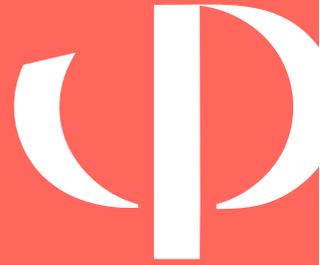


Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

CARLOS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ, EDITOR

VOLUME 14 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING 2015

FROM THE EDITOR

Carlos Alberto Sánchez
SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

In continuing our tradition of publishing first-rate scholarly papers, included in this issue of the newsletter is an article by Mariana Alessandri, "Forging *El Mundo Zurdo*: Sexual and Linguistics *Atravesados* in Gloria Anzaldúa's Rio Grande Valley." Also in this issue is the winner of the 2014 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, Philip T. L. Mack's "Should a Concept of Truth Be Attributed to Nahuatl Thought? Preserving 'the Colonial Difference' between Concepts of the West and Nahua Philosophy." The essay prize is awarded to "the best unpublished, English-language, philosophical essay in Latin American philosophy/thought."

Alessandri's article is a timely examination and reflection on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, particularly her concepts of "*atravesados*" and "*el mundo zurdo*." Alessandri argues that "*el mundo zurdo*," understood as, among other things, "a theoretical space where oppressed peoples of all kinds," or *atravesados*, can exist and "build coalitions," is an ideal that must be forged "all over the world." A goal of her article, she writes, is to "forge it in Anzaldúa's own borderlands." In her own words: "My goal runs along the same lines as some of these scholarly and activist endeavors to try to turn the 'is' of the borderlands into the 'ought' of *el mundo zurdo*." If the *atravesados* already live in the borderlands of the Rio Grande Valley, and we agree with Anzaldúa that we should join forces to combat their oppression, then the remaining question is *How?*

Mack's essay is an investigation into the Nahuatl conception of truth. Mack calls into question the accepted translation of the Nahuatl word "*neltiliztli*" as "truth," arguing that such a translation loses the "unique semantic content" of *neltiliztli*, and thus that translating it as "truth" is "misguided." Furthermore, Mack suggests that an analysis of *neltiliztli* and William James's pragmatic account of truth show a way in which *neltiliztli* can be understood which avoids both disjuncts of the colonial double bind: it is neither analogous to the Western conception of truth, nor radically different and incommensurable with it.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2015 ESSAY PRIZE IN LATIN AMERICAN THOUGHT

The APA's Committee on Hispanics cordially invites submissions for the 2015 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, which is awarded to the author of the best unpublished, English-language, philosophical essay in Latin American philosophy/thought. The purpose of this prize is to encourage fruitful work in this area. Eligible essays must contain original arguments and broach philosophical topics clearly related to the specific experiences of Hispanic Americans and Latinos. The winning essay will be published in a future issue of this newsletter.

A cash prize accompanies the award, along with the opportunity to present the prize-winning essay at an upcoming divisional meeting. Information regarding submissions can be found on the [APA website](#). Please consider submitting your work and encourage colleagues or students to do the same. Feel free to pass this information along to anyone who may be interested. The submission deadline is June 5, 2015.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The committee is soliciting papers or panel suggestions for next year's APA divisional meetings. Please send any ideas to Grant Silva (grant.silva@marquette.edu) who will relay these suggestions to the rest of the committee.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* is accepting contributions for the fall 2015 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic related to Hispanic/Latino thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as reflections, book reviews, and interviews.

Please prepare articles for blind-review. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting.

All articles submitted to the newsletter are blind-reviewed by members of the Committee on Hispanics.

Book Reviews

Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

Deadlines

June 20, 2015

Submission Instructions

Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor, Carlos Alberto Sánchez, by email (carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu), or by post:

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Formatting Guidelines

The *APA Newsletters* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).

Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

ARTICLE

Forging El Mundo Zurdo: Sexual and Linguistic Atravesados in Gloria Anzaldúa's Rio Grande Valley

Marianna Alessandri

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In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa describes the borderlands as physical home to what she calls the *atravesados*, literally the "crossers" but figuratively "troublemakers" or the "squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed and the half-dead" (1999, 25).¹ In "La Prieta," published six years earlier as part of *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), Anzaldúa envisioned *el mundo zurdo* (literally, "the left-handed world") as spiritual home to these *atravesados* (1983, 208). Anzaldúa describes the *atravesados* in the geographical borderlands as unwanted, scorned, and shamed, whereas in *el mundo zurdo* they are

welcomed, appreciated, and cherished. This essay urges Anzaldúa scholars to continue forging *el mundo zurdo* all over the world, and it outlines one concrete path for doing so that is rooted Anzaldúa's hometown of the Rio Grande Valley in Deep South Texas.

To begin to answer the practical question of how to forge *el mundo zurdo*, this essay analyzes two examples of border-crossing in Anzaldúa's works—sexual and linguistic—to show how borders create the very *atravesados* they subsequently perceive as threats rather than as persons who play a valuable role in transforming society. Combining Anzaldúa's position that borders create borderlands and those who live in them, with her implication that the sexual border is related to the linguistic border in that both submit to what Maria Lugones calls the "logic of purity," I argue that intentional crossings like code-switching and cross-dressing are ethico-political transgressions that are crucial to forging *el mundo zurdo*.²

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first, I give a brief history of the concept of *el mundo zurdo* and its ethico-political uses by Anzaldúa and other activist-scholars. In the second section, I analyze Anzaldúa's description of the borderlands as physical home to the *atravesados* created by unnatural borders. I suggest that *atravesados* in the borderlands challenge the logic of purity, and provide a means for shifting public perception about the naturalness of certain borders through border-crossing. In the third section, I compare Anzaldúa's concepts of hybridity, *mestizaje*, and *nepantla* to analyze the various ways Anzaldúa tried to articulate how "impurity" can be reframed in order to develop less exclusionary and non-binary forms of thinking. Finally, I examine two related concrete examples of perceived impurities—sexual and linguistic—in an effort to move beyond binary thinking. More specifically, I suggest that subversive acts like speaking Spanglish and transgressing gender norms are ethico-political in nature, and can be especially effective in shifting perceptions about impurity in geographical borderlands like the Rio Grande Valley. As Anzaldúa's scholarly-activist allies, we ought to be forging *el mundo zurdo* all over the world; I offer this essay to articulate one way to forge it in Anzaldúa's own borderlands.

DEVELOPING EL MUNDO ZURDO

El mundo zurdo was a central concept in Anzaldúa's early writings that she foresaw developing in her future writing, but which stayed mostly out of print until the end of her career. AnaLouise Keating, who has written more on *el mundo zurdo* than anyone else, calls it "one of Anzaldúa's earliest, least discussed concepts" that is nevertheless crucial for understanding Anzaldúa's "spiritual activism."³ That *el mundo zurdo* was a central theme for Anzaldúa is evident upon analyzing even the little she says about it in interviews and print. The first use of the term occurs in 1977, when Anzaldúa wrote a poem called "The coming of el mundo surdo," which remained unpublished until after her death in 2004.⁴ Between 1977 and 1981, Anzaldúa conducted a series of reading and writing workshops in the San Francisco Bay Area called "el mundo surdo."⁵ During the same time frame, she was working on "La Prieta," which was published in *This Bridge Called My Back*

(1981). Here, she calls *el mundo zurdo* her way of “trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be.”⁶ Indeed, “La Prieta” was supposed to constitute preliminary notes to an essay that she never wrote, to be titled “Toward a Construction of El Mundo Zurdo.”⁷ In the same year she attended a workshop in Chicago inspired by her concept called “El mundo zurdo: political-spiritual vision for the third world and the queer,” and in 1982 she transferred the *el mundo zurdo* writing workshops to Buffalo, NY, renaming them “Speaking in Tongues.”⁸ In 1983, she conducted a workshop at a conference titled “Third World Women’s Conference: El Mundo Zurdo—The Vision.”⁹ Although the concept of *el mundo zurdo* gained a lot of national attention in the next few years, Anzaldúa published *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and edited *Making Face/Making Soul* (1990) without philosophically developing it.¹⁰ Twenty years passed before Anzaldúa directly wrote about *el mundo zurdo* again, both in “now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts,” published in *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), and in “counsels from the firing . . . past, present, future” which is the 2001 forward to the third edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*.¹¹ In “now let us shift . . .,” Anzaldúa clearly articulates the continuing importance of *el mundo zurdo*, which she has now “amplified here into the model of conocimiento”:

Not long ago your mother gave you un 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 Corazon con razon, with intelligence, passion, and purpose, a “mindful” 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 (Keating and Anzaldúa 2002, 571).

The fact that Anzaldúa returns to the language of *el mundo zurdo* in spite of the time gap suggests a continuity in her attempt to “uncover/discover/create/name” concepts that would help her forge *el mundo zurdo* out of the world that we live in.¹² If Keating is right that we ought to interpret *el mundo zurdo* as a practice in spiritual activism, then we can distinguish (at least) two ethico-political spaces for it: the written and the lived.

From the beginning, Anzaldúa said that she envisioned *el mundo zurdo* as a “network [. . .] where we could help each other.”¹³ It constituted a theoretical space where oppressed peoples of all kinds could build coalitions.¹⁴ Thus Keating connects *el mundo zurdo* to “relational difference,” or the idea that difference itself unites:

Applied to alliances, it indicates communities based on commonalities, visionary locations where people from diverse backgrounds, often with very different needs and concerns, co-exist and work together to bring about revolutionary change. (Anzaldúa 2009, 322)¹⁵

These communities are not identity-based like most coalitions, but affinity-based; people choose to work together to speak out against multiple oppressions.¹⁶ In “Building Bridges, Transforming Loss, Shaping New Dialogues: Anzaldúan Studies for the Twenty-First Century,” Keating and Gloria González-López suggest that

The kaleidoscope collage of perspectives and voices illustrates and enacts one form that *el mundo zurdo* might take [. . .] it represents a visionary approach to community building in which people from varied backgrounds and with different needs and concerns coexist and work together to bring about revolutionary change. *El mundo zurdo* defines difference relationally (rather than hierarchically) and thus makes it possible to develop communities based on commonalities (not sameness).¹⁷

Anzaldúa doubtless interpreted the edited book projects of *This Bridge Called My Back* and *This Bridge Called Home* as attempts to publicly forge *el mundo zurdo* in the world of ideas. Encouraging multiple subject-positions to speak for themselves in a text is a legitimate way to build ethico-political coalitions based less on what form the oppression takes and more on how best to combat oppression together.¹⁸ Along the same lines, *Bridging* (2011), edited by Keating and Lopez, can be interpreted as a more recent attempt to forge *el mundo zurdo* in writing.¹⁹

The examples above illustrate the scholarly vitality of *el mundo zurdo*, but it has gotten even more traction as an activist movement than it has as a theoretical concept. Many groups have united in the name of *el mundo zurdo* to combat various oppressions. Keating quotes Anzaldúa in “La Prieta,” saying: “I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world, that travelling El Mundo Zurdo path is the path of a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and a reconstruction of society,”²⁰ and she reiterates the importance of activism for Anzaldúa:

With El Mundo Zurdo, Anzaldúa proposes and enacts a spirit-inflected, visionary approach to community building that enables very different people—men and women from diverse backgrounds with a wide variety of needs and concerns—to coexist and work together to enact revolutionary change.²¹

Coalitions have been formed in the name of *el mundo zurdo*, including one at the New School for Social Research. Indigo Violet writes about an attempt to forge *el mundo zurdo* in the New School in 1997. Faculty and students from different disciplines mobilized together to try to obtain better working and learning environments. Although Violet says “we did not win,” the participants both created useful networks and transformed themselves, both of which

are crucial components to *el mundo zurdo* (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 486–94). In short, since Anzaldúa first described *el mundo zurdo* as a theoretical concept and practico-spiritual vision, various individuals and groups have attempted to transform the intellectual, physical, and political spaces they occupy.²²

My goal runs along the same lines as some of these scholarly and activist endeavors to try to turn the “is” of the borderlands into the “ought” of *el mundo zurdo*. If the *atravesados* already live in the borderlands of the Rio Grande Valley, and we agree with Anzaldúa that we should join forces to combat their oppression, then the remaining question is *How?* Here, I take my point of departure from Kavitha Koshy, who calls the answer “nepantlera activism.”²³ She warns that forging *el mundo zurdo* will be “an arduous journey during which we can learn to move beyond and above the narrowness of binary thinking.” Finally, Koshy hopes that “more concrete and more creative strategies for social change will emerge” as scholars read and study Anzaldúa.²⁴ The next section examines the binary thinking that accompanies the logic of purity, whereby unnatural borders create the very *atravesados* who inhabit the borderlands.

BORDERS CREATE BORDERLANDS

Borders are designed to keep *border-crossers* out, but they fail, and end up creating then housing the very *atravesados* who settle in the adjoining borderlands. For instance, Anzaldúa posits that the “unnatural boundary” constituting the national border between the United States and Mexico itself actually *creates* the “vague and undetermined place” called the borderlands. On Anzaldúa’s interpretation, the *atravesados* found in borderlands—identified as “the queer, the perverse, the squint-eyed” (I would add the Spanglish-speakers and cross-dressers)—exist *because* the border exists. In contrast to the more typical and naïve logic of borders, no amount of fence-building or militarization of the border will keep out the “troublemakers,” because reinforcing or policing an unnatural boundary inevitably begets more *atravesados*—i.e., people who recognize it as a border that is meant to be crossed.

Anzaldúa believes that borders necessarily fail to create clean divisions between two things, including countries, genders, and languages, resulting in a surrounding borderlands inhabited by a people who are not clearly defined by either side of the border, and who often cross from one side to the other. Such borders are fortified by what Maria Lugones calls a “logic of purity,” which in turn relies on what she calls a “logic of splitting.” Structures of power, according to Lugones, have an interest in splitting for the sake of purity—for example, keeping English separate from Spanish and “man” conceptually separate from “woman.”²⁵ Anzaldúa explicitly analyzes the splitting that happens along the linguistic border of the Rio Grande Valley. The border’s function is to keep the English speaker in and others out, the assumption being that mixing languages results in a watered-down, inferior, discombobulated language—i.e., an *impure* language. In contrast, Anzaldúa contends that the Spanglish-speaking *atravesado* living in the linguistic borderlands exposes the border’s failure to maintain linguistic purity. She also indirectly addresses an

analogous disconnect between the sexual border and its sexual borderlands. All kinds of gender/sexual *atravesados* live in the Valley, and Anzaldúa refers to them as “la jotería” (“the queer” in various hybrid forms, including herself).²⁶ Indeed, Anzaldúa’s reference to herself as half-man, half-woman must be understood in light of her claim that in the borderlands this type of crossing is not coincidental but rather created by the border itself. Both Spanglish-speakers and *la jotería* (in various hybrid forms) will thus continue to exist not just despite but actually because of opposition from those who believe in the logic of purity. As Anzaldúa argues, the borderlands surrounding the border act as a constant reminder of the borders’ inability to excise the impure, to eradicate the *atravesados*. Both the linguistic and the sexual borders are incapable of enforcing purity (as is the geographical border that is separated by a winding river and at least three different types of wall or fence, one of which problematically divides a College campus).²⁷ The same border working to maintain purity ironically ends up producing the very multilinguals and multisexuals it subsequently rejects as *atravesados*.

In sum, Anzaldúa believes that impurity exists and persists because borders are necessarily surrounded by messy borderlands.²⁸ Instead of perceiving the resulting impurities—*los atravesados*—as a problem, Anzaldúa rejects the logic of purity in order to forge a new world—*el mundo zurdo*—where *los atravesados* can flourish. Lugones likewise rejects the logic of purity in favor of a “logic of curdling.” She refers to the way that eggs and oil don’t always become mayonnaise; sometimes you are left with an oily egg or eggy oil.²⁹ The two are no longer separable, and this is most often interpreted in a strictly negative light. However, what Anzaldúa calls “perversity” and Lugones calls “curdling” will always exist in the borderlands because borders are messy. The persistence of the *atravesados* in the Valley can be interpreted positively rather than negatively. Instead of considering the ambiguity of the borderlands a failure, Anzaldúa spent her career articulating the advantage of the *atravesados*. The vague borderlands and the *atravesados* who inhabit them reject binary thinking, reject the logic of purity, and give us ways of reframing impurity.

The *atravesados* living in the borderlands always tacitly and sometimes explicitly challenge the strict boundaries, dualistic thinking, and logic of purity that borders try but inevitably fail to enforce. This makes the *atravesados* and their borderlands not only ambiguous but also defiant. For this reason borderlands make great spaces for thinking about forging *el mundo zurdo*. Throughout her career, Anzaldúa highlighted some of the ways that borderlands and the people who inhabit them challenge us to think differently. In the section below, I explore her concepts of hybridity, *mestizaje*, and *nepantla*.

HYBRIDITY, MESTIZAJE, NEPANTLA

In different ways, the concepts of hybridity, *mestizaje*, and *nepantla* reveal how borderlands naturally challenge dualistic thinking. These three concepts help us move away from seeing borders as primarily bridging two disparate things—man/woman, English/Spanish, Texas/Mexico—and toward an interpretation of borders as creating spaces of

resistance. What Anzaldúa calls the “third space” refers not to a new creation in a Hegelian dialectical cycle but to a space for many new creations. When she uses the term “third,” she is using a metaphor for a non-dialectical and non-dualistic way of thinking. The “third country” holds multiplicities even as it resists binaries. Anzaldúa uses the Rio Grande Valley as an example of a third country; it is a borderland created by a border. It is neither Texas nor Mexico, nor is it half of one and half of the other. Rather, it is a third country that yields all kinds of other thirds—people, languages, sexualities—that have no binary counterpart. In other words, borderlands are hybrid entities.

Unlike the more typical contemporary use of the term *hybrid*—to connote a combining of two things, like the hybrid car (half gas- and half electrically powered)—Anzaldúa’s hybrid is more than the sum of its parts. When she says that she feels like “half-man-half-woman,” Anzaldúa is invoking any number of different sexualities and genders that do not fit into “man” or “woman”; her emphasis is not on *half-and-half*, which would amount to reinforcing the man/woman dichotomy. For Anzaldúa, hybridity does not imply a mere mixing of two things but signals a new possibility that transcends binaries. The ambiguity she celebrates in her evolving concepts results from colliding dualisms and is symbolized by something vague, multiplicitous, and non-dualistic. The borderlands she writes about are home to hybrids of all kinds—here multilinguals meet multisexuals.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa introduces the concept of the new *mestiza*, a person with a *mestiza* consciousness, or a non-dualistic way of thinking. Like hybridity, the term “mestizaje” highlights the most positive aspect of border-life; living in the border has taught the new *mestiza* to be comfortable with ambiguity. Since the borderland “is in a constant state of transition,” the new *mestizas* who live here break down dualisms:

[The new *mestiza*] has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically [. . .] The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for ambiguity [. . .] She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (1999, 25, 101)

The new *mestiza* knows that borders are threatened by borderlands, and that their inhabitants will never become fully *acculturated*, a concept that I address below. Likewise, she knows that such binaries are fictions, no matter how powerful, and she can use this knowledge to combat conceptual norms and expectations. Lugones also underscores this theme of resistance when she writes that “mestizaje defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting

fragmentation into pure parts” (Lugones 2003, 123). Lugones posits that *mestizo/as* “resist in [their] curdled state,” resulting in their becoming “unclassified, unmanageable,” which explains the threat they pose to those who adhere to the logic of purity (Lugones 2003, 123). The *mestiza* thus represents an impure or curdled being who can be neither controlled nor eradicated. For Anzaldúa and Lugones, the defiance of *mestizas* give us reason to celebrate as it signals a potential transformation in the direction of less exclusionary way of thinking and living.

Nepantla is one of Anzaldúa’s latest concepts, and is the one that perhaps best describes the refusal of dichotomous thinking, along with why we ought to reconsider the logic of curdling. Anzaldúa claims to have adopted *nepantla*—the Náhuatl term for the “*tierra entre medio*” (“in-between space”)—to replace “borderlands,” which was being interpreted in too limited and dichotomous a way. Instead, *nepantla* stresses the “psychic and emotional borderlands” in addition to the physical:

With the *nepantla* paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of *mestizas* living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined. (2000, 268)

Anzaldúa believes that *nepantla* better describes people who experience “in-betweenness” in these “unarticulated dimensions.” Bearing in mind the earlier point that Anzaldúa developed *conocimiento* later in her career as an extension of her earlier attempts to forge *el mundo zurdo*, she describes *nepantla* as the “second stage of *conocimiento*,” a kind of knowledge production that results from an *arrebato*, or an earthquake of the soul. This earthquake shatters stability and forces one to “experience reality as fluid, expanding and contracting. In *nepantla* one is exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to ‘see through’ them with a mindful, holistic awareness” (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 544). Ultimately, *nepantla* is ambiguous; it is painful but it also helps the self understand itself and others more clearly. “It signals unexpected, uncontrollable shifts, transitions and changes” (Keating 2006, 9). For each positive aspect of *nepantla*—“we disidentify with existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity [and] are able to transform these existing conditions”—exists a corresponding negative aspect—“*Nepantla es tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling.”³⁰ According to Anzaldúa, *nepantla* makes one aware of “knowledge, identity and reality construction,” and challenges this process. Without the *arrebato*, these constructions become much harder to see. Although it is a painful process to live and think non-dualistically, the upshot of *nepantla* is that it sees value in the *atravesados* created by the border, instead of trying to conceal them. Rejecting dualisms is the key to forging *el mundo zurdo*.

Moving from theory to practice, or from “inner works” to “public acts,” Anzaldúa describes *nepantleras* as “in-betweeners,” who “facilitate passages between worlds,” who “act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality. . . . They serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness.”³¹ Having been through the painful processes that make this knowledge production possible, the *nepantlera* develops the same flexibility that the new *mestiza* has for changing the terms of the debate. Although Anzaldúa is talking about *conocimiento* as a form of knowledge production, which invokes standpoint theory, I am not claiming that the *atravesados* have some privileged understanding of what Anzaldúa is explaining here, based on their subject positions (although this may be true). Rather, I am claiming that we can learn something by studying the way that borderlands and the *atravesados* who inhabit them never quite let the border have its way.

To recap, hybridity, *mestizaje*, and *nepantla* all represent Anzaldúa’s attempts to learn from the illegitimate, impure *atravesados* who are created by the border and who reside in the borderlands. As long as borders exist, *atravesados*, who act as a constant reminder that borders cannot eradicate impurity, also exist. Anzaldúa and Lugones find in these curdled beings a reason to reconsider the value of impurity. The existence and persistence of the *atravesados* show us that purity is not only impossible to maintain, but is also undesirable. The key to forging *el mundo zurdo* in the borderlands consists of reconceiving the *atravesados* (a passive term imposed onto a people) as *nepantleras* (an active term that includes teaching others to reinterpret commonly negative terms like impurity, curdling, and perversity).³² This shift marks the beginning of actively forging *el mundo zurdo* instead of merely thinking or writing about it. In the next section, I focus on how linguistic and sexual *atravesados* (who can and should be read as *nepantleras*) refuse binary thinking and reinforce the logic of curdling.

LINGUISTIC AND SEXUAL MESTIZAJE

LINGUISTIC MESTIZAJE

Spanish was not taught in Anzaldúa’s school; it was “corrected,” an act Anzaldúa calls “linguistic terrorism” (1999, 80). She recounts her early use of Spanish in the classroom being equated with “*hablando pa tras*” (talking back), for which she was punished. In the following passage, Anzaldúa painfully refers to the severity of language-policing in the United States, even in her life as an academic:

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I

have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (1999, 81)³³

Language-policing is a common story for people of Anzaldúa’s generation in the Rio Grande Valley, but persists for some younger people as well. In other words, what Anzaldúa calls “border tongues” are still largely accused of being “impure” and “bastard languages.” Today, speaking Spanglish in the classroom is still thought of as a linguistic aberration for those who believe in language purity, but also for those who believe that Spanish itself is not valuable. Many Spanish speakers in the Valley, including Anzaldúa, have received this same message throughout their education.³⁴ As Anzaldúa points out, “Chicano Spanish is considered by the purest and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish” (1999, 77). The opposition to Spanglish in the name of linguistic purity exists in and outside of the University; Spanglish is still seen as impure by those who believe in linguistic boundaries. Clearly, *el mundo zurdo* has yet to be forged, in part because it has yet to be articulated as a goal for the border-dwellers of the Valley.

Because different versions of diglossia³⁵ are rejected in the school system, Anzaldúa justifiably worries about linguistic acculturation: “by the end of this century, English and not Spanish will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos (1999, 81). She worries that the logic of purity will win out, that even the *atravesados* will end up speaking English only. I believe Anzaldúa is calling for what anthropologist Fernando Ortiz calls “neoculturation,”³⁶ and that even though Anzaldúa worries about it, she and many others could and should declare with Jose Maria Arguedas, “yo no soy un aculturado.”³⁷ As Silvia Spitta points out, Ortiz’s concern is to “counter the image of colonized peoples as passive recipients of a dominant colonizing culture.”³⁸ If *acculturation* is, as Spitta describes it, the “one-way imposition of the dominant culture,” Ortiz’s concept of *transculturation* is the refusal to be acculturated.³⁹ In a way that resonates with Anzaldúa’s concepts of hybridity, *mestizaje*, and *nepantla*, Ortiz describes a third term, “neoculturation” as the “creation of a new cultural phenomenon,” born of the *choque* (crash) between old and new:

The result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them.⁴⁰

In direct opposition to the logic of purity that insists separation is necessary to maintain the purity of language, Ortiz and Anzaldúa agree that the “impure” languages are at least partially responsible for ensuring the survival of the two original languages. In this case, Ortiz would say that Spanish is not in danger of being lost thanks to Spanglish.⁴¹ Neoculturation is precisely what occurs when English and Spanish, Mexican and Anglo, man and woman emerge as hybrid thirds that refuse binary thinking. We can conclude that impurity works to preserve rather than destroy, so that more Spanglish in the Valley is perfectly compatible with the preservation of both Spanish and English.

As a member of “a complex heterogeneous people,” Anzaldúa lists all of her languages, some of which seem to be types of neoculturation rather than acculturation:

- 1) Standard English
- 2) Working class and slang English
- 3) Standard Spanish
- 4) Standard Mexican Spanish
- 5) North Mexican Spanish dialect
- 6) Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations)
- 7) Tex-Mex
- 8) Pachuco (called caló) (Anzaldúa 1999, 77)

The last three languages involve English and Spanish together, which Anzaldúa sometimes refers to as *border tongues* and which I am generally calling *Spanglish*. Anzaldúa calls Chicano Spanish and Tex-Mex “closest to my heart,” calling the former a “homeland,” a “secret language” with which to communicate with others who do not fit into either of the neat categories the border tries to keep separate. In keeping with the previous two sections, she writes: “Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language,” that has been created by a people who

are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English. (1999, 77)

It is fitting that a border people adopt a border tongue. Anzaldúa’s “forked tongue” evokes the image of border-bodies as also being forked; the language that is a “variation of two languages” reflects a culture that is a variation of two cultures. It is a hybrid tongue, a *mestiza* tongue, a *nepantlera* tongue, a curdled tongue, and a neocultured tongue, not a dualistic tongue. It is one of the tongues of *el mundo zurdo*.

Whether Anzaldúa meant her speaking Spanish in the classroom to be a political act, it was likely *taken* as one.⁴² Chicano Spanish, Spanglish, code-switching, bilingualism, diglossia—however one wants to refer to the multilingualism that is present here in the form of English and Spanish—is still considered dangerous today; Spanish and Spanglish are contentious in and outside of the classroom. I suggest that we can use this to our advantage; since using a border tongue is already read as a political act, we should use it for political purposes. Speaking a border tongue says that *atravesados* are legitimate, that the tongue spoken here—the otherwise “secret language”—is to be made public rather than kept private, affirmed instead of denied. Transgressing the linguistic border will move us beyond binary thinking, will force political change, will bring about *el mundo zurdo*.

SEXUAL MESTIZAJE

By a similar logic, we can capitalize on the political implications of cross-dressing, androgyny, and other types of sexual border crossings. Since these forms of border-crossing will be taken as politically defiant acts, we can and should use them to replace the logic of purity with the logic of curdling. Similar to the way Spanglish is taken as an assault on both Spanish and English, various forms of sexual deviance are taken as an assault upon heteronormativity. Third-space living is typically taken to be not just transgressive but even dangerous, so that various forces are constantly at work to keep the logic of purity active. Just as Anzaldúa described her border tongue, she also describes her border-body, calling herself *mita y mita*, half-man-half-woman:

There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within. (1999, 41)

It is the rigid sexual border that Anzaldúa is rejecting; she is not making a claim about wholes being the sum of their parts. *Hieros gamos* is a marriage ritual like sex, which brings opposites together. *Mita y mita* does not mean half-man and half-woman. It is a third in the way that Anzaldúa means it, representing multiple combinations, and its goal, above all, is to reject the dualism. In the borderlands, gender and sexual identity are often ambiguous and amorphous. When Anzaldúa calls herself *mita y mita*, she translates herself into an easily misunderstood dualistic language. In “To[o] Queer the Writer—loca, escritora, y chicana,” Anzaldúa rejects the term “lesbian” because it implies whiteness. She prefers “queer” or “dyke” in English but says “call me loquita, jotita, marimacha, pajuelona, lambiscona, culera—these are words that I grew up hearing [. . .] I identify most closely with the Náhuatl term *patlache*.”⁴³ These terms are neither interchangeable nor translatable; the *marimacha* cannot be explained by studying white lesbians in San Francisco or brown queers in Los Angeles. Anzaldúa asks us to take place seriously, to recognize that terms like *patlache* and *jotería* lack an equivalent term in English. In the Valley, if someone wears a beard and high heels, their body is different from a cross-dresser in New York, even though both are undoubtedly challenging the logic of purity.

For Anzaldúa, mixing genders and sexualities is as natural as mixing languages in the borderlands:

The *mestizo* and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls. (1999, 107)

Although Anzaldúa does not directly address language in this passage, it is safe to conclude that language is implied, given the connection she makes between language and ethnic identity when she says things like “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (1999, 81). Here, she could have easily said “sexual identity,” as all three are racialized in a Foucaultian sense of racial purity grounded in one’s blood. Larry La Fountain believes that “both [sexuality and language] relate to notions of purity or impurity: of that which is civilized or nominally acceptable, as opposed to that which is considered to be taboo, savage, or degraded.”⁴⁴ He uses race purity to connect linguistic to sexual and racial *mestizaje* in Anzaldúa’s writings:

Anzaldúa’s revolt occurs in the context of a dominant view of Spanglish (the code-switching between Spanish and English) as an “impure language,” opposed to *pureza de la lengua*, only a stone’s throw away from *pureza de sangre o de raza* [purity of blood or race]—ideologies intrinsically opposed to the fundamental reality of Latin American *mestizaje*. Politics in both English and Spanish-language communities, which attempt to promote “la defensa de la lengua” [the defense of language], deny the heterogeneity and mixture that characterize the New World.⁴⁵

Language and sexuality both fail to obey the logic of purity. Just as Spanglish is still largely interpreted as impure and therefore wrong and defiant, sexual hybridity is also rejected and often perceived as a threat; these two examples are evidence that we have not yet forged *el mundo zurdo* in the borderlands. Transgressors of language and sexuality are often read as dangerous and as needing to be controlled or policed. The ethico-political answer, then, is to use language and sexuality as tools to transform the world. Both have the potential to reveal the same truths about certain kinds of borders that are unnatural, mythical, unsustainable, and undesirable. If we intentionally cross the sexual and linguistic borders, we will be on our way to forging *el mundo zurdo*.

CONCLUSION: FORGING EL MUNDO ZURDO

For Anzaldúa, *el mundo zurdo* involves a transformation of the world, beginning with the *atravesados* who have experienced the pain caused by borders. She admits to being “confused” about how to forge *el mundo zurdo* without romanticizing oppression or asking those who are already oppressed to do more work, but she insists it must involve personal change:

The pull between what is and what should be. I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world, that traveling *el mundo zurdo* path is a path of a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society.⁴⁶

Twenty years later, in the third edition of the same text, Anzaldúa adds that we need imagination in order to forge *el mundo zurdo*:

Imagination offers resolutions out of the conflict by dreaming alternative ways of imagining/feeling/thinking. For positive social change to happen we need to envision a different reality, dream new blueprints for it, formulate new strategies for coping in it.⁴⁷

If Keating is right that *el mundo zurdo* should be interpreted as a kind of spiritual activism that—as Anzaldúa says, requires imagination—then we can begin by calling *atravesados* “*nepantleras*.”

Nepantleras can contribute to and benefit from *el mundo zurdo*, since as Anzaldúa describes, they are used to the balancing act of walking on a “tightrope,” and have been forced to “achieve a kind of equilibrium.” *El mundo zurdo* is the home to the new *mestiza*, who “juggles cultures” and “sustains contradictions” successfully. *El mundo zurdo* is a universe that the *nepantla* has had to build for herself, since she has been denied by both cultures. She has become an “an acrobat in equipoise, expert at the balancing act.”⁴⁸ Using these images, Anzaldúa is making conceptual room for the success that comes from the *nepantleras* walking the tightrope day in and day out. *El mundo zurdo* is where *atravesados-turned-nepantleras* can celebrate walking the rope with “ease and grace” as Anzaldúa does. Without denying the suffering in the lives of the *atravesados* (who “cover so many oppressions”), Anzaldúa is trying to “transform the planet” by creating coalitions with them.⁴⁹ In her 2001 forward to the third edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, titled “counsels from the firing,” Anzaldúa adds:

We are not alone in our struggles, and never have been. Somos almas afines and this interconnectedness is an unvoiced category of identity. Though we’ve progressed in forging *el mundo zurdo*, especially its spiritual aspect, we must now more than ever open our minds to others’ realities.⁵⁰

Anzaldúa sees forging *el mundo zurdo* as a collective effort, it takes the work of many people; those of us who are aware of the “multiple oppressions” suffered by the *atravesados*, as well as by the *nepantleras*.⁵¹

The only people who are currently “legitimate” in the Valley, according to Anzaldúa, are the “whites and those who align themselves with whites” (1999, 25). By extension, she means middle-classed straight, monolingual English speakers. In contrast, Anzaldúa would like to see people in the Valley unanimously endorse the multiplicity of border languages instead of insisting on either (1) eliminating Spanish and declaring English to be the national language, or (2) trying to eliminate Spanglish from the youngest of the border-dwellers. If people were to stop trying to advance these two purity-driven agendas, it would suggest that Americans have become comfortable with borderlands and those who dwell in them, and it would affirm the *nepantleras*’ positive contribution to society. In other words, it would signal the forging of *el mundo zurdo*. Since this is not the case now, either inside or outside of the Valley, we can assume that the Spanglish-speaking half-breeds who reside in the borderlands are

not currently taken seriously, that *atravesados* are not seen as *nepantleras* yet. In the borderlands, however, we are in a great position to combat what Anzaldúa calls “linguistic terrorism” and what I would call “sexual terrorism.” Here are the *atravesados*, the *nepantleras*, the Spanglish speakers as well as the high-heeled, beard-wearing *mifa y mitas*. In *el mundo zurdo*, all the *nepantleras* will be able to say, with Anzaldúa: “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (1999, 81). Forging *el mundo zurdo* is an ethico-political project appropriate everywhere there is hatred for *atravesados* who “live outside the confines of the normal,” and it holds a special importance here in the borderlands, where Anzaldúa was born and raised (1999, 25).

NOTES

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999). Due to the frequency of citations, we will use in-text citations when referring to Anzaldúa’s texts, which include: Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990); *Interviews/Entrevistas*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2000); “Speaking Across the Divide: An Email Interview,” *SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures* 15 (2003-2004): 7-21; *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002).
2. Socio-Linguist Fernando Peñalosa explains the rationale behind using the term “code”: “Whether different varieties of speech are languages, dialects, or whatever, depends not on linguistic grounds, but on socio-political considerations. Thus . . . one would prefer to avoid the spurious language-dialect distinction and use the more neutral term ‘code’.” In Fernando Peñalosa, “Chicano Multilingualism and Multiglossia,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 3, no. 2 (1972): 218.
3. Keating reads *el mundo zurdo* as specifically *spiritual* activism, and argues that many scholars are reluctant to broach Anzaldúa’s spirituality, opting instead to focus on her non-religious concepts, or simply to leave out her spiritual side. She calls it “academic spirit-phobia” (See AnaLouise Keating, “I’m a Citizen of the Universe”: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change,” *Feminist Studies* 34, no. ½ (Spring/Summer 2008), 53-69). Also see Keating, “From Borderlands and New Mestizas to Nepantlas and Nepantleras: Anzaldúan Theories for Social Change,” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 4, no. 3 (2006): Article 3; and Keating, “From Intersections to Interconnections: Lessons for Transformation from This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color,” in *The Intersectional Approach Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 81-97. This reading fits Anzaldúa’s own sense that many of her readers were made uncomfortable by the “unsafe” elements (the spiritual/religious) of Borderlands (See, K. Urch, M. Dorn, and J. Abraham, “Working the Borderlands, Becoming Mestiza: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa,” *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 4 (1995): 75-96.
4. The spelling of “surdo” is technically incorrect, but Anzaldúa used the “s” as a way of acknowledging and legitimating her South Texas roots, where they would pronounce “zurdo” as “surdo” (Keating, “From Intersections to Interconnections,” 36-37, 321). “The coming of *el mundo zurdo*” can be found in its entirety in Anzaldúa (2009, 36-37).
5. Randy P. L. Conner and David Hatfield Sparks explain how they helped Anzaldúa organize the reading series in San Francisco: “This series nurtured the coming together of women, people of color, queer people, and others involved in the arts [. . .] Both *el mundo zurdo* and *This Bridge* challenged the radical movement as a whole to personalize its politics.” See “And Revolution is Possible’: Remembering the Vision of This Bridge” in *The Bridge We Call Home*, 510-16.
6. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 208.
7. *Ibid.*, 208.
8. For more on the series, see Anzaldúa’s 1982 interview with Linda Smuckler in Anzaldúa (2000, 68) and Keating (“From Intersections to Interconnections,” 328).
9. In the 1982 interview with Linda Smuckler, Anzaldúa says: “But see, my other vision is *el mundo zurdo*. It started out as a place for people to come and do their writing, like a retreat. (It was going to be in Italy, but now think it’s going to be in Oaxaca. And I’m going to try to get over there this July.) [. . .] In San Francisco I started an *El Mundo Zurdo* reading series and an *El Mundo Zurdo* creating writing workshop that I did for about a year. Right now my energy has to go into writing. I don’t know about the future” (Anzaldúa 2000, 63). See also Keating (“From Intersections to Interconnections,” 329).
10. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa includes a poem titled “Arriba mi gente” in which people are rising up in order to find “*el mundo zurdo*” (1999, 214). The poem, however, fails to articulate a vision for *el mundo zurdo*. *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990) makes no reference to *el mundo zurdo*, though she does entitle one section “Left-Handed Guardians” (1990, xxvi).
11. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002).
12. Anzaldúa uses this phrase in an email to students of Keating, and reveals the way she thinks about the terms she coins. In the email she goes on to advise these students to “unravel these concepts” and makes it clear that she does not consider them exclusively hers. See Keating, “From Intersections to Interconnections,” 300.
13. For more on this network, see Anzaldúa’s 1993 interview with Jamie Lee Evans—“Making Alliances”—in Anzaldúa (2000, 197).
14. In “Feels like ‘Carving Bone’: (Re)Creating the Activist-Self, (Re)Articulating Transnational Journeys, while Sifting through Anzaldúan Thought,” Kavitha Koshy interprets Anzaldúa’s call for *el mundo zurdo* in “La Prieta” to be a call to create a “new place of belonging” for all queers. She says: “We the misfits finally had a common ground in “in-betweenness” or a shared uncertainty in liminality and the hopeful vision of *El Mundo Zurdo* to work toward” (in Keating and Gloria González-López, *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa’s Life And Work Transformed Our Own* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 198, 203). In “And Revolution is Possible’: Remembering the Vision of This Bridge,” Randy Conner and David Hatfield echo Koshy’s vision when they call *el mundo zurdo* “honoring diversity in the borderlands”: “only when persons of varying ethnicities, genders, and sexual identities—the inhabitants of Gloria’s ‘borderlands,’ of *El Mundo Zurdo*—struggle together in alliance against oppression will revolution truly commence” (in *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa’s Life and Work Transformed Our Own*, 510-16).
15. This definition also appears in *Bridging* (Keating and González-López 2011, 242-43). For more on *el mundo zurdo*, see “Forging *El Mundo Zurdo*: Changing Ourselves, Changing the World” in Anzaldúa and Keating (2002, 519-30); “I’m a Citizen of the Universe”: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change,” in Keating (2008, 59); “Intimate Interconnections,” in Keating and González-López (2011, 8-9); and Keating, “From Intersections to Interconnections: Lessons for Transformation from This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color,” 81-99.
16. In “Charting Pathways, Marking Thresholds . . . A Warning, An Introduction,” Keating calls *el mundo zurdo* Anzaldúa’s “solution” to “difference and alienation,” “where those of us who don’t fit in come together, doing our work to bring about revolutionary transformation” (Anzaldúa 2009, 6-20).
17. AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López, “Building Bridges, Transforming Loss, Shaping New Dialogues: Anzaldúan Studies for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Bridging: How and Why Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s Life and Work has Transformed Our Own* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 14.
18. See, for example, “counsels from the firing . . . past, present, future,” which is Anzaldúa’s forward to the third edition of *This Bridge Called my Back* (Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, 3rd

- ed. (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 2002), xxxiv-xxxix), as well as "(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces," which is Anzaldúa's preface to *This Bridge We Call Home* (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 1-5).
19. Anzaldúa gives two different accounts of the inception of *el mundo zurdo*. First, in an 1982 interview with Linda Smuckler, Anzaldúa remembers having thought about *el mundo zurdo* in a class taught by James Sledd at UT-Austin, which would have taken place between 1974 and 1977. She writes: "[James Sledd] was a rebel [...] He was the one who got me started to write about my experiences. That's when I first started articulating El Mundo Zurdo, in his class" (Anzaldúa 2000, 51). Later, in "counsels from the firing . . ." Anzaldúa says that she was guest-lecturing for a "white gay male" friend at UT-Austin, when *el mundo zurdo*—"the vision of a blood/spirit connection/alliance in which the colored, queer, poor, female, and physically challenged struggle together and form an international feminism—came to me in his class" (*This Bridge Called My Back*, xxxv).
 20. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 2nd ed., 208.
 21. "From Intersections to Interconnections," 87.
 22. For example, in "Transchildren, Changelings, and Fairies: Living the Dream and Surviving the Nightmare in Contemporary America," Jody Norton connects *el mundo zurdo* to "teaching by activism," and she is specifically talking about the oppression that faces transchildren in the United States today. She takes Anzaldúa's vision of *el mundo zurdo* as a home to the "marginalized, the abused and the oppressed" and also calls it a "social, political, and spiritual way" (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 150-51). As a final example, The Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa has hosted a yearly conference for the past few years titled "el mundo zurdo" in San Antonio, Texas. The conference seeks to "provide a space for students, scholars and community to come together to continue with Anzaldúa's vision and passion," and it publishes its proceedings every year. See <http://www.gloriaanzaldua.com/>.
 23. *Bridging*, 203.
 24. *Ibid.*, 203.
 25. Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 121-48.
 26. The term "queer" may be more problematic than illuminating in a context such as this one. Although Anzaldúa uses it, she does so reluctantly (see note 28). I prefer to use the general term "atravesados," as it covers many types of border-crossers. For a scholarly critique of the use of the term "queer," see Michael Roy Hames-Garcia and Ernesto Javier Martínez, eds., *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 12-13.
 27. The wall that splits Texas Southmost College suggests that borders are incapable of the clean divisions they aim to make.
 28. Celia Bardwell-Jones distinguishes between Anzaldúa's use of the terms *border*—the violent crashing of two cultures—and *borderlands*—the space where creativity emerges and where ambiguity thrives. I would like to thank Bardwell-Jones for pointing out Anzaldúa's distinction during the 2010 First International Conference on Pragmatism and the Hispanic/Latino World at Texas A&M University. However, drawing attention to the way that borders themselves are not as clean as they pretend to be, or as any purist would claim them to be, also puts into question Bardwell-Jones's distinction between borders and borderlands; they may be conceptually distinct (and therefore helpful), but perhaps realistically indistinguishable.
 29. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 121-48.
 30. "From Borderlands to New Mestizas," 9.
 31. *Ibid.*, 9. For the full interview, see Anzaldúa (2003-2004, 7-21).
 32. This rethinking/renaming can be seen as a response to Anzaldúa's injunction in *Borderlands*: "People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying" (1999, 107).
 33. Anzaldúa also says, "*Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente*. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huerfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue" (Anzaldúa 1999, 80).
 34. Anzaldúa continues: "Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools we attended or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages. I, for one, became adept at, and majored in English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty. And Spanish was not taught in grade school. And Spanish was not required in High School. And though now I write my poems in Spanish as well as in English I feel the rip-off of my native tongue" (in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 165-66).
 35. Socio-Linguist Fernando Peñalosa distinguishes diglossia from bilingualism in his study of code-switching of various Chicano communities. As he explains it, diglossia refers to two languages coextensively used in a society (like English and Danish in Denmark), whereas bilingualism refers to an individual's use of two languages in a society, and these terms can exist simultaneously but don't always. One can imagine a city where two languages are spoken, and are perhaps even both "official languages," but that, on the individual level, people are monolingual. And vice-versa. Peñalosa concludes about Chicano communities: "At this point it should be obvious that what is in the Chicano community is not a simple case of diglossia and bilingualism, but rather a case of multiglossia and multilingualism, with very complex relationships among the half-dozen codes in use in among Chicanos" ("Chicano Multilingualism," 216).
 36. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).
 37. Arguedas was a Peruvian novelist who gave a speech entitled "No soy un aculturado" in acceptance of the "Inca Garcilaso de la Vega" prize in 1968. The speech can be found at <http://servindi.org/actualidad/3252>.
 38. Silvia Spitta, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America* (Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 2005), 6.
 39. *Ibid.*, 3.
 40. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 102-103.
 41. Although Ortiz was thinking and writing about Cuba, the concept is transferrable to the Mexico-U.S. border since it represents a clashing of cultures along an actual border rather than a borderless choque. One does not have to point to Chicano Spanish or Tex-Mex to argue that language purity is a myth, that languages evolve—or die. In the case of Mexican Spanish, Indian languages are already embedded. One need only look at words accepted in "pure" Spanish to deconstruct the myth of purity: words like "choclo" or "poroto" used in some Latin American countries betrays the Andean influence on Spanish; similarly "cacahuate" and "aguacate" betray the Náhuatl influence on the Spaniards. See Spitta, *Between Two Waters*, 4. See also Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 97-103.
 42. James Baldwin believes that the use of language is political, whether it is intended as such or not: "It goes without saying, then, that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: it reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity. There have been, and are, times and places, when to speak a certain language could be dangerous, even fatal." In James Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" In *Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 649-52, 650. (Reprinted from *The New York Times*, July 29, 1979).
 43. "To[o] Queer the Writer" was first published in 1991 in *Inversions: Writing by Dykes, Queers, and Lesbians*. See Anzaldúa (2009, 163-75). Anzaldúa reiterates that she does not identify with the term lesbian, and prefers *patlache* in a 2003 email conversation with Keating's students. See Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 300.
 44. Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes, "The Queer Politics of Spanglish," *Critical Moment* 9 (March-April 2005), 2.
 45. *Ibid.*, 3.

46. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 2nd ed., 208.
47. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 3rd ed., xxxix.
48. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 2nd ed., 208.
49. *Ibid.*, 209.
50. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 3rd ed., xxxvii.
51. Anzaldúa adds: "In challenging our own negative, unconscious assumptions of self-identity we make ourselves so uncomfortable we're forced to make changes. Our images/feelings/thoughts have to be conflicted before we see the need for change. Restoring dignity and overcoming a stigmatized status changes our self-image; changes in the self lead to changes in the categories of identity, which in turn precipitate changes in community and traditions" (*This Bridge Called My Back*, xxxviii).

2014 ESSAY PRIZE IN LATIN AMERICAN THOUGHT

Should a Concept of Truth Be Attributed to Nahuatl Thought? Preserving "the Colonial Difference" between Concepts of the West and Nahua Philosophy

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§1

The Nahuatl word *neltiliztli* is often used as a reference point by which scholars explore whether the Nahua possessed a conception of truth. Indeed, *neltiliztli* is commonly translated as "truth." However, there are reasons to call this translation into question, all of which demonstrate that attributing a concept of truth to Nahuatl thought is misguided. *Neltiliztli* is best understood through an analysis of its relation to the following: (1) Nahuatl metaphysics, which is processive, and according to which the universe is produced and maintained by a vivifying force called *teotl*, and (2) the major problematic of Nahua philosophy, according to which humans must live a life of *neltiliztli* in order to effectively navigate the so-called "slippery earth," the normative import of "being rooted" or living a rooted life. If translated as "truth," *neltiliztli* loses its unique Nahuatl meaning, or its unique semantic content, and so translating *neltiliztli* as "truth" is misguided.¹

The underlying impetus of this paper is inspired by Walter Dignolo's writing on the colonial double bind,² according to which the ideas of non-Western systems of thought are either (1) too similar to Western thought (and so are assimilated into it, and thought of as making no genuine contribution), or (2) too foreign, even incommensurable, to Western thought (and so are called into question as to their status as "genuine" philosophy).³ Part of the problem with translating *neltiliztli* as "truth" is derived from the colonial double bind: while *neltiliztli* is not simply cast aside as unimportant by scholars (thus avoiding the second disjunct of the double bind), some are seduced into assimilating

the word *neltiliztli* into a Western framework by translating it as "truth," a familiar Western word (thus committing themselves to the first disjunct of the double bind). The motivation for doing so stems from the foreign nature of *neltiliztli*. There are seemingly no Western notions that parallel *neltiliztli*, and so it is either dubiously translated as "truth" or dismissed from a Western perspective.

Neltiliztli should be translated without recourse to the word "truth," and such a translation can be achieved without falling prey to the double bind. In order to avoid the first disjunct of the double bind, it will be argued that *neltiliztli* should not be understood or defined by the word "truth." In order to avoid the second disjunct of the double bind, it will be argued that *neltiliztli* is not too foreign a concept to Western thought through an analysis of its relation to William James's account of pragmatic truth. Although Jamesian truth and *neltiliztli* are not equivalent, my analysis will show that *neltiliztli* stands on its own as a genuine philosophical concept, a move that is critical to the process of decolonization and expansion of philosophical dialogue.

§2

While understanding and translating *neltiliztli* with use of the word "truth" may be useful for scholarship, there are reasons to call this mode of analysis into doubt. Consider the etymology of the word *neltiliztli*. León-Portilla writes,

The word "truth" in Nahuatl, *neltiliztli*, is derived from the same radical as "root," *tla-nél-huatl*, from which, in turn, comes *nel-huáyotl*, "base" or "foundation." The stem syllable *nel* has the original connotation of solid firmness or deeply rooted. With this etymology "truth," for the Nahuas, was to be identified with well-grounded stability.⁴

León-Portilla attributes a concept of truth to the Nahua by identifying it with *neltiliztli*.⁵ León-Portilla's etymological note is, nevertheless, helpful in supporting the claim that *neltiliztli* should not be translated or understood as truth. The chief reason for this is that *neltiliztli* has a unique semantic content⁶ that should preclude its being translated as "truth." That is, it means something specific in Nahuatl, namely, firmly- or well- or deeply-rooted, and it should be translated as such. Thus, the word "truth" should not be smuggled into the translation of *neltiliztli*. It should stand on its own, with its own unique semantic content. After all, according to León-Portilla's analysis of *neltiliztli*, "truth" does not appear at all in the etymology of the word!

One might contend, however, that translating *neltiliztli* as "truth" is useful because it helps those unfamiliar with Nahuatl thought, but familiar with Western conceptions of truth, to understand what *neltiliztli* roughly means. By using a familiar word like "truth," *neltiliztli* stands as a more accessible concept to those who have never encountered the word before—it is easier for scholars to understand what the word *neltiliztli* means if translated as "truth."

However, by becoming a more accessible concept to those who have not encountered it before, *neltiliztli* loses something, namely, its "colonial difference" as Dignolo

puts it, which in this context is *neltiliztli*'s unique semantic content. *Neltiliztli* means firmly- or well- or deeply-rooted. There is no mention of truth in its etymology, and so there should be no mention of truth in its translation. Doing otherwise is inimical to a proper understanding of what the Nahua meant by *neltiliztli*. Additionally, translating *neltiliztli* as "truth" runs the risk of falling prey to the first disjunct of the double bind. Translating *neltiliztli* as "truth" makes *neltiliztli* seem very similar to Western conceptions of truth. This, in turn, could lead to *neltiliztli*'s being unwarrantedly assimilated into Western thought, and thereby considered as making no genuine philosophical contribution.

Further support for the claim that attributing a concept of "truth" to Nahuatl thought is misguided comes from the insights of comparative philosophy scholars. David Hall, for instance, offers a historical strategy for the purpose of understanding concepts in non-Western systems of thought.⁷ Hall argues, "[o]ur mistake is in asking which of the many theories of truth contained in a Western philosophical dictionary might be found within the [non-Western]⁸ philosophical milieu."⁹ Hall is correct, and his argument supports the foregoing etymological argument, because in making sense of *neltiliztli*, it is important not to impose thoroughgoing Western notions of truth on our understanding of *neltiliztli*, else we run the risk of misconstruing its meaning, and falling prey to the double bind. Instead, an effort should be made at understanding *neltiliztli* from within the Nahuatl tradition by looking to the historical and cultural conditions out of which the concept emerged.¹⁰

Relatedly, James Maffie argues that there is not enough evidence to support translating *neltiliztli* as "truth." Maffie writes,

[t]ranslating *neltiliztli* as truth contributes more to our misunderstanding than it does to our understanding of Nahua thought. . . . I also worry that [such a translation] amounts to a projection of Western philosophical notions on pre-Hispanic Nahua thought.¹¹

Following Willard Gingerich's translation of *neltiliztli*, Maffie argues that it is better translated as "well-rootedness-cum-*alethia simpliciter* [which] is much clearer and more straightforward."¹² Gingerich argues that *neltiliztli*, as well as components of Nahua poetry, contains Heideggerian notions that can aid in our understanding of *neltiliztli*.¹³ Gingerich writes that *neltiliztli* can be understood as "non-referential *aletheia*—'disclosure,' 'clearing and lighting.'"¹⁴ He, furthermore, claims that *neltiliztli* is "often found in its adverbial form *nelli*, 'truly' or 'with truth.'"¹⁵ What can be gleaned from Gingerich's Heideggerian analysis is that *neltiliztli* should not be understood as a semantic theory of truth, since it does not contain the ideas and terms often used in such theories of truth such as "correspondence."

Although Maffie's and Gingerich's efforts are admirable, I am not convinced that translating *neltiliztli* as "well-rootedness-cum-*alethia simpliciter*"¹⁶ is adequate. In their appropriation of Heideggerian concepts for the purpose of translating *neltiliztli* both Maffie and Gingerich succumb

to the first disjunct of the double bind. Although it could be argued on their behalf that neither scholar conceives of *neltiliztli* as too similar to Western thought, they assimilate the concept into a Western philosophical perspective. Although they avoid the word "truth" in their respective translations, using a Heideggerian framework to both understand and translate *neltiliztli* is an unwarranted move. Focus is shifted from understanding *neltiliztli* from a Nahua perspective to understanding the term from a Heideggerian perspective.

We should, therefore, jettison all truth-talk when translating and understanding *neltiliztli*, because if not, we will not properly understand what the Nahua meant by *neltiliztli*. Nahuatl thought should be understood from within by analyzing the conditions out of which *neltiliztli* emerged. It follows that if *neltiliztli* is translated as "truth," it loses its unique semantic content, and translating *neltiliztli* as "truth" is misguided.

§3

Neltiliztli is best understood in part through an analysis of its relation to Nahuatl metaphysics. The Nahua posited a processive metaphysic according to which the universe is produced by a force called *teotl*. *Teotl* is "a single, dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating and self-regenerating sacred power, energy or force."¹⁷ Since the universe is generated by and identical to *teotl*, it is, accordingly, eternally regenerated, and therefore, ever-changing.¹⁸ The universe and everything it contains, then, is guaranteed to endlessly change according to the processes of *teotl*. Thus, according to Nahuatl metaphysics, the universe is neither fixed nor stable. Any fixedness or stability we think we perceive in the world is illusory.¹⁹

The Nahua articulated their notion of *neltiliztli* in concordance with the foregoing metaphysic. Returning to León-Portilla's definition, *neltiliztli* is defined as follows: "[*neltiliztli*] was to be identified with well-grounded stability."²⁰ *Neltiliztli* is well-groundedness in *teotl*. Therefore, for something to be "true" is to be well-grounded in *teotl*.²¹

The Nahua also thought persons, objects, ways of life, terms, or concepts could be *neltiliztli*.²² This is in sharp contrast to most Western notions of truth in which propositions are the only things that can be true. In other words, *neltiliztli* is non-semantic, whereas most Western notions of truth are.²³ A concept, for example, is *neltiliztli* if it endures the ever-changing nature of *teotl*. This is not to say that *neltiliztli* can be eternally true—the word "endurance" should not be understood as "enduring for all time." It would be a mistake to make such a claim since *neltiliztli* is understood in terms of its well-rootedness with regard to *teotl*, which is ever-changing. In other words, a concept's being *neltiliztli* may endure for an extended period of time, but it is always possible to lose its well-rooted status if it becomes irrelevant with regard to the ever-changing processes of *teotl*. For example, if my way of life is well-rooted in *teotl* at time_n, then it is *neltiliztli* at time_n. However, if *teotl* changes at time_{n+1}, and with it the universe, during the course of my life, making my way of life lose its well-rootedness in *teotl*, then my way of life is no longer *neltiliztli*. *Neltiliztli*,

because it is crucially linked to *teotl*, is ever-changing, and, therefore, has no stable or static properties.

§4

Neltiliztli should also, in part, be understood against its relation to the major problematic of Nahua philosophy. This problematic is one of effectively navigating a world shot-through with pain, strife, and danger, as well as the ever-changing *teotl*.²⁴ Louise Brukhart elaborates:

The Nahua earth was a treacherous place. Its very name connotes this character. *Tlalticpac* literally means not “on earth” but “on the point or summit of the earth,” conveying the idea of a narrow place between dangers. An adage recorded by Sahagún states . . . “it is slippery, it is slick on the earth.” This was said of someone who had lived a good life but then fell into some *tlatlacolli*, as if slipping in the mud.²⁵

In order not to lose one’s balance on the slippery earth, one must live a life of practical wisdom.²⁶ And to live a life of practical wisdom is to become well-grounded, or stable, that is, to be *neltiliztli*, in all one thinks and does in *teotl*. *Neltiliztli*, then, is the way in which persons should comport themselves so as to navigate their lives effectively in *teotl*.

In light of *neltiliztli*’s relationship to Nahuatl metaphysics and the chief problematic of their philosophy, it is evident that *neltiliztli* should be defined by incorporating both ontology and praxis. There are, then, two primary desiderata that must be satisfied for a satisfactory definition of *neltiliztli*. First, a satisfactory definition should incorporate Nahuatl ontology, because *neltiliztli* is well-grounded stability in *teotl*. Second, a satisfactory definition should incorporate practical wisdom, which is crucial to overcoming the chief problematic in Nahua philosophy. Thus, with these desiderata in mind, we can define *neltiliztli* as follows:²⁷ *x* is *neltiliztli* if, and only if, *x* is well-grounded or stable in the world, or *teotl*.

§5

In the following section *neltiliztli* will be compared and contrasted with James’s pragmatic account of truth (PAT) to demonstrate the risks involved in translating *neltiliztli* against the background of Western notions of truth. However, despite these risks, the translation of *neltiliztli* offered above can be maintained while avoiding the double bind. It will be shown that *neltiliztli* makes a genuine contribution to philosophical thought, and that it is not entirely incommensurable with Western thought. In a word, *neltiliztli* is neither (1) too similar to Western thought nor (2) too foreign, or incommensurable, to Western thought.²⁸ Yet, although James’s PAT is the closest one gets to understanding *neltiliztli* in a Western framework, there is still reason not to subsume such an understanding firmly under the first disjunct of the double bind.

James’s PAT takes a non-semantic view with regard to truth. In elaborating his account James applies the pragmatic maxim to the notion of truth. He writes, “[g]rant an idea

or belief to be true,’ . . . ‘what concrete difference will its being true make in any one’s actual life. . . . What . . . is the truth’s cash-value in experiential terms?’²⁹ James then proceeds to answer these questions as follows: “*True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not.*”³⁰ Verification is emphasized: a true idea is one which accords with empirical data and does not lead to “frustration or contradiction.”³¹ James aligns truth with our concrete, lived experience, instead of making truth an abstract feature of propositions. Truth, in this sense, is intimately related to experience, especially to the way we operate in our world: “the possession of true thoughts means everywhere the possession of invaluable instruments of action.”³² James suggests, moreover, that truth, because it is bound to our experience, is a living concept, not an inert or static feature of discourse. Force is added to this claim when James mentions the so-called Rationalist’s fallacy, which is to “extract a quality from the muddy particulars of experience, and find it so pure when extracted that they contrast it with each and all its muddy instances as an opposite and higher nature.”³³ Contrasting this “pure” truth with the experience from which it came runs contrary to our concrete experience, and the abstractions are made to be antithetical to the arena from which they are derived. These pure truths do little work for us in our lived experiences in the world, whereas James’s truth is a guiding principle for us, a kind of practical wisdom, it is useful—for example, our true beliefs contribute to actions that result in useful consequences; our false beliefs do not, and ought to be eschewed.

James also draws an important connection between his notions of truth and reality. He states: both [reality] and the truths men gain about it are everlastingly in process of mutation.³⁴ He adds,

[e]xperience is in mutation, and our psychological ascertainments of truth are in mutation—so much rationalism will allow; but never that either reality itself or truth itself is mutable. Reality stands complete and ready-made from all eternity, rationalism insists, and the agreement of our ideas with it is that unique unanalyzable virtue in them of which she has already told us . . . their truth has nothing to do with our experiences. It adds nothing to the content of experience.³⁵

Against this picture of reality as readymade, James thinks reality is mutable. Because reality is mutable, the ways in which our beliefs can be deemed true are also mutable. For instance, it is compatible on James’s view of truth that my belief at time_{*n*} could be true at that time, but if the features of reality which are relevant to my belief being true at time_{*n*} change at time_{*n+1*} such that my belief no longer holds true, then my belief is false at time_{*n+1*}. I must, then, change my belief at time_{*n+1*} so as to better accord with and navigate the world around me. These passages reveal that Jamesian truth not only includes the notion of truth as a mutable concept, but also that we construct truth as our experience and reality changes.

§6

The similarities between James's PAT and *neltiliztli* demonstrate that *neltiliztli* is not too foreign a concept to Western thought. *Neltiliztli* and James's PAT both emphasize praxis and a mutable reality. Moreover, both place considerable emphasis on our beliefs and the way in which we live. The PAT and *neltiliztli* are ways in which humans can comport themselves when they navigate and experience the world. We can plausibly claim, then, that *neltiliztli* is not an entirely incommensurable or foreign concept in relation to Western thought. This avoids the second disjunct of the double bind. As a corollary, we can claim that *neltiliztli* should not be called into question as a genuine philosophical concept.

However, PAT and *neltiliztli* are not equivalent. The most obvious difference between the two is that James is operating with the word "truth." The Nahua, on the other hand, do not use the word "truth" in any sense. Furthermore, *neltiliztli* is intimately bound up with the chief problematic of their philosophy, as mentioned above. James does not operate with such a problematic. Instead, he is concerned primarily with how humans navigate the world with their pragmatically true beliefs. The problematic in James's system, if one could be identified, is simply one of effectively operating within the world, a problematic which does not stem from a view of the world as one with a slippery surface, as the Nahua story goes. So, *neltiliztli* is not too similar to Western thought, and so it cannot simply be assimilated into it, and thought of as making no genuine contribution.

NOTES

1. This is not to suggest that *neltiliztli* is entirely incommensurable with Western philosophical frameworks. My claim is one of caution, and not the abandonment of intercultural philosophical dialogue. My caution is that scholars working with ideas from non-Western traditions ought to be aware of how they might be importing philosophical ideas when investigating such traditions. For more on this point, see Ofelia Schutte, "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Contexts," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 53–72.
2. It should be noted that Mignolo credits this thought to Robert Bernasconi.
3. Walter D. Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," *Philosophy Today* 43 (1999): 83.
4. Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 8.
5. Though, to be fair, León-Portilla probably should not be blamed too harshly for doing so, since his project in *Aztec Thought and Culture* was a difficult one: presenting Nahuatl thought as philosophy to an audience with a mostly, if not entirely, Western understanding of philosophy and truth.
6. What I mean by the phrase "unique semantic content" is that *neltiliztli* has a definite and determinate meaning in Nahuatl.
7. David L. Hall, "Just How Provincial Is Western Philosophy? 'Truth' in Comparative Context," *Social Epistemology* 15, no. 4 (2001): 285–97. Hall employs his strategy for the purpose of understanding whether and to what extent ancient Chinese philosophical traditions had a concept of truth, and in what ways this concept differs from or is similar to Western notions of truth (namely, the pragmatic notion of truth).
8. Again, Hall is analyzing ancient Chinese conceptions of truth. However, I think his argument is just as applicable to the Nahuatl concept of *neltiliztli*.

9. Hall, "Just How Provincial Is Western Philosophy?," 292.
10. This will be demonstrated in the forthcoming sections.
11. James Maffie, "Why Care About Nezahualcoyotl?: Veritism and Nahua Philosophy," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2002): 88.
12. Maffie, "Why Care about Nezahualcoyotl?," 87. See also Willard Gingerich, "Heidegger and the Aztecs: The Poetics of Knowing in Pre-Hispanic Nahuatl Poetry," in *Recovering the Third World: Essays on Native American Literature*, eds. B. Swann and A. Krupat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 85–112.
13. Gingerich, "Heidegger and the Aztecs," 104.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 102.
16. Maffie, "Why Care about Nezahualcoyotl?," 87.
17. James Maffie, "Aztec Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Section 2 ("Metaphysics"), Subsection a ("Teotl as Ultimate Reality and Root Metaphor"), <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/>, accessed March 20, 2013.
18. Ibid. See also James Maffie, "Why Care about Nezahualcoyotl?," 76.
19. Maffie, "Why Care about Nezahualcoyotl?," 77.
20. León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 8.
21. Maffie, "Aztec Philosophy," Section 4 ("Epistemology"), Subsection b ("Truth as Well-Rootedness-cum-Alethia").
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., Section 3 ("The Defining Problematic of Nahua Philosophy"), Subsection a ("How Can Humans Maintain their Balance on the Slippery Earth?").
25. Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 58.
26. Maffie, "Why Care about Nezahualcoyotl?," 85.
27. Where "x" is a person, concept, object, or way of life.

28. It is useful, also, to make note of the prevailing Western conception of truth: the correspondence theory of truth (CTT). There are vast differences between *neltiliztli* and the CTT which show that *neltiliztli* and the CTT are incommensurable. This supports the thesis that using the word "truth" for the purpose of understanding *neltiliztli* is unsatisfactory. The CTT is a semantic theory of truth (Alan R. White, *Truth* [London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1970], 102.). Accordingly, the only sorts of things that can be true under the CTT are propositions which our sentences express. According to the CTT, propositions are true if, and only if, they correspond to facts. Thus, for example, the proposition "Snow is white" is true if, and only if, snow is, in fact, white. So, to say that something is true is to say that it corresponds to some fact (Ibid.).

Contrary to the CTT, and as was mentioned in the foregoing, the Nahua thought persons, objects, ways of life, terms, or concepts can be "true" (I enclose the word 'truth' in double quotation marks ("")) to indicate that this word should not be taken as a feature of Nahuatl thought, as has been my argument all along) or *neltiliztli*. Thus, a person, object, way of life, term, or concept can be *neltiliztli*. This is in sharp contrast to the CTT in which propositions are the only things that can be true. In other words, the concept of *neltiliztli* is non-semantic, whereas the CTT is semantic. This difference can be highlighted by the definition I offered above, and by the definition of truth under the CTT:

Neltiliztli:

x is *neltiliztli* if, and only if, x is well-grounded or stable in the world, or *teotl*.

CTT:

x is true if, and only if, x corresponds to some fact.

The differences between *neltiliztli* and the CTT reveal that *neltiliztli* and the CTT are incommensurable concepts. I am operating with

Hilary Putnam's definition of the incommensurability thesis, according to which "terms used in another culture, say the term 'temperature' as used by a seventeenth-century scientist, cannot be equated in meaning or reference with any terms or expressions we possess. As Kuhn puts it, scientists with different paradigms inhabit 'different worlds'" (Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 114.) Given the wholly semantic character of the CTT and the non-semantic character of *nehtiliztli*, we see that these two concepts do not in any sense mean the same thing. Additionally, the conceptual frameworks operative behind both *nehtiliztli* (that is, well-grounded stability in *teotl*) and the CTT (that is, the correspondence of a proposition with a fact) are entirely different, and do not share the same meaning.

The incommensurability between the CTT and *nehtiliztli* shows that *nehtiliztli* is undoubtedly not too similar to Western thought. This effectively avoids the first disjunct of the double bind. As a corollary, then, we can claim that *nehtiliztli* cannot be assimilated into Western thought. And as a further corollary, we can avoid concluding that *nehtiliztli* is of little or no philosophical significance. Thus, based on this analysis, we can avoid the first disjunct of the double bind. It remains to be demonstrated, however, how our understanding of *nehtiliztli* can avoid the second disjunct of the colonial double bind. Although *nehtiliztli* is incommensurable with the CTT, I will argue that it is not incommensurable with James's pragmatic account of truth. Because this is so, we will see that *nehtiliztli* is not too foreign, or incommensurable, to Western thought, and therefore we are not obliged to call it into question as a genuine philosophical concept.

29. William James, *Pragmatism*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 92.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 94.

32. *Ibid.*, 93.

33. *Ibid.*, 103.

34. *Ibid.*, 101.

35. *Ibid.*

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