, woman of color, *patlache* (queer) no longer suffices. Your resistance to identity boxes leads you to a different tribe, a different story (of *mestizaje*) enabling you to rethink yourself in more global-spiritual terms instead of conventional categories of color, class, career. It calls you to retribalize your identity to a more inclusive one, redefining what it means to be *una mexicana de este lado*, an American in the U.S., a citizen of the world, classifications reflecting an emerging planetary culture. In this narrative national boundaries dividing us from the “others” (*nos/otras*) are porous and the cracks between worlds serve as gateways.

At first *la nueva historia* resembles Shelley's Frankenstein monster—mismatched parts pieced together artificially—but soon the new rendition fuels your drive to seek alternative and emerging knowledges. It motivates you to expose oppressive cultural beliefs, such as that all women are *traicioneras* (betrayers), queers are abnormal, whites are superior, and sparing the rod spoils the child, and replace these notions with new ones. It inspires you to engage both inner and outer resources to make changes on multiple fronts: inner/spiritual/personal, social/collective/material.

The new stories explore aspects of reality—consciousness, hope, intention, prayer—that traditional science has ignored, deeming these nonexistent as they cannot be tested in a lab. In the new stories, post-modern science shifts its orientation, no longer holding itself to what can be validated empirically by the five senses. It acknowledges non-physical reality, inner subjective experiences, and spirit. The world, from the depth of the sea to the highest mountain, is alive, intelligent, ensouled. In the fourth stage *del camino de conocimiento* you caught glimmers of this holistic story—a paradigm that's always served indigenous cultures. Beliefs and values from the wisdom of past spiritual traditions of diverse cultures coupled with current scientific knowledge is the basis of the new synthesis. The emerging narratives are multicultural. They not only insist on analyzing and combatting oppressive power systems, but advocate the

The new accounts trace the process of shifting from old ways of viewing reality to new perceptions. They depict your struggles, recount your losses, re-ignite your hope for recovery, and celebrate the workings of the soul that nourish us with visions. They articulate unnamed, unvoiced, and repressed experiences and realities. The new versions of reality they offer demand that you employ alternative ways of knowing and re-wire your ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and expressing. By using information derived from multiple channels and different systems of knowing you collectively create new societies. Together you attempt to reverse the Cartesian split that turned the world into an "other," distancing humans from it. Though your body is still *la otra* and though *pensamientos dualísticos* still keep you from embracing and uniting corporally *con esa otra*, you dream of the possibility of wholeness. Collectively, you rewrite the story of "the fall" and the story of western progress (Tarnas, 22)—two opposing versions of the evolution of human consciousness. Collectively you note the emergence of the new gatekeepers of the earth's wisdom.

Led by the light of the moon (Coyolxauhqui consciousness), you take the fifth step and see through the illusion of permanence—the fantasy that you can pull yourself together once and for all and live happily ever after. You again suffer *otro espanto*, and another dislocation. Surrendering the self, sacrificing a certain way of being, you go through the whole process again, repeating all seven stages of the cycle. Your inability to live with your old self is also a bodily function and not merely a mind thing—every seven years your body sheds its cells completely as it regenerates new cells. When the latest story/self/body ceases to be credible or is not developing the way you want, you reinterpret the story you imagine yourself to be living. *Tu autohistoria* is not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds. Forced to rework your story, you invent new notions of yourself and reality—increasingly multidimensional versions where body, mind, and spirit interpenetrate in more complex ways.

In struggling with adversity and noting your reactions to it you observe how thoughts direct perceptions of reality. You realize that personal/collective reality is created (often unconsciously) and that you're the artist scripting the new story of this house/self/identity/essay under construction. You realize it's the process that's valuable and not the end product, not the new you, as that will change often throughout your life. Connecting the disparate parts of information from a new perspective, you re-member Coyolxauhqui in a new composition, temporarily restoring your balance and wounded psyche. Your story's one of *la búsqueda de conocimiento*, of seeking experiences that'll give you purpose, give your life meaning, give

stages, and identity transformations. Like the heroine in a myth or fairy tale, after an arduous struggle in the dark woods, you return, bringing new knowledge to share with others in your communities.

Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrite the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming, disinheritance and recuperation, stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives. Coyolxauhqui represents the search for new metaphors to tell you what you need to know, how to connect and use the information gained, and, with intelligence, imagination, and grace, solve your problems and create intercultural communities.

6. the blow-up . . . a clash of realities

New knowledge occurs through tension, difficulties, mistakes and chaos.

—Risa D'Angeles

You fly in from another speaking gig on the East Coast, arriving at the feminist academic conference late. *Hayas un desmadre*. A racist incident has unleashed flames of anger held in check for decades. In postures of defiance, enraged women of color protest their exclusion from the woman's organization decision-making processes; "white" middle-class women stand, arms crossed, refusing to alter its policies. When they continue conducting business as usual *las mujeres de color* walk out.

The urgency compelling every woman to give testimony to her views is so thick you can almost taste it. *Caras reflejan angustia* and blanched looks of shock; eyes glint with hostility; feelings of disgust, bitterness, disillusionment, and betrayal clash, spatter, and scatter in all directions. These emotions flare through your body as you turn from one group to another like a weathervane. You lose yourself in the maelstrom, no longer able to find the calm place within as everything collapses into unresolvable conflict. You know that in the heart of the conflagration lies its solution, but your own anguish clouds true perception. Catching your co-presenter's eye, you both grimace in recognition. Though for years you've felt the tectonic bedrock of feminism shifting under your feet, you never imagined the seismic crack would be so devastating, the blow-out so scorching. *El mar de coraje (anger) se te viene encima*—you recoil from its heat. Trying to be objective, you distance yourself until you feel as though you're in an airplane observing safely from above.

Like most feminist conferences, this one begins as a bridge, a place of mutual access where thousands crisscross, network, share ideas, and struggle together to resolve women's issues. After fifteen years of strug-

ization to deal with racism as it's promised, the women of color and some Jewish, working-class, and progressive white allies feel betrayed by their white middle-class sisters. Seething in frustration, they cancel their panels and workshops, *quejandose que las feministas anglas do not allow their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual realities into this academic setting.* They're tired of being treated as outsiders. They feel that whites still view issues of racism as the concern of women of color alone, anti-Semitism the concern only of Jewish women, homophobia the concern of lesbians, and class the concern of working-class and poor women. They accuse whites of reinscribing the imperialist tradition of dominance and call them on their white privilege.

White women accuse women of color and their allies of emotionalism—after all, this is the academy. Feeling unjustly attacked, they adamantly proclaim they're not racist but just following the organization's policies. Though their intentions—making “common ground”—are good, they don't realize *que su base de acuerdo may be different or too narrow from el terreno comunal de otras mujeres and not really common at all.* They ignore the input of *mujeres de color* in defining common ground.

You view most white women's racism as covert and always cloaked. An insidious *desconocimiento*, it refuses to allow emotional awareness and its threat into their consciousness. They deny their recognition of the situation, then forget having denied this recognition. This forgetting of having forgotten their denial (repression) is at the core of *desconocimiento*. Though most white feminists intellectually acknowledge racism, they distance themselves from personal responsibility, often acting as though their reality and ways of knowing are universal, not culturally determined. They assume that feminist racialized “others” share their same values and goals. Some view gender and race oppression as interchangeable. As members of a colonized gender, they believe they're experts on oppression and can define all its forms; thus they don't have to listen/learn from racial others. They herd women of color under the banner of their brand of feminism and impose their experiences and interpretations of reality, especially of academic life, on them—all racist acts.

The refusal to think about race (itself a form of racism) is a “white” privilege. The white women who do think about race rarely delve beyond the surface: they allude to the category, cite a few women-of-color texts, tack on a token book to their syllabi, and assume they've dealt with race. Though many understand the racism perpetrated by white individuals, most do not understand the racism inherent in their identities, in their cultures' stories. They can't see that racism harms them as well as people of color, itself a racially superior attitude. Those who see don't feel pre-

monkey on their backs—survivor guilt, the guilt of privilege that, unacknowledged, breeds greater guilt.

When their racism is exposed they claim they're the victims of attacks and are outraged at being “mauled” by these pit-bullish others. They use white privilege to coax women of color to toe the line. When that doesn't work they pull rank. They fail to meet the women of color halfway, don't bother negotiating the give-and-take between “majority” culture and “minority.” Though they may pay lip service to diversity issues, most don't shift from positions of power. The privilege of whiteness allows them to evade questions of complicity with those in power; it gives leave to disrespect other peoples' realities and types of knowledge—race and soul remain four-letter words. Their socialization does not allow women-of-color consciousness to transform their thinking. Afraid of losing material and psychological privilege, they drown others' voices with white noise.

Con nudo en la garganta, you look at your *hermanas de color*, challenged warriors, who try to stop being victims only to fall into the trap of claiming moral higher ground, using skin color as license for judging a whole category of people. They're forced to belabor the point because most white women won't listen. Leading with their wounds focuses their energy on the role of victim: oh, poor me, I'm so oppressed. Though inadvertently at times you too assume this attitude, you have little sympathy for it. Buying into victimhood forces you/them to compete for the coveted prize of the walking wounded. Many are driven to use the truth of their ill treatment as a stick to beat whites into waking up; they are the experts on oppression and thus don't have to listen/learn from whites. Some women of color—*las meras meras*—strut around with *macha in-your-face* aggressiveness. Hiding their vulnerabilities behind clenched fists and a “*que se chinguen*” attitude, they overlook the wounds bonding them to the other and instead focus on *las heridas* (wounds) that divide. As a writer one of your tasks is to expose the dualistic nature of the debate between whites and people of color, the false idealized pictures and other *desconocimientos* each group has but would rather ignore, and promote a more holistic perspective.

Seeing women from both camps throw words at each other like stones gives you stomach cramps. *Apedradas* (pelted with stones), each woman tries to regain her ground. Weaving her experience into a storyline where she's the one put-upon, she incites her allies to torch the bridge with inflammatory rhetoric. Pitting herself against the other (the enemy), she feeds *las llamas* her energy and repressed shadow parts, turning the conference into a militarized zone where *desconocimiento* runs rampant. In full-frontal attack, each camp adopts an “us-versus-them”

conflict resolution paradigm of our times, one we continue using despite the recognition that confrontational tactics rarely settle disputes for the long run.

You watch some women react to psychological violence in instinctive knee-jerk ways or in ways they've programmed themselves or have been programmed to respond. The usual tactics for dealing with conflict and threat are fighting, fleeing, freezing, or submitting. Those fighting or fleeing shut their ears and assume a hypervigilant guard mode to help them attack or escape. Those freezing separate their awareness from the reality of what's happening—they dissociate. Those submitting surrender their ground to more aggressive forces. All struggle to burrow back into their past histories, former skins, familiar racial and class enclaves even though these may be rife with discomfort and disillusionment and no longer feel like "home."

Caught in the middle of the power struggle, you're forced to take sides, forced to negotiate another identity crisis. Being coerced to turn your back on one group/person and favor the other feels like a knife to the heart. It reminds you of the seventies when other lesbians reprimanded you and urged you to abandon your friendships with men. Women of color will brand you disloyal if you don't walk out with them. Nationalistic fence-maintainers will label you *malinchista*; lesbians will think you not queer enough. You retreat from your feelings, take refuge in your head, priding yourself on equanimity, an objectivity detached from the biases of personal fear, anger, anxiety. As you observe others, pitying their misguided actions, you catch yourself feeling superior because you don't let your emotions take over. Not you, you've achieved spiritual and emotional equilibrium. You'd like to believe that detachment is always a strength, that remaining emotionally distant allows you to bring a sense of balance to conflicted situations. But instead of attaining spiritual non-attachment, you've withdrawn from painful feelings—a detachment that cuts you from your body and its feelings.

What takes a bashing is not so much you but the idea/picture of who you think you are, an illusion you're hell-bent on protecting and preserving at all costs. You overlook the fact that your self-image and history (*autohistoria*) are not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to the winds. A threat to your identifications and interpretations of reality enrages your shadow-beast, who views the new knowledge as an attack to your bodily integrity. And it is a death threat—to the belief that posits the self as local and limited to a physical body, a body perceived as a container separating the self from other people and other forms of knowledge. New *conocimientos* (insights) threaten your sense of what's "real" when it's up against what's "real" to the other. But it's precisely this threat that triggers

You think you've made progress, gained a new awareness, found a new version of reality, created a workable story, fulfilled an obligation, and followed your own conscience. But when you cast to the world what you've created and put your ideals into action, the contradictions explode in your face. Your story fails the reality test. But is the failure due to flaws in your story—based on the tenuous nature of relationship between you and the whole—or is it due to all-too-human and therefore imperfect members of the community?

The bridge buckles under the weight of these feminist factions, and as in the Russian "Tale of Two Goats on the Bridge" (MacDonald), the different groups butt each other off. With other in-betweeners (*nepantleras*) from both sides of the divide you navigate *entre tres aguas* trying to sustain some sort of dialogue among the groups. Pronto llegas a un *crucero*—you have to decide whether to walk off or remain on the bridge and try to facilitate passage. Though you've always been a bridge, not a separatist, *es difícil decidir*. From the eye of the storm you choose to hold fast to the bridge and witness for all camps. With only half the participants present at the roundtable, you use the forum to discuss the causes of the blow-up and possible strategies to resolve the conflict.

Often in the following days you and other *nepantleras* feel frustrated, tempted to walk out as the bridge undergoes more tremors. Negotiating *cuesta trabajo*. Las *nepantleras* must alter their mode of interaction—make it more inclusive, open. In a to-and-fro motion they shift from their customary position to the reality of first one group then the other. Though tempted to retreat behind racial lines and hide behind simplistic walls of identity, las *nepantleras* know their work lies in positioning themselves—exposed and raw—in the crack between these worlds, and in revealing current categories as unworkable. Saben que las *heridas* that separate and those that bond arise from the same source. Besides fighting, fleeing, freezing, or submitting las *nepantleras* usan otra *media*—they employ a fifth tactic.

Recognizing that the basic human hunger to be heard, understood, and accepted is not being met, las *nepantleras* listen to members of both camps. By attending to what the other is not saying, what she's not doing, what isn't happening, and by looking for the opposite, unacknowledged emotion—the opposite of anger is fear, of self-righteousness is guilt, of hate is love—las *nepantleras* attempt to see through the other's situation to her underlying unconscious desire. Accepting doubts and ambiguity, they reframe the conflict and shift the point of view. Sitting face-to-face with all parties, they identify common bonds, name reciprocities and connections, and finally draft a mutually agreeable contract.

When perpetual conflict erodes a sense of connectedness and whole-

common ground and interwoven kinship among all things and people. This faculty, one of less-structured thoughts, less-rigid categorizations, and thinner boundaries, allows us to picture—via reverie, dreaming, and artistic creativity—similarities instead of solid divisions. In gatherings where people luxuriate in their power to prevent change instead of using it to cause transformation, where they spew verbal abuse in a war of words and do not leave space for others to save face, where feelings are easily bruised or too intense to be controlled by will alone—la nepantlera proposes individual and group rituals to contain volatile feelings and channel them into acts of *conocimiento*.

In gatherings where people feel powerless la nepantlera offers rituals to say good-bye to old ways of relating; prayers to thank life for making us face loss, anger, guilt, fear, and separation; rezos to acknowledge our individual wounds; and commitments to not give up on others just because they hurt us. In gatherings where we've forgotten that the aim of conflict is peace, la nepantlera proposes spiritual techniques (mindfulness, openness, receptivity) along with activist tactics. Where before we saw only separateness, differences, and polarities, our connectionist sense of spirit recognizes nurturance and reciprocity and encourages alliances among groups working to transform communities. In gatherings where we feel our dreams have been sucked out of us, la nepantlera leads us in celebrating la comunidad soñada, reminding us that spirit connects the irreconcilable warring parts para que todo el mundo se haga un país, so that the whole world may become un pueblo.

7. shifting realities . . . acting out the vision or spiritual activism

The bridge will hold me up.

—Gabrielle in Xena, Warrior Princess

You're three years old and standing by the kitchen table staring at the bright orange globe. You can almost taste its tart sweetness. You'll die if you don't have it. You reach for it but your arms are too short. Body quivering, you stretch again, willing yourself to reach the fruit. Your arms elongate until your small hands clasp the orange. You sense you're more than one body—each superimposed on the others like sheaths of corn. Years later after a few more experiences of bilocation, you describe it as a yoga of the body.¹⁹ The ability to recognize and endow meaning to daily experience (spirituality) furthers the ability to shift and transform.

When and how does transformation happen? When a change occurs

self, others, and surroundings) becomes cognizant that it has a point of view and the ability to act from choice. This knowing/knower is always with you, but is displaced by the ego and its perspective. This knower has several functions. You call the function that arouses the awareness that beneath individual separateness lies a deeper interrelatedness "la naguala."

When you shift attention from your customary point of view (the ego) to that of la naguala, and from there move your awareness to an inner-held representation of an experience, person, thing, or world, la naguala and the object observed merge. When you include the complexity of feeling two or more ways about a person/issue, when you empathize and try to see her circumstances from her position, you accommodate the other's perspective, achieving un *conocimiento* that allows you to shift toward a less defensive, more inclusive identity. When you relate to others, not as parts, problems, or useful commodities, but from a connectionist view compassion triggers transformation. This shift occurs when you give up investment in your point of view²⁰ and recognize the real situation free of projections—not filtered through your habitual defensive preoccupations. Moving back and forth from the situation to la naguala's view, you glean a new description of the world (reality)—a Toltec interpretation. When you're in the place between worldviews (nepantla) you're able to slip between realities to a neutral perception. A decision made in the in-between place becomes a turning point initiating psychological and spiritual transformations, making other kinds of experiences possible.

Core beliefs command the focus of your senses. By changing some of these convictions you change the mental/emotional channel (the reality). In the Coatlicue state, an intensely negative channel, you're caged in a private hell; you feel angry, fearful, hopeless, and depressed, blaming yourself as inadequate. In the more optimistic space cultivated by las nepantleras, you feel love, peace, happiness, and the desire to grow. Forgiving yourself and others, you connect with more aspects of yourself and others.

Orienting yourself to the environment and your relationship to it enables you to read and garner insight from whatever situation you find yourself in. This *conocimiento* gives you the flexibility to swing from your intense feelings to those of the other without being hijacked by either. When confronted with the other's fear, you note her emotional arousal, allow her feelings/words to enter your body, then you shift to the neutral place of la naguala. You detach so those feelings won't inhabit your body for long. You listen with respect,²¹ attend to the other as a whole being, not an object, even when she opposes you. To avoid miscommunication you frequently check your understanding of the other's meaning,

I'm reading you right." When an experience evokes similar feelings in both, you feel momentarily in sync. Like consciousness, *conocimiento* is about relatedness—to self, others, world.

When you're troubled, *conocimiento* prompts you to take a deep breath, shift your attention away from what's causing pain and fear, and call upon a power deeper and freer than that of your ego, such as *la naguala y los espíritus*, for guidance. Direction may also come from an inner impression, dream, meditation, I Ching, Tarot cards. You use these spiritual tools to deal with political and personal problems. Power comes from being in touch with your body, soul, and spirit, and letting their wisdom lead you.

By moving from a militarized zone to a roundtable, *nepantleras* acknowledge an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other. We are the other, the other is us—a concept AnaLouise Keating calls "re(con)ceiving the other" (*Women*, 75–81). Honoring people's otherness, *las nepantleras* advocate a "nos/otras" position—an alliance between "us" and "others." In *nos/otras*, the "us" is divided in two, the slash in the middle representing the bridge—the best mutuality we can hope for at the moment. *Las nepantleras* envision a time when the bridge will no longer be needed—we'll have shifted to a seamless *nosotras*. This move requires a different way of thinking and relating to others; it requires that we act on our interconnectivity, a mode of connecting similar to hypertexts' multiple links—it includes diverse others and does not depend on traditional categories or sameness. It enacts a retribalization by recognizing that some members of a racial or ethnic group do not necessarily stay with the consciousness and conditioning of the group they're born into, but shift momentarily or permanently. For example, some whites embody a woman-of-color consciousness, and some people of color, a "white" consciousness.

Conocimiento of our interconnectivity encourages white women to examine and deconstruct racism and "whiteness." But perhaps, as Keating suggests, "white" women who are totally invested in this privileged identity can't be *nepantleras*: "I really think that 'whiteness' is a state of mind—dualistic, supremacist, separatist, hierarchical . . . all the things we're working to transform; I'm still not sure how this concept of 'whiteness' as an oppressive/oppressing mindset corresponds to lightskinned bodies, but I do believe the two are not synonymous."²²

This move to a roundtable—generated by such concepts as *nos/otras* and retribalization—incites women of color to speak out and eventually refuse the role of victim. Though most identify with their *mestizaje* you wonder how much of a *mestiza* a person must become before racial categories dissolve and new ones develop, before committing to social con-

community forms. You wonder when others will, like *las nepantleras*, hand themselves to a larger vision, a less-defended identity.

This is your new vision, a story of how *conocimiento* manifests, but one with a flaw: it doesn't work with things that are insurmountable, or with all people at all times (we haven't evolved to that stage yet), and it doesn't always bring about immediate change. But it works with *las nepantleras*, boundary-crossers, thresholders who initiate others in rites of passage, *activistas* who, from a listening, receptive, spiritual stance, rise to their own visions and shift into acting them out, *haciendo mundo nuevo* (introducing change). *Las nepantleras* walk through fire on many bridges (not just the conference one) by turning the flames into a radiance of awareness that orients, guides, and supports those who cannot cross over on their own. Inhabiting the liminal spaces where change occurs, *las nepantleras* encourage others to ground themselves to their own bodies and connect to their own internal resources, thus empowering themselves. Empowerment is the bodily feeling of being able to connect with inner voices/resources (images, symbols, beliefs, memories) during periods of stillness, silence, and deep listening or with kindred others in collective actions. This alchemy of connection provides the knowledge, strength, and energy to persist and be resilient in pursuing goals. *Éste modo de capacitar* comes from accepting your own authority to direct rather than letting others run you.

Not long ago your mother gave you an *milagro*, a tiny silver hand with a heart in its palm, never knowing that for years this image has resonated with your concept of *el mundo zurdo* amplified here into the model of *conocimiento*; *la mano zurda* with a heart in its palm is for engaging with self, others, world. The hand represents acting out and daily implementing an idea or vision, as opposed to merely theorizing about it. The heart es un corazón con razón, with intelligence, passion, and purpose, a "mind-full" heart with ears for listening, eyes for seeing, a mouth with tongue narrowing to a pen tip for speaking/writing. The left hand is not a fist pero una mano abierta raised with others in struggle, celebration, and song. *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.

Although all your cultures reject the idea that you can know the other, you believe that besides love, pain might open this closed passage by reaching through the wound to connect. Wounds cause you to shift con-

by your habitual point of view or else shut you down, pushing you out of your body and into desconocimiento. Like love, pain might trigger compassion—if you're tender with yourself, you can be tender to others. Using wounds as openings to become vulnerable and available (present) to others means staying in your body. Excessive dwelling on your wounds means leaving your body to live in your thoughts, where you re-enact your past hurts, a form of desconocimiento that gives energy to the past, where it's held ransom. As victim you don't have to take responsibility for making changes. But the cost of victimhood is that nothing in your life changes, especially not your attitudes, beliefs. Instead, why not use pain as a conduit to recognizing another's suffering, even that of the one who inflicted the pain? In all the great stories, says Jean Houston (105–6), wounding is the entrance to the sacred. Openings to the sacred can also be triggered by joyful experiences—for example meditation, epiphanies, communion with nature, sexual ecstasy, and desire—as in your childhood experience of reaching for the orange. Because most of you are wounded, negative emotions provide easier access to the sacred than do positive emotions.

You reflect on experiences that caused you, at critical points of transformation, to adopt spiritual activism. When you started traveling and doing speaking gigs, the harried, hectic, frenzied pace of the activist stressed you out, subjecting you to a pervasive form of modern violence that Thomas Merton attributes to the rush of continual doing. To deal with personal concerns while also confronting larger issues in the public arena, you began using spiritual tools to cope with racial and gender oppression and other modern maldades—not so much the seven deadly sins, but the small acts of desconocimientos: ignorance, frustrations, tendencies toward self-destructiveness, feelings of betrayal and powerlessness, and poverty of spirit and imagination. The spiritual practice of *conocimiento*: praying, breathing deeply, meditating, writing—dropping down into yourself, through the skin and muscles and tendons, down deep into the bones' marrow, where your soul is ballast—enabled you to defuse the negative energy of putdowns, complaints, excessive talk, verbal attacks, and other killers of the spirit. Spirituality became a port you moor to in all storms.

This work of spiritual activism and the contract of holistic alliances allows conflict to dissolve through reflective dialogue. It permits an expansive awareness that finds the best instead of the worst in the other, enabling you to think of *la otra* in a compassionate way. Accepting the other as an equal in a joint endeavor, you respect and are fully present for her. You form an intimate connection that fosters the empowerment of both (*nos/otras*) to transform conflict into an opportunity to resolve an

racism and other systemic *desconocimientos*. You look beyond the illusion of separate interests to a shared interest—you're in this together, no one's an isolated unit. You dedicate yourself, not to surface solutions that benefit only one group, but to a more informed service to humanity.

Relating to others by recognizing commonalities does not always serve you. The person/group with conflicting desires may continuously attack you no matter how understanding you are. Can you assume that all of us, Ku Klux Klan and holistic alliance members, are in it together just because we're all human? If consciousness is as fundamental to the universe as matter and energy, if consciousness is not local, not contained in separate vessels/bodies, but is like air and water, energy and matter, then *we are* all in it together.²³ When one person steps into *conocimiento*, the whole of humanity witnesses that step and eventually steps into consciousness. It's like Rupert Sheldrake's concept of morphic resonance: when rats in a laboratory maze learn the way out, as time goes on rats in other mazes all over the world do it more and more quickly because of morphic resonance from previous members that have learned the hard way (311). Before holistic alliances can happen, many people must yearn for a solution to our shared problems.

But sometimes you need to block the other from your body, mind, and soul. You need to ignore certain voices in order to respect yourself—as when in an abusive relationship. It's impossible to be open and respectful to all views and voices. Though *las nepantleras* witness as impartially as they can in order to prevent being imprisoned by the other's point of view, they acknowledge the need for psychological armor (*picture un nopal*) to protect their open vulnerable selves from negative forces while engaging in the world. For attempting the best possible outcome not just for her own group, but for the other—the enemy—*la nepantlera* runs the risk of being stoned for this heresy—a case of killing the messenger. She realizes that to make changes in society and transform the system, she must make time for her needs—the activist must survive burn-out. When the self is part of the vision a strong sense of personal meaning helps in identity and culture construction. By developing and maintaining spiritual beliefs and values *la nepantlera* gives the group hope, purpose, identity.

You hear *la Llorona/Cihuacóatl* wailing. Your picture of her coiled serpent body with the head of a woman, shedding its skin, regenerating itself reminds you of the snake story in Genesis. A hunger to know and to build on your knowledge sweeps over you. You recommit to a regime of meditation, reflection, exercise. These everyday acts contain the sacred, lending meaning to your daily life.

Through the act of writing you call, like the ancient *chamana*, the

ous task of rebuilding yourself, composing a story that more accurately expresses your new identity. You seek out allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice. By compartiendo historias, ideas, las nepantleras forge bonds across race, gender, and other lines, thus creating a new tribalism. Éste quehacer—internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world.

For you writing is an archetypal journey home to the self, un proceso de crear puentes (bridges) to the next phase, next place, next culture, next reality. The thrust toward spiritual realization, health, freedom, and justice propels you to help rebuild the bridge to the world when you return “home.” You realize that “home” is that bridge, the in-between place of nepantla and constant transition, the most unsafe of all spaces. You remove the old bridge from your back, and though afraid, allow diverse groups to collectively rebuild it, to buttress it with new steel plates, girders, cable bracing, and trusses. You distend this more inclusive puente to unknown corners—you don’t build bridges to safe and familiar territories, you have to risk making mundo nuevo, have to risk the uncertainty of change. And nepantla is the only space where change happens. Change requires more than words on a page—it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity, and acts of love. In gratitude and in the spirit of your Mamagrande Ramona y Mamagrande Locha, despachas éstas palabras y imágenes as giveaways to the cosmos.

ritual . . . prayer . . . blessing . . . for transformation

Every day you visit the sea, walk along Yemaya’s glistening shores. You want her to know you, to sense your presence as you sense hers. You know deep down that she’s not independent of humans, not indifferent, not set apart. At the lips del mar you begin your ritual/prayer: with the heel of your left foot you draw a circle in the sand, then walk its circumference, stand at the center, and voice your intention: to increase awareness of Spirit, recognize our interrelatedness, and work for transformation.

Then with feather, bone, incense, and water you attend the spirits’ presence:

Spirit embodying yourself as rock, tree, bird, human, past, present, and future,

you of many names, diosas antiguas, ancestors,
we embrace you as we would a lover.

You face **east**, feel the wind comb your hair, stretch your hands toward the rising sun and its orange filaments, breathe its rays into your body, on the outbreath send your soul up to el sol,²⁴ say:

Aire, with each breath may we remember our interrelatedness
see fibers of spirit extend out from our bodies
creating us, creating sky, seaweed, serpent, y toda la gente.
“El alma prende fuego,”²⁵ burns holes in the walls separating us
renders them porous and passable, pierces through posturing and
pretenses
may we seek and attain wisdom.

Moving sunwise you turn to the **south**:

Fuego, inspire and energize us to do the necessary work, and to honor it
as we walk through the flames of transformation.

May we seize the arrogance to create outrageously
soñar wildly—for the world becomes as we dream it.

Facing **west** you send your consciousness skimming over the waves
toward the horizon, seamless sea and sky. Slipping your hands into el ojo
del agua

you speak to the spirit dwelling here en éste mar:

Agua, may we honor other people’s feelings
respect their anger, sadness, grief, joy as we do our own.

Though we tremble before uncertain futures
may we meet illness, death and adversity with strength
may we dance in the face of our fears.

You pivot toward the **north**, squat, scoop sand into your hands:

Madre tierra, you who are our body, who bear us into life, swallow us in
death

forgive us for poisoning your lands, guide us to wiser ways of caring
for you.

May we possess the steadfastness of trees

the quiet serenity of dawn

the brilliance of a flashing star

the fluidity of fish in our element

Earth, you who dream us, te damos las gracias.

Completing the circle, retornas al **centro**, look down to the **underworld**:

May the roaring force of our collective creativity

heal the wounds of hate, ignorance, indifference

open our throats so we who fear speaking out raise our voices
 by our witnessing, find connections through our passions
 pay homage to those whose backs served as bridges.
 We remember our dead:
 Pat Parker, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara
 Cameron, y tantas otras.

You raise your head to the sky:
 May the words and the spirit of this book, our "giveaway" to the world,
 take root in our bodies, grow, sprout ears that listen
 may it harm no one, exclude none
 sabemos que podemos transformar este mundo
 filled with hunger, pain, and war
 into a sanctuary of beauty, redemption, and possibility
 may the fires of compassion ignite our hands
 sending energy out into the universe
 where it might best be of service
 may the love we share inspire others to act.

You walk back along the circle, erase the lines en la arena, leave a
 tortilla to symbolize
 feeding the ancestors, feeding ourselves, and the nurturing shared in
 this book.
 Qué éste libro gather in our tribe—all our tribes—y alze nuestras
 voces en canto.
 Oh, Spirit—wind sun sea earth sky—inside us, all around us,
 enlivening all
 we honor tu presencia and celebrate the spirit of *this bridge*
we call home.

We are ready for change.
 Let us link hands and hearts
 together find a path through the dark woods
 step through the doorways between worlds
 leaving huellas for others to follow,
 build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our
 "home"
 si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.

Now let us shift.

contigo,

Notes

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A note on translations: I translate the first time a word or phrase appears and when the word or phrase appears much later and the reader may not remember what it means.

1. This essay is sister to "Putting Coylxauhqui Together."
2. *Conocimiento* derives from *cognoscera*, a Latin verb meaning "to know" and is the Spanish word for knowledge and skill. I call *conocimiento* that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained.
3. *Nepantla* es una palabra indígena for an in-between space, el lugar entremedio, un lugar no-lugar. I have expanded this word to include certain workings of consciousness. See my "Border Arte." A slightly different version appeared in *NACLA Report* 27, no. 1 (July–August 1999).
4. *Naguala* is the feminine form of *nagual*, the capacity some people such as mexican indigenous shamans have of "shapeshifting"—becoming an animal, place, or thing by inhabiting that thing or by shifting into the perspective of their animal companion. I have extended the term to include an aspect of the self unknown to the conscious self. *Nagualismo* is a Mexican spiritual knowledge system where the practitioner searches for spirit signs. I call the maker of spirit signs "la naguala," a creative, dreamlike consciousness able to make broader associations and connections than waking consciousness.
5. *Xochiquetzal* is the Aztec goddess of love, del amor. Her name means Flor Preciosa, Precious Flower or, more literally, Pluma de Flor. Her cult descended from los toltecas.
6. *Tomoanchan* is one of the levels of heaven (paradise) according to Aztec mythology.
7. According to neurologist Antonio R. Damasio, consciousness is the sense of self in the act of knowing. The inner sense is based on images of feelings—without imaging you can't have feelings, you can't have consciousness (*Feeling*).
8. *La Llorona* is a ghost woman with long black hair and dressed in white who appears at night, sometimes near bodies of water, sometimes at crossroads, calling with loud and terrifying wails for her lost children. She has her origins in various prehispanic deities: Cihuacóatl, Xtabai, Xonaxi Queculla, and Auicanime. See my *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona*.
9. Toltec *nagualism's* idea of "seeing" beyond the apparent reality of the mundane world and into the spiritual was described to Carlos Castañeda by Don Juan.
10. The seven planes of reality are the physical, emotional, mental, Buddhist, atmic, monadic, and cosmic. Carolyn Myss, medical intuitive, makes a case for the seven chakras corresponding to the seven Christian sacraments and the sefirot of the Kabbala.
11. I wrote about this incident in one of the *Prieta* stories, "The Crack between the Worlds."
12. *Susto*, fright sickness, attributed to being frightened out of one's soul. Indigenous people in the Americas believe in the physicality of the soul. The Mesoamerican Mexica, called the Aztecs by the Spaniards, believed that a person had multiple souls which could be verified through the senses: these include the soul that animates the body and confers individual personality, aptitudes, abilities, and desires; the soul as breath; and the soul as an invisible shadowy double (Furst).
13. AnaLouise Keating, in one of her many generous readings of different drafts of this essay, made this comment to the mind/body split: "in various places throughout, you insist that you can't solve the cartesian mind/body split. yes & no. what you write *does* offer a solution—a solution that's difficult to live out in our lives, but the vision of spirit is the solution. it's finding pathways to manifest that vision in our lives (bodies) which is so damn tricky."
14. In south Texas, *una lechuza* is believed to be a *naguala*, usually *una viejita* (an old woman) who shapeshifts into an owl.