On the Relevance of Gloria Anzaldúa's Mestiza Rhetoric to the Study of Composition for G1 Students of Color

In terms of composition, I think teachers need to look at alternate models. I want my textbook—the writing, reading, speaking, dreaming book I've been talking about—to offer other ways of considering how to write a story, a poem, or a paper...I'm trying to present another way of ordering and composing, another rhetoric...

—Gloria Anzaldúa, Interviews/Entreintas, 2000

For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic...How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? —Barbara Christian "The Race for Theory," 1987

I. Introduction

Let me begin with a confession (or two). The inquiries here are inspired by my own inability to 'choose' between academic writing and non-academic writing and also by my own sense that my indoctrination through graduate study into academic discourse, my attempts to 'master' the academic essay, fundamentally transformed me as a writer and my relationship to writing. Thus the questions guiding this paper are: What are we asking of G1 Students of Color in writing courses designed to introduce them to academic writing? What does it mean for a student of color coming to the university with ways of knowing and communicating that knowing that are organic to their communities to become 'effective' academic writers? And is there an effect (cost) to this mastery? If in fact, as Berlin (1988) argues, rhetoric is always already ideological, and as writing teachers we are, consciously or not, teaching a version of reality, the best way of knowing and communicating that reality, and locating through our teaching, our "student's mode and operation within it" (1982, 257), then what are we asking students to do when we teach academic writing? The broader question of what is/is not academic discourse haunts this essay. Many of the sources I have selected for review grapple in one way or another with this and its correlating questions: What is academic discourse? And via Bartolomae (1996) if we know what it is how do we teach it? Moreover, given that, academic discourse is a discourse grounded in western epistemologies with specific histories of rhetorical colonization (Slevin 2001, Mignolo 2006), what are the limits and boundaries of academic discourse?

What holds this essay together, I hope, is a tension. What Hall called, in defining the work of cultural studies, a necessary tension (Morley and Chen, 271-272). When teaching academic writing to G1 Students of Color, if you don't feel the tension between the need to develop the academic writing and thinking skills essential to academic success and your knowledge of the effects, limits, and contradictions—the epistemic violence even—of Western rhetorical practices "then theory has left you off the hook" (Ibid.). Is it possible, in our teaching, to create writers who see this tension as a space of healing and possibility? Instead of interpreting this tension as a difficulty or lack, can we strive to develop a rhetorical sensitivity where this tension is precisely the interstice (as in space, gap, opening, borderlands, rajadura) that makes academic writing purposeful and exciting?¹ More broadly, using Gloria Anzaldúa's

¹ I dedicate this paper to Gloria Anzaldúa, for it is inspired and indebted to her brilliant theorizing on composition in Borderlands and beyond. In fact Borderlands was only the beginning.
mestiza rhetoric, can rhetorical difference provide a space for making transformative interventions in academia—for changing the nature of knowledge—for healing epistemologies?

In this essay I use the term G1 Students of Color to refer specifically to first-generation to college underrepresented students entering the research university. The term is derived from the concept 'people of color' that gained wide currency in the 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of Third World Feminism, Native American, African-African, Chicana/o, Asian American, and Ethnic Studies. G1 Students of Color then refers to students from ethnic groups in the Americas who have a shared history of colonization and subsequent processes of racialization. This specificity is important in my attempt here to think about the relevance of Anzaldúa's mestiza rhetoric to composition studies. ‘G1’ refers here to first-generation to college in contradistinction to similar terms where it is used in reference to immigration. While much of what I discuss in this essay is applicable to G1.5 Students, English Language Lerner (ELL) students, and English as a Second Language (ESL) students, the term G1 Students of Color enables me to bracket critical issues of language proficiency, bilingualism, and byculturalism beyond the scope of this essay and my expertise. The term also enables me to begin by disclosing the politics that inform my writing, to position myself, and author transparency is always helpful for the reader. And finally, as the section below will elaborate, another reason for using this term is that G1 Students of Color, with all its weightiness and its loaded history, forces us to—begin with, center, always have in mind, to reckon with even—the history of English composition as a cultural hegemonic project integral to conquest and colonization.

The Rhetorical Conquest of the Americas

"There is nothing innocent about it; education is, for nearly all students living within a structure of social and cultural inequity, symbolic violence"—James Slevin, 2001

The colonization of the Americas included an imposition of Western alphabetic writing, books, and systems of knowledge (Mignolo, 2006). When the Spaniards arrived in the New World they found highly developed societies with elaborate systems for recording and transmitting knowledge. The magnificence of the center of the Aztec empire, the city of Tenochtitlán, the elaborate códices were the tlacuilos (Aztec scribes) recorded important historical events, dates, and figures, as well as their laws, rituals, and ceremonies, all evidenced developed literacy. For the Spaniards, it was simply not possible to assume that the societies they encountered were illiterate and uncivilized because evidence against this was everywhere: In their elaborate forms of 'writing,' in the existence of the colmeca (Aztec university), in the stratification of society into elite/learned and masses/unlearned, in the complexity and efficiency of their irrigation and trade systems, in their advanced architecture and Mayan astrology. One of the first difficulties for the Spaniards then was to understand what they encountered. And it was in that process, in the Spaniard's attempt to explain what it was they were witnessing, if not writing and reading, when the tlacuilo and the tlamatini (wise men, philosopher) recorder and interpreted the codices that the rhetorical conquest of the Americas began. The Spaniards, unable to understand that writing and literacy did not have to be based on the alphabet and

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contained in books imposed a description of themselves as a universal frame for making sense of indigenous writing systems grounded in orality (Ibid.). Thus native literacies with systems for transmitting knowledge that used signs and symbols recorded by scribes which in turn were interpreted/translated by the tlamatini in the process of constructing knowledge/truth, were replaced by a European system of writing based on the alphabet and contained in books. The history of writing in the Americas is marked by this irreconcilable rhetorical difference, for the tlamatinime never understood the idea that knowledge/truth could be contained in a book, it was simply incomprehensible. Anzaldúa’s mestiza rhetoric centers this history and encourages writing from the 'conquest zone.' Her conception of nepantla, bridges (heals) this rhetorical aporia by reintroducing indigenous symbology in order to create hybrid theories based on Euro-American and indigenous knowledge bases. The mestiza writer, the nepantlera, in Anzaldúa's rhetoric is the one "who stands at the threshold of two or more worlds and negotiates the cracks between the worlds" in order to imagine alternative possibilities (Anzaldúa 2000, 268). She is the one who, in Ana Castillo's poem, asks the impossible, who makes, "the impossible a simple act" (Castillo 2000, 3).

In the poem It's the Poverty Cherrie Moraga writes, I lack imagination you say.

No. I lack language.

The language to clarify
my resistance to the literate.

Words are a war to me.
They threaten my family.

To gain the word to describe the loss,
I risk losing everything.

While Moraga in this poem is writing specifically about what it means for her, as a queer Chicana creative writer, to be intelligible and literate, her poem narrates the prevalent resistance and perceived risk in gaining the literacy required to "gain the word to describe the loss" of G1 Students of Color (Moraga, 62-62). Moraga's ambivalent relationship to literacy and awareness of the cost of making sense of her reality is common among G1 Students of Color as they come to academic writing, reading, and thinking. Jamaica Kincaid is another writer who, reflecting on her love-hate relationship to the English language, writes about what it means for a descendent of slaves to have only English language, the language of the slave traders to write about the slave trade, "For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what does this really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deeds..." (Kincaid, 94).

3 Mignolo's study (Chapter 2) includes a historic dialogue in the 1560s that took place in Mexico City at the Colegio Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco between native noble leaders, the society's learned men and twelve Franciscan friars who called the dialogue to explain to native leaders their mission and their role as agents of God. The dialogue is important here because it demonstrates that the question of reading, writing, books, and knowledge were at the foreground from the beginning of the colonization.
This ambivalence to the English language, literacy, and writing is in turn a manifestation of the symbolic violence of education quoted in the epigraph above and theorized by Slevin in *Introducing English: Essays on the Intellectual Work of Composition*.

Slevin writes about the introduction of English composition in the New World as a cultural hegemonic project in order to propose that the central role language played in that process matters (or should matter) to the field of Composition Studies today. Through analysis and interpretation of colonial narratives, Slevin charts a history of the introduction of education and in particular, English literacy in the early American colonies. The history of English education he presents "at the moment of introducing English in the New World" and the main theme of his study "introducing English" highlight the symbolic violence that characterized the educational project in the New World. And it was not just English that was introduced in the New World, not just European or English culture, it was "a whole range of things to be known and powers to be developed and manners to be observed that accompany learning to read and write" (Slevin, 67-9). Significantly, Slevin’s history of education continues to influence the way students are introduced to English, for "English" remains a figure of speech, a way to talk about the "wide range of cultural values and knowledge that one is assumed to learn in the academy" (Ibid.). Slevin discusses the symbolic violence of colonization and the specific role of education—indeed, the introduction of English—through a focus on narratives about Pocahontas, the discourses that enabled and reinforced colonization, in that violent process. In the colonial narratives, Pocahontas, Slevin notes, became not a subject, but an object, a commodity, a symbol reifying colonization. It is central to the point of Slevin's study, that Pocahontas, a woman of color is the first "Virginian" to learn English, for this reminds us that the education of people of color is not incidental to the history of American education, but integral to it from the beginning (Ibid.).

Slevin addresses one of my guiding questions, what are we asking G1 Students of Color to do when we ask them to become effective academic writers? when he turns his attention to an interrogation of genres in order to propose a 'poetics of composition.' His attempt to develop a comprehensive theory of genre is grounded in the work of Bourdieu: Slevin adds a consideration of academic genres to Bourdieu's analysis about the role of schooling in the reproduction of social inequity. More specifically, Slevin incorporates Bourdieu's ideas about the role of education in maintaining the status quo, the relationship between cultural reproduction and social reproduction and what pedagogical action [PAs] this entails. The exigency in this chapter is a critical examination, acknowledgement, reckoning (even) with how we as writing teachers are complicitly reproducing educational inequality by requiring our students to conform and write in academic genres. A 'poetics of composition' according to Slevin makes Bourdieu's "analysis specific in relation to the availability of the genetic repertoire valued by (within) the academy" (Ibid., 167). Slevin's method here is to explore the operation of genre in schooling through a case study of a student paper and his attempt to provide feedback, to respond to a colleague's call for *what to do?* Slevin guides us through his reading, his attempt to, as he puts it, find the logic in the student paper (he searches for the logic or difficulty in this piece primarily via Shaughnessy). Through this exercise Slevin is enacting his proposed interpretive pedagogy, modeling for the reader in a detailed manner the way of teaching academic writing he is proposing. In the end, after some clarification; noting the differences between descriptive and interpretive phrases and the paper's major claims vs the reasons for believing those claims, some reorganization and word omission, Slevin presents us with an academically acceptable revised version of the student paper. As Slevin presents us with the revised student paper, he emphasizes
that his aim is to find or read for the logic in the student's paper, to "muster the intelligence of his interpretative work so that it can transform into the kind of writing most commonly valued in formal schooling" (Ibid., 175-76). What Slevin is attempting to do through this example is demonstrate how a writing teacher can guide a student—using revisions—through a process that maintains the intelligence in their writing, the logic, but reworks it to fit academic genres acceptable in the academy. For Slevin nothing is fundamentally changed or lost in this revision process, there is nothing of consequence that was not in the original (Ibid.). And here are my concerns with Slevin: How does Slevin know this is true? How does he know that his revisions did not in fact fundamentally change the logic or intelligence in the student's paper? Moreover, in his search, his attempt to find the logic or intelligence in the student paper, could Slevin in fact miss it? In other words, what if the logic in the original student piece is precisely in its organizational structure, not only in the use of the I and the inclusion of the writer in the piece (which Slevin correctly addresses) but at the level of paragraph and sentence structure? Maybe the intelligence of the original piece is precisely in the way it negates the distinction between interpretive and descriptive, in its refusal to differentiate between his major claims and the reasons for believing them? Slevin, in my view is heading in the right direction, almost there, yet he does not go far enough. Although he has read and understands via Heath and others, that students bring organic knowledge, funds of knowledge from their communities, homes, cultures, and that these knowledges should be incorporated into academia, that in fact, the writing teacher's work is to guide students in this process, he is asking teachers essentially to help students translate this knowledge, groom it so that it becomes acceptable academic writing. He questions academic genres and calls for us to think about textual difficulty not as a lack, but as "a difference operating within coherent structures of signification" (Ibid., 180). Essentially he proposes the need to teach students to transcend their difference in order to write in acceptable academic genres. Yet is this going far enough? What I am interested in developing through Anzaldúa's mestiza rhetoric is a transformative poetics of composition that asks how alternative/organic knowledge can be brought into academia as a way to question and ultimately transform what counts as academic writing and knowledge.

Re/Writing Reality: Gloria Anzaldúa's Mestiza Rhetoric

the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it—Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues," 1983

A rhetoric cannot escape the ideological question, and to ignore this is to fail our responsibilities as teachers and as citizens—James Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology," 1988

When Gloria Anzaldúa passed to the next world in May of 2004, she was in the middle of a seven-chapter book about the writing process, rhetoric, and composition. While she had many other writing projects after the publication and success of Borderlands/La Frontera, the book gestating in her, or as she would say, the book she was empregnadá with, was to be the sequel to Borderlands. In her interview with Andrea Lunsford in 1996, Anzaldúa talked about this next book: “I have about four different chapters of notes and rough drafts that have to do with the writing process, with rhetoric and composition…So it’s my composition theme, “compostura.” In fact it's the title of one of my chapters.” Later in the interview she returns to this book when

4 Pregnant
asked about her teaching of composition, “I want my textbook—the writing, reading, speaking, dreaming book I’ve been talking about—to offer other ways of considering how to write a story, a poem, or a paper.” While we do not have Anzaldúa’s sequel to Borderlands her theory of composition and mestiza rhetoric is woven throughout her published and unpublished writings. For Anzaldúa the composition process and her theory of composition were intertwined with her ideas about how one creates and recreates one's identity, consciousness, and reality. The word she used to describe her composition theme was 'compostura' (Ibid.). In Mexicana culture the word 'compostura' refers to the process of seaming together fragments to make something to wear and for Anzaldúa the process of pulling together fragments to create a new piece of writing, a new identity, a new consciousness and reality were interconnected. What follows then, is my attempt to begin to piece together Anzaldúa’s mestiza rhetoric by discussing its distinguishing features though their relevance and resonances to the study of composition for G1 Students of Color.

One of the questions guiding this essay is: Can rhetorical difference provide a space for making transformative interventions in academia? The broader question here is of course, what is our goal in teaching students to become effective academic writers? Is our goal, as Bartholomae suggests, teaching students to become master assemblers, to master their discipline and successfully participate in the "reproduction of disciplinary boundaries and disciplinary authority" (Bartholomae 1996, 328-9)? Very rarely, do composition teachers, professors within the disciplines, or anyone in the academy for that matter, talk about the secret secrets of the institution: The focus on producing mastery, on respecting, reifying, and too often policing disciplinary boundaries. Given the university's imperative, it is impossible for us to accept, praise, or see the growth in the disorderly, less skillful, less masterful student paper (Ibid., 327-342). Bartholomae prompts us to ask: How do our unquestioned expectations of what constitutes "good" writing reify traditional disciplines? And indirectly he is asking: What should the writing teacher's charge be? Do we want our students to "appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse"? (Bartholomae 2003, 624). In posing these questions and in proposing a 'practical criticism,' Bartholomae is calling for teaching students critical thinking skills through their writing and revisions. He wants students to call discourse into question, to historicize the conversations they are engaging in and position themselves within their writing and in the conversations as writing subjects: "we can imagine that the goal of writing instruction might be to teach an act of criticism that would enable a writer to interrogate his or her own text in relationship to the problems of writing and the problems of disciplinary knowledge" (Bartholomae 1996, 332-3). Like Bartholomae, Bizzell also argues for the possibility of teaching academic discourse in a way that encourages critical consciousness, to create in Bartholomae's words, "writing that negates the disciplines, their limits and possibilities" (Bartholomae 1996, 331). In an application of Freire's liberatory theory of education Bizzell proposes that academic discourse can be liberatory. Bizzell argues that this is possible because knowledge is not merely


6 Included in Appendix A is a list of her published writing. Her archives containing much of her unpublished work, including drafts of chapters for this book are housed in Special Collections at the University of Texas at Austin, Benson Library. Index available on line at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00189/lac-00189p1.html#series3
communicated but constituted in academic discourse. In academic discourse, the disciplines are not static depositories of truth, but contested discursive sites that require the constant reflection and evaluation of new ideas to challenge consensus. Academic discourse then should be taught for what it is, discourse, with critical attention to disciplinary paradigms and how they define thesis formation, what counts as knowledge (as well as what is outside of knowledge), how problems/issues are formulated and what the discipline considers reliable evidence (Bizzell 1992, 129-152).

The potential of all discourse, including academic discourse, to encourage critical consciousness is a central tenet in mestiza rhetoric. One of the primary aims of writing in mestiza rhetoric is to make transformative interventions that change the nature of knowledge—particularly dominant ideologies responsible for the symbolic and epistemic violence of G1 Students of Color. "Writing is about freeing yourself up, about giving yourself the means to be active, to take agency, to make changes," says Anzaldúa.7 As in Berlin's socio-epistemic rhetoric there is a keen awareness "that in studying rhetoric—the ways discourse is generated—we are studying the ways in which knowledge comes into existence" (Berlin 1988, 731). Anzaldúa discusses the difficult predicament of the mestiza writer caught between using and being used by dominant discursive practices when she asks, "How does an internal postcolonial writer rewrite the dominant ideology from within to produce a different conocimiento of different versions of reality? She can’t. But I’d like to think that a community of writers can."8 In mestiza rhetoric, the concept of conocimiento is the heuristic used to interrogate how reality is constructed and the ways it is constructed. Yet Anzaldúa’s analysis of the metarhetorical realm of epistemology differs from Berlin’s in that mestiza rhetoric not only centers the wounds of these processes but more importantly, calls for writing from them. Anzaldúa elaborates this use of conocimiento in discussing her experience asking academics at a queer conference to look at white privilege, "I was calling for conocimientos, a kind of looking at the ways they construct reality, the ways they construct knowledge, and in particular how those ways of constructing knowledge and reality violate other people’s knowledges and sense of reality."9

Re/Writing Reality

In Anzaldúa's mestiza rhetoric the composition process is interconnected with the process of creating one's identity, consciousness, and reality. The overarching paradigm that captures this interconnectivity and attempts to flesh out10 their entwinement is conocimineto. In an interview with Blake and Abrejo Anzaldúa described her use of cultural terms such as conocimiento as rhetorical strategies that enable shifting out of victimized/pressed frameworks toward the construction of knowledge that liberates, transforms and empowers the writing

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7 Lundsford interview, 265.
8 Lundsford interview, 273.
As defined by Anzaldúa the Spanish meaning of the word *conocimiento* is knowledge, or skill, yet its origin is the Latin word *cognoscere*, meaning to know. Importantly the way Anzaldúa uses *conocimiento* it is not only a word for knowledge, or a way to define knowledge gained, but also, "that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained" (Anzaldúa 2002, 577). As a frame of intelligibility *conocimiento* enabled Anzaldúa to elaborate her perpetual interest in the relationship between knowledge production and power: "Another thrust of my writing is to look at who constructs knowledges, realities, and information and how they control people’s identities through that construction. What’s the relationship between knowledge and power, between conocimiento and power? How do they create subjectivities? Not only in people like us, but in institutions, like institutions of higher learning, public schools, the media."  

Significantly, Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* refuses to accepted traditional knowledge hierarchies and instead elevates spirituality to the level of dominant forms of knowledge based on science and rationality. *Conocimiento* then is a "form of spiritual inquiry," that is reached via creative acts, including the act of writing, of theorizing. Traditional divisions between creative writing and academic/theoretical writing are blurred for the mestiza writer who can confront the traits and habits distorting how she sees reality and inhibiting the full use of her facultades. 13 "When I think conocimiento," says Anzaldúa, "I see a little serpent for counter-knowledge. This is how it comes to me that this knowledge, this “counter-knowledge,” is not acceptable, that it’s the knowledge of the serpent of the Garden of Eden." 14 *Conocimiento* then questions reason and rationality, the conventional categories, classifications, and contents while centering spirituality as a legitimate form of knowledge. In one of her last published essays, "now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work/public acts" Anzaldúa charts the path of *conocimiento*. There are seven stages of conocimiento: 1. el arrebato...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning—one can be put or can catapult into this stage by illness, violent attack, death, depression, betrayal, systematic racism/sexist, natural disaster or any other traumatic event; 2. nepantla...torn between ways—the in-between space, it is a liminal transitional space where you are suspended between realities, ways of knowing, you are two people; 3. the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing—this is a dark space, when you are overwhelmed, full of despair, hopeless, when dominant ideologies can do the most violence to you; 4. the call...el compromiso...the crossing, and conversion—you break free from the Coatlicue state and reconnect with spirit, with you life's work, your compromio; 5. putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective "stories"—you dismantle your old stories and compose a new history and a new self, you rewrite your autohistoria,15 the story that informs you of who you are; 6. the blow-up ... a clash of realities—you take your new story out in the world to test it, you risk confrontation, disappointment, being misunderstood or not heard at all; 7. shifting realities...acting out the vision of spiritual activism—this is the space of transformation, where "you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by

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11 Blake and Abrejo interview.
12 Blake and Abrejo interview, 216.
13 Here I am paraphrasing from Anzaldúa 2002, 541.
14 Lundsford interview, X.
15 Your autographical theory, "story" of who you are
forming holistic alliances. You include these practices in your daily life, act on your vision—enacting spiritual activism" (Anzaldúa 2002, 545).

Anzaldúa's theory of composition, her mestiza rhetoric, is defined in the way her path of conocimiento essay articulates the relationship between writing, reality, and consciousness. In mestiza rhetoric the path of conocimiento requires shifting consciousness, and in shifting consciousness you are shifting reality; as in "you can recreate reality." What is enacted in the essay is a process that is not only mediated through the composition/writing process—it is the composition process. Anzaldúa's use of 're-writing reality' in an essay by that title also invokes the fact that the shift in consciousness and transformation of reality is mediated through language and more specifically through the writing or 'compostura/composition process (Anzaldúa 2002). Like Berlin's social-epistemic rhetoric, Anzaldúa's mestiza rhetoric is self-consciously ideological. In fact, Anzaldúa would surely agree with Berlin that in teaching writing "we are teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it" (Berlin 1982, 257). What become clear as I re-read Borderlands, her essays, and interviews in my attempt to piece together her mestiza rhetoric is the rhetoric's transformative purpose within and without (as in inner work...public acts). Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say that the raison d'être of Anzaldúa's mestiza rhetoric is precisely the awareness that, in learning writing you are learning a version a reality, the best way of knowing and communicating that reality as well as your place within it. And it is because mestiza rhetoric understands that rhetoric is always already ideological, that it defines the limits of "what is possible and impossible" that its exigency is precisely transgressing the limits of expectation (Berlin, 1988, 720).

Finally, Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento, is not chronological or linear, in fact the seven stages are present in each stage, one can go through all seven stages in one day or stay in one or in-between stages for months, yet the stage that mediates between all others and occurs most of often is nepantla: "the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes, where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it" (Anzaldúa 2002, 545-6 and 548-9).

**Nepantla**

Many of Anzaldúa's concepts about composition came under the heading of nepantla. Anzaldúa often used indigenous, specifically Aztec, words, mythology, and pre-columbian cultural figures in order to give a language to the ideas that came from her indigenous background. She did this because consciously including concepts that gave voice to the indigenous in her enabled her to construct hybrid theories grounded in both Euro-American and indigenous knowledge bases. Thus her concept of nepantla is an Aztec word used to describe the space in between, the middle ground, the meeting of two things. As a writer who inhabited a "liminal state between worlds, between realities, systems of knowledge, between symbology systems" the concept of nepantla served as a paradigm to: "theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual,

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16 Lundsford interview, 270.
17 Here I am paraphrasing from Berlin, "Contemporary Composition," 256.
historical, creative, imagined" (Ibid., 268). While nepantla is similar to Anzaldúa’s conception of borderlands, the notion of nepantla signals a shift in Anzaldúa’s post-Borderlands theorizing to an increased emphasis on spirituality and attending to the imaginal. When asked about her use of nepantla she said that the concept allowed her "to expand on the psychic and emotional borderlands...With nepantla the connection to the spirit world is more pronounced as is the connection to the world after death, the psychic spaces. It has a more spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous resonance" (Anzaldúa 2000, 176).

In composition studies a notion that resonates with Anzaldúa’s nepantla is Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of the contact zone. In "Arts of the Contact Zone" Pratt defines contact zones as "Social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, 1991, 33). Pratt offers contact zones as an alternative way to consider models of community (as in Anderson's imagined community) used in teaching and theorizing. It is a response to the call by an increasingly diverse student body to not only be in the institution but also belong in it. Using the contact zone model Pratt suggests that universities offer courses that function like a contact zone in that texts read stand in specific historical relationship to students in the class. While a much more difficult way to teach, Pratt shows how organizing courses using this model allowed all students space in the curriculum and put each student's assumptions and identities on the line. One of the first scholars in composition studies to heed Pratt's call for developing the pedagogical arts of the contact zone was Patricia Bizzell (Ibid., 40).

Bizzell first introduced the notion of 'contact zones' to composition studies in the early 1990s, in the midst of heated debates about multiculturalism and the English canon. In “Contact Zones and English Studies” Bizzell questioned innovative attempts to include multicultural literature in ways that, she argued, leave the structure of English studies intact. Her critique called for new systems, new ways to organize English Studies that come from the new material English Studies was attempting to incorporate. In response to her question "how are we to develop a new system of organizing from the new materials of study?" Bizzell introduces Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" (Bizzell 1996, 482-85). As Bizzell proposed it, the 'contact zone' concept in English studies enabled an understanding of the United States as a site of struggle, or a congeries of overlapping contact zones from the time of the first migrations to the present age of multiculturalism. The advantage of this new way of thinking within English studies was that contact zone scholarship and teaching acknowledged differences from the start and made it possible to consider race, class, gender, and sexuality not as essentialized categories to be held separately, but as factors within a historically defined contested site of struggle.

Bizzell argued that using this model enabled material from different points of view, histories, and life ways to be put in conversation with each other, enabling students to appreciate the richness in multiculturalism.

In addition to redrawing the boundaries of English studies by suggesting a new method for incorporating more diverse literature, Bizzell proposes that the concept can be useful in the classroom. The practical pedagogical advantage of the 'contact zone' model as Bizzell proposed it allows for fully integrating composition and rhetoric into the curriculum since "studying texts as they respond to contact zone conditions is studying them rhetorically" (Ibid.). Students learn how to write by learning how to read texts in the contact zone, by analyzing rhetorical strategies they both enter literary analysis and learn to refine their own writing (Ibid., 485). Following Pratt, Bizzell proposes that contact zone pedagogy enables students to "negotiate difference" by
studying how various writers working in various genres have participated in a contested discursive field marked by pervasive difference. Pedagogically, the goal of the 'contact zone' model Bizzell proposes is to teach students how to read a variety of literacy texts rhetorically, to become sensitized to rhetorical strategies and to ultimately, through imitation, refine their own writing (Ibid.).

Bizzell's notion of the 'contact zone,' and working in the zone has since then become a euphemism for those in composition studies whose interest is thinking through how to teaching writing to an increasingly diverse student population. Slevin for example writes about "Encountering the Pedagogy of the Contact Zone" in his autobiographical narrative about his failed early attempts to teach composition in the contact zone (Slevin 2001, 21-2). Most relevant to my discussion is the use of 'contact zones' to try to explain what students bring to the university and more specifically to the writing class, as in Rose's call for thinking about what we are asking students to accomplish and what happens when unequal or contrasting epistemologies meet (Rose 1989). Slevin, uses the notion of 'contact zone' to write about what happens when unequal paradigms of critical practice meet. He began teaching with assumptions about the university as a site of initiation, where students were his apprentices. In preparation for his teaching he had elaborated lectures with "truly brilliant questions" requiring equally brilliant responses. Yet he soon finds that the training he had received, his teaching, failed him because "it (I) was unable to clarify, elaborate, and support the possibilities of their ways of thinking" (Slevin 2001, 21).

I hope to have persuaded you that mestiza rhetoric and nepantla are useful paradigms to continue discussions about teaching in the 'contact zone.' The concept of nepantla, in particular, shifts discussion beyond 'contact' (as in first-meeting zone) to an awareness and critical examination of how one teaches and learns in an increasingly diverse and fragmented world. While in the last four decades the challenges posed by multiculturalism and its responses focused on issues of inclusion/exclusion of heretofore excluded people and their texts, discussions about institutional diversity will increasingly focus on and question prevailing assumptions about the nature, production, and organization of knowledge. These are kinds of discussions that those of us teaching in the 'nepantla zone' need to have with our students and need to prepare our students to have beyond our classroom if we are truly committed to social and institutional transformation. Nepantla, writes Anzaldúa, “operates in the cracks between the worlds, in the liminal spaces. It navigates the razor edge of this raja dura, always teetering, about to fall on the side of the overly ordered or on the side of the bacchanalian chaos, always attempting to join the two in a seamless web…Nepantla averigua el conflicto. It provides associations and connective tissue” (Anzaldúa 1999, 252-53). The question is how do we translate mestiza rhetoric and nepantla into meaningful and transformative pedagogical practices; practices that, in Slevin's words, clarify, elaborate, and support the possibilities of our student's ways of thinking?
Bibliography

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Appendix A

Published Writings by Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa
Compiled by AnaLouise Keating

Books


Edited Books

this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation. New York: Routledge, 2002. (Co-edited with AnaLouise Keating)

Essays

“now let us shift....the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts.” this bridge we call home:


Fiction/Autohistorias*


Course Reflection

There are so many things I could talk about and would talk about if my brain wasn’t mush. I thoroughly enjoyed the course. Even in times of disagreement, and there were difficult moments, I thought that everyone was trying to be respectful and to really hear what the other person was saying, or that we were trying hard to hear the other person’s perspective, listening for the other person’s understanding of the issue/article etc. This is rare in group discussions, especially ones on the larger side as this was. I thought you did a fantastic job pushing us—or perhaps ‘pulling us’ though is a more accurate metaphor—to make sure we were going as far as we could in our individual processing and our collective effort to struggle with the issue/s at hand or penetrate the reading. It is rare also to have a space with as much diversity in terms of the composition of the group (bodies) and their stance (ideologies) remain a safe space.

Some of the key things I take from this course are: The teaching of writing and learning to write has historically been and continues to be segregated, it occupies a difficult or problematic place within the institutions; Institutions can and often do replicate social marginalization (the more extreme would say they continue the colonization, cultural genocide etc); one of the greatest challenges for the university is how to teach writing to students who are increasingly multilingual/multicultural; another challenge, especially during these times of economic crisis is how to teach writing to a student population that may be increasingly “underprepared;” Despite all of these difficult scenarios, there is much hope. There are many people like Lothlorien, on a mission to teach their heart out in the community colleges—probably one of the most challenging places to teach writing. And within composition studies there are also discussions taking place that have real potential for changing not only how we teach writing but our whole approach to the mission of the university, namely the production and dissemination of knowledge. Thank you for a wonderful experience.

Best

Yolanda