

Dear workshoppers,

Thank you for taking the time to read and discuss my work. What follows is still a rough draft of the first chapter of my dissertation, provisionally titled *Anational Poetics*. In brief, by anational I mean an approach to an order of ideas, images, and concepts whose construction and inner logics are independent of the socio-historical ubiquity of the nation. Mainly relying on two concepts, Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature and James C. Scott's hidden transcripts, I am elaborating the anational as a hermeneutics allowing us to read against the backdrop of the nation in order to trace and constellate alternative accounts of collectivities as formulated by minority poetics and poetics.

The chapter I am workshopping analyzes the work of Gloria Anzaldúa through the lens of the nation form. In relation to the anational, a lot of the work I do in this chapter is still preparatory—I begin to sketch the concept only towards the end of the chapter. I apologize for the length of the document, yet it is important for me that I workshop the entire thing so that I can assess whether the chapter-format is actually working well and conveying what I intend. If you're pressed for time, you can read the intro and first section only.

I would like to receive all feedback you're willing to provide; yet more specifically I would like to hear your thoughts on the coherence and legibility of the theory employed and on the pertinence and persuasiveness of the structure as prefatory to the anational.

Looking forward to discussing this with you.

Thanks,
Geronimo

Introduction: Anzaldúa and the Nation Form

In 2002, Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating edited and published *this bridge called my back*, a compilation of essays revisiting the 1981 anthology of writings by women of color *This Bridge We Call Home*, in turn edited by Cherríe Moraga and Anzaldúa.

Expanding on the first anthology, *this bridge called my back* nonetheless argued in favor of a shift in direction. As Anzaldúa puts it in her preface, “Twenty-one years ago we struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference.”¹ Likewise, in the essay that closes the volume, “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts,” Anzaldúa readdresses this recognition of commonality in terms of her own experience phrased in the second person: “With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings—*somos todos un paíz*.”² It is these last words in Spanish which best index the tensions that I want to trace in Anzaldúa’s thought. The sentence manages to capitalize on the previous descriptions of an absolute inclusiveness—the aforementioned recognition of commonality turned radical—through an epigrammatic reformulation that even switches languages in the process.³

Simultaneously, however, the sentence posits that the frame of inclusion is that of ‘*paíz*,’ of

¹ Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (eds.), *this bridge called my back: radical visions for transformation* (London: Routledge 2002), 5.

² *Ibid.* p. 558.

³ The language shift also entails a register shift, moving from a standard English to what becomes an irregular Spanish in the grammatical variation of the spelling of the word *país*. I will address this and other linguistic variations below.

country, a term that appears to summon the theoretical and historical connotations of the nation—without the two being exactly identical. In a sort of disjointed identity, ‘country’ and ‘nation’ chart the stakes of my analytical investment in Anzaldúa’s writings: although the semantic fields of the two words predominantly overlap to the point that their connotations are understood as synonymous, there are areas in which each term’s specific denotations and histories diverge from the other—a divergence that differentiates the predominance of temporal from spatial tropes. While the etymology of ‘nation,’ from *nasci*, to be born, refers to a condition attained at birth and traces a blood-line which makes it emphatically temporal, ‘country’ develops on rather spatial tropes from the preposition *contra*, specifying the land ‘in front of’ someone or something or ‘against’ another land.

Put differently, the synonymous-yet-disjointed identity of these two terms describes a Venn diagram with almost overlapping areas. Keeping this figure in mind, I am interested in the presence of the nation and its different inflections in Anzaldúa’s writings: in how she conjures “the unity and interdependence of all beings” while inflecting the idea of a nation by shaping this totality in the form of a conceptually synonymous-yet-disjointed country.

In the following pages I read Anzaldúa through the optic of the nation form in order to acknowledge her active role in its reproduction *within* and *for* the US. As a preliminary exposition, by nation form I refer to a set of historical and geographical configurations deployed with the purpose of subsuming a specific collectivity under the logic of the nation state. An instance of such a deployment would in fact be the understanding of “the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings” as comprising a nation—which, again, is not exactly Anzaldúa’s claim. With the figure of a synonymous-yet-disjointed identity I can

offer a departing premise which posits that Anzaldúa's reproduction of the nation form is a dominant presence in her writings (the area of overlap) that is nonetheless contiguous with emergent and residual forms of non-identity (the areas of divergence). This hypothesis states that a reappraisal of Anzaldúa's politics in the context of the nation state exhibits an anational potential that can only be gleaned against the dominant presence of the nation form. As I will argue in the following, within the extensive repertoire of tropes that Anzaldúa deploys to weave her poetics, the dominant presence of the nation form can be most notably gleaned through her use of the idea of *mestizaje* in its reliance on *Coatlicue*; on the other hand, the concept of *nepantla* provides the most insightful source for an understanding of anational projections in her work.

Along with my readings of Anzaldúa I will revisit some of the critical studies of her work over the last decades to both locate them historically and point out how these readings have skirted considerations of the nation form. This relates to my contention that some of the political claims contained in and made about Anzaldúa's writings should be reoriented and updated in order to pay heed to the historical transformations that undergird her thought. To begin with, I address the relationship between Anzaldúa's work and its historical context as one constrained by multiculturalism and deconstruction; part of this historical revision hinges on an understanding of multiculturalism and deconstruction as structural to the US nation during the last decades of the twentieth century. Following Catherine Malabou, I employ the term structural in reference to a particular conceptualization that excises it from structuralism and its afterlife as an a priori

or original ground, and instead stresses “an a posteriori structure, a *residue of history*.”⁴ From the vantage point of this retrospective orientation, in the first section of this chapter I analyze the interaction of multiculturalism and deconstruction in Anzaldúa’s writings in order to gauge the dominant presence of the nation form. I take this initial section as attempting to turn Anzaldúa’s work and criticism towards an engagement with the complexities that multiculturalism poses in what Elizabeth Povinelli has termed the cunning of recognition: “we need to understand better the cunning of recognition; its intercalation of the politics of culture with the culture of capital. We need to puzzle over a simple question: What is the nation recognizing, capital commodifying, and the court trying to save from the breach of history when difference is recognized?”⁵ In this sense, and keeping in mind Anzaldúa’s emphasis of recognition both of difference and commonality in *this bridge called my back*, I read recognition as the counterpart to the nation form’s resilience and expandability.

Building on the historical contextualization of the first chapter, in the second section I juxtapose Anzaldúa’s seminal 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera* with Michael Taussig’s concurrent anthropological studies on the nation state’s general economy in order to describe the specific national mechanics operative within Anzaldúa’s writings; in particular, this chapter focuses on the dominant presence of the nation by close reading Anzaldúa’s embodiment of a mestiza identity. Taussig’s analysis, furthermore, affords a model to approach the formal divergences from the nation that Anzaldúa’s later work

⁴ Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the dusk of writing: dialectic, destruction, deconstruction*, tr. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University, 2010), 51.

⁵ Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham: Duke University, 2002), 17.

displays. In the third section of the chapter I take up the Marxist notion of formal subsumption in order to develop a hermeneutics of anational poetics. By analyzing the historical provenance of *nepantla*, I argue in favor of interpreting this concept as a both residual *and* emergent form that provides instances of anational projections beyond the nation form. With anational poetics as a hermeneutics, moreover, I elaborate a different interpretation of Anzaldúa's commitment to a radical recognition of sameness, where sameness extends beyond the nation form and multiculturalism.

Cunning Multiculturalism's Form

In terms of criticism on Anzaldúa's work, AnaLouise Keating offers a fitting place to start, since she collaborated closely with Anzaldúa and has written profusely on her. In a 2008 essay titled "'I'm a citizen of the universe': Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as catalyst for social change," Keating argues in favor of Anzaldúa's coupling of spiritual life and political activism as a strategy that allows moving beyond identity politics and "the binary-oppositional frameworks we generally use in identity formation and social change."⁶ To begin with, Keating's title borrows a sentence by Anzaldúa that could be read as the complement to "—somos todos un país": in this case she affirms participation within a totality, the universe, and gives this membership of the whole the form of citizenship, the form of belongingness to the nation state. Although Keating does not offer a close reading of this fragment, I want to keep it in the background while I address her claims about

⁶ AnaLouise Keating, "'I'm a citizen of the universe': Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as catalyst for social change," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1/2, The Chicana Studies Issue (Spring-Summer, 2008), p. 60.

spiritual activism. Through a compelling call for a keener and more open academic reception of Anzaldúa's spirituality (which I heed in the second section of this chapter), Keating claims that spiritual activism tends to be ignored because it couples together seemingly contradictory terms: "Although the word 'spiritual' implies an other-worldly, inward-looking perspective that invites escape from and at times even denial of social injustices, the word 'activism' implies outward-directed interaction with the material world—the very world that spirituality seems to deny or downplay."⁷ It is telling how this coupling of the inner and outer, beyond the suggestion of contradiction, resembles Benedict Anderson's seminal description of the nation as an imagined community: an entity conformed both of a structural element—the community as an outer configuration—and a symbolic or spiritual counterpart—the imagination as an inner counterpart. In other words, or in keeping with the aforementioned background, Anzaldúa's spiritual activism emulates the dynamics of national belongingness as an inner set of configurations in accordance to an outer state of affairs. It is by noting such similarities that I intend to both approach the ways in which Anzaldúa reproduces the nation form, but also the ways in which these formal gestures remain beyond the purview of previous criticism.

Keating contends that spiritual activism, through such a coordination of interiority and exteriority, affords the capacity to go beyond normative binaries, to the point of collapsing the distinction between inside and outside: "'inner' and 'outer' are so intimately interrelated and interwoven as to occur simultaneously; each depends on, influences, and shapes the other."⁸ Similarly, in *Women Reading Women Writing*, Keating credits Anzaldúa

⁷ Ibid. pp. 53-4.

⁸ Ibid. p. 59.

with inventing what she describes “as mestizaje écriture, nonsymmetrical oppositional writing tactics that simultaneously deconstruct, reassemble, and transcend phallogentric categories of thought.” Both of Keating’s assertions, therefore, rely on the assumption that such deconstructive “oppositional forms of resistance can subvert culture from within.”⁹ In this sense Keating’s claims rehearse a recurrent argumentative line about Anzaldúa’s writing which employs conceptualizations akin to deconstruction both to classify and to gauge the political impact of her claims. This argumentative line partly emerges from Anzaldúa’s own deconstructive leanings which manifest throughout the several tropes she deployed to illustrate her ideas.

For example, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s 1987 autobiographical treatise on the emerging consciousness of the new mestiza, she explains how life in the frontier that separates the US and Mexico has produced a fragmented and conflicted identity: “I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*”¹⁰ Despite the neutralization of self that arises from internalizing the borderlands, Anzaldúa’s identity still unfolds through its own instability and she embraces it as such: “But even when I am not, I am.” Both in its acknowledgment of a self-destructive tendency and in its bilingual unfolding, Anzaldúa’s self-definition exhibits similarities to Derrida’s understanding of deconstruction. As Malabou points out, for Derrida “deconstruction is *what happens*; [...] deconstruction speaks *plus d’une langue*,” that is, “both more than a

⁹ AnnaLouise Keating, *Women Reading Women Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 122.

¹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lutte, 1987), 85.

language and no more of a language.”¹¹ Anzaldúa’s own account of her language resonates with a deconstructive situation of *plus d’une langue*, a situation Derrida elsewhere terms the monolingualism of the other. In order to unfold this concept we can follow, for example, Anzaldúa’s description of the linguistic practices of Chicanas/os:

We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. [...] And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

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*)¹²

In the binding constraint of communication and secrecy, of difference and commonality, Anzaldúa’s account of a Chicana/o language traces a branching out of myriad inflections that depart from the intertwined admixtures of English and Spanish. The linguistic position that the Chicana/o subject adopts seems to entail constant movement and/or a permanent multiplicity. Such a condition brings to mind the tenets of monolingualism posed by Derrida: “1. *We only ever speak one language.* 2. *We never speak one language.*”¹³ Besides the descriptive aim of portraying Chicana/o culture, Anzaldúa’s intention appears to point towards the tearing apart of a notion of unity, of a standardized Chicana/o language obeying a homogeneous collectivity. The latter comes across in the political strategizing

¹¹ Malabou, 20.

¹² Anzaldúa (1987), 77.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*, tr. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University, 1998), 7.

that a “secret language” entails, as if dispelling not only the homogeneity of Chicanas/os, but also, correspondingly, the nation’s as the framework that contains them.

In Derrida’s words, this monolingual perception is one that offers “*uniqueness without unity*” and qualifies the terms in which one possesses a language, as in, for example, the language *of* Chicanos: “The *of* signifies not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, *the* coming of the other.”¹⁴ Monolingualism charts difference by allowing the recognition of the multiple points of provenance of language—in doing so, monolingualism tears the veil of homogeneity. This tearing has important repercussions for the nation form.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the critical reception of Anzaldúa emphasized her stance on and experience of a heterogeneous identity stemming from the edges of the nation state; she offered a singular case of analysis for critics invested in fleshing out the dominant politics of US normativity. Monolingualism, embedded in deconstruction, usually provided a theoretical perspective that coupled Anzaldúa’s identity with the disruptive potential that was attributed to her language. For example José David Saldívar’s interpretation of Anzaldúa’s work reads her linguistic practices along with her autobiographical theory as a disruption of the relations of power in the US: “Anzaldúa’s *autohistoriateoría* grounds her late twentieth century work in the differential vernacular serpent’s tongue, a catechistic subalternist tongue which is capable of cracking, fracturing, and braiding the very authority of the master’s English-only tongue.”¹⁵ Saldívar’s

¹⁴ Ibid. 60.

¹⁵ José David Saldívar, “Unsettling race, coloniality, and caste: Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/la frontera*, Martínez’s *Parrot in the oven*, and Roy’s *The God of small things*,” *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Issue 2/3 (March, 2007), 353.

investment in Anzaldúa's writings takes her catechistic language as evidence of conflict and dissensus against a normative status quo. To think of catachresis as a strategic inflection of national languages allows to construe misnaming and language abuse (considering the etymology of catachresis) as divergent enunciations that supplement and saturate the nation's self-understanding. In this account, Anzaldúa's writings deploy monolingualism as a disruptive excess beyond the self-definition of the nation state. "Such a [monolingual] remainder," Derrida claims in a passage that pertains to Anzaldúa's case, "permits one at once to analyze the historical phenomena of appropriation and to treat them politically by avoiding, above all, the reconstitution of what these phantasms managed to motivate: 'nationalist' aggressions (which are always more or less 'naturalists') or monoculturalist homo-hegemony."¹⁶

At this point a historical revision is pertinent, which, following the cue of Derrida's mention of a monoculturalist homo-hegemony and the historical phenomena of appropriation, can allow us to posit a series of thoughts along the lines of the deconstruction of the nation. This historical revision attends to Anzaldúa's monolingualism in order to flesh out what it is exactly amid this cracking, fracturing, and braiding—as Saldívar puts it—that escapes national reconstitution. We can contemplate the possibility that Anzaldúa's monolingualism does not have the disruptive impact she and Saldívar envisioned when we consider that, due to the resilience and expandability of the nation form, monolingualism might not appear as a remainder, but as readily available for reification. Because Anzaldúa's writings unfold parallel to multiculturalism's recognition

¹⁶ Derrida, 64.

process, we can consider that by seemingly providing the national setting for their appearance, the multicultural US already anticipates the political impact of her work. Amid the different outcomes that Anzaldúa's cracking, fracturing, and braiding yield, I will contrast mestizaje and nepantla as opposed instances of, on the one hand, national reification and appropriation and on the other, unincorporated national remainders.

In this context, it might prove illustrative to consider the figure of the Aztec deity Coatlicue as mobilized in Anzaldúa's work. Partly detached from the actual Aztec story of Coatlicue, the goddess who gave birth to the moon and the stars, Anzaldúa's use of the term acquires a psychological and emotional connotation; in her later writings she would refer to the "Coatlicue state" as an "an intensely negative channel," preceding a conciliatory stage, wherein "you're caged in a private hell; you feel angry, fearful, hopeless, and depressed, blaming yourself as inadequate."¹⁷ Chela Sandoval goes as far as positing a synonymous apposition when she refers to "deconstruction, or coatlicue" as a step in a methodology of political action.¹⁸ In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, however, we find a less developed account of Coatlicue, wherein Anzaldúa exalts the concept's omnivorous and assimilative properties: "We need *Coatlicue* to slow us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes. [...] *Coatlicue da luz a todo y a todo devora. Ella es el monstruo que se tragó todos los seres vivientes y los astros, es el monstruo que se traga al sol cada tarde y le da luz cada mañana.*"¹⁹ *Coatlicue* is a rupture in our everyday

¹⁷ Anzaldúa (2002), 569.

¹⁸ Chela Sandoval, "AfterBridge: Technologies of Crossing," in *this bridge called my back: radical visions for transformation*, ed. by Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (London: Routledge 2002), 24.

¹⁹ "Coatlicue gives birth to everything and everything devours. She is the monster that swallowed all living beings and celestial bodies she is the monster that swallows the sun every evening and gives birth every morning."

world. [...] Coatlicue depicts the contradictory.”²⁰ The set of ideas attributed to Coatlicue oscillate between repetition and difference, between the normalcy of daily change (earth’s rotation around the sun) and the encounter with contradictory difference. In order to elucidate the overlap between Coatlicue and multiculturalism in this passage it’s important to note the function of assimilation and devouring. Within the homogeneous nation, this oscillation can frame the incorporation of difference as an attempt to manage, or normalize, the *depicted* contradiction of heterogeneity. Perhaps an even more emphatic point about this conceptual resonance between Coatlicue and multiculturalism relates to the moment of recognition through visual perception. “Seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she.” Anzaldúa writes, “These seemingly contradictory aspects—the act of being seen, held immobilized by a glance, and ‘seeing through’ an experience—are symbolized by the underground aspects [...] of what I call the *Coatlicue* state.”²¹ That is, the figure of Coatlicue exhibits an assimilative drive already hinted by the appropriation of this Aztec figure, a drive that, in its embrace of contradiction, anticipates any monolingual remainder. As a normalizing management under the guise of the recognition of difference, Coatlicue’s assimilation and devouring emulate and illuminate the multicultural nation like a structure constitutive of another structure. Hearing the resonances of multiculturalism in the Coatlicue state, elsewhere defined as “a prelude to crossing,”²² serves to qualify our reception and understanding of the stage that follows after it: the new consciousness of the new mestiza.

²⁰ Anzaldúa (1987), 68-9.

²¹ Ibid, 64.

²² Ibid, 70.

Since hindsight permits, as I commented above, to discern a multicultural structure as historical residue, my intention is to offer a model of the structure of the nation that follows Malabou's understanding of the structure of philosophy, which "does not therefore refer to a paradigm, model, or invariable; rather, it describes the result of the destruction and deconstruction of the paradigm, model, or invariable in general." The aim of such an account is to gauge the transformations that the nation underwent when the homogeneous nation encountered (recognized) difference (monolingualism). Put differently, I want to read these historical changes through an analytic lens that substitutes Malabou's object, philosophy, with the nation state:

By "structure of philosophy," I mean the form of philosophy after its destruction and deconstruction. This means that structure is not a starting point here but rather an outcome. Structure is the order and organization of philosophy once the concepts of order and organization have themselves been deconstructed.²³

What I propose, then, is to read multiculturalism, in the present, through the 'structure of the nation' where 'structure' describes the destruction and deconstruction of the nation state conceived as grounded on a homogeneous ethnicity.

Malabou argues that the two negative motions of destruction and deconstruction are caught in a dialectic interplay that conforms a triad. This triad puts in dialogue Hegel's and Derrida's philosophies: "Clearly the dialectic has not disappeared. Rather, the fact is that dialectic, destruction, and deconstruction circulate continuously, moving in and out of one another, continuing to transform each other today just as they always have."²⁴ This continuous circulation provides a map to chart the assimilative drive of Coatlicue, where

²³ Malabou, 51.

²⁴ Ibid, 5.

devouring, as a sublimation of sorts, allows to enunciate “the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings” in the totality of a country. Malabou’s emphasis on a hermeneutics sensitive to the plasticity of form, to the dialectic interaction of destruction and deconstruction, permits a reckoning with the historical moment of multicultural recognition as both the destruction of the sublimated (homogeneous) nation state and its permanence as the deconstructed (multicultural) nation state.

In the case of the US, this homogeneous conception of the nation refers to a long-standing dominant ideology that imposed a melting-pot model; within this model, difference is perpetually assimilated into uniformity through a system of sublimation. The recognition of difference that inaugurates the stage of US multiculturalism, disrupts the melting-pot model as it reveals the plasticity of the nation’s structure. The nation form, in this sense, appears as “a form that is the fruit of the self-regulation of the relation between tradition and its superceding and which at the same time exceeds the strict binary terms of this relation.”²⁵ This self-regulation is what I have in mind when I observe that US multiculturalism and Anzaldúa’s inflections of the nation anticipate each other, which is an observation reliant on the mediating figure of Coatlicue as assimilation.

In other words, I want to consider the historical moment of the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a landmark in the context of the evolution of the US nation state during its multicultural period. Already in 1992, the Chicago Cultural Studies Group commented how “multiculturalism [was] proving to be fluid enough to describe very different styles of cultural relations, and [how] corporate multiculturalism [was] proving

²⁵ Ibid, 52.

that the concept need not have any critical content.”²⁶ So even though multiculturalism describes manifold and even contradictory ideas and phenomena, I want to focus on how it facilitates the incorporation of collectivities within the nation state’s purview. Following Etienne Balibar’s theorization of neo-racism as a differential racism that assumes culture as both second nature and the site of difference, I will now briefly articulate a theoretical framework where multiculturalism performs what Balibar termed the delayed nationalization of society: the process by which a nation-state continually integrates alien populations.²⁷ By analyzing this process, we can read Anzaldúa’s borderland theorizations, and in specific her mestiza identity, in a different light that turns away from deconstruction in order to emphasize form and plasticity.

In the US, multiculturalism followed decades after a supposedly anti-racism agenda that was adopted in the aftermath of World War II (‘supposedly’ because it still favored a melting-pot ideology). In tandem, this agenda posited racial inequality as a problem along with an anti-racist stance that morally justified a US claim to global leadership. For Jodi Melamed, this anti-racism agenda, which she terms racial liberalism, was a suture to “US nationalism, itself bearing the agency for transnational capitalism.”²⁸ In an attempt to keep in sight this national-capitalist agency, Melamed identifies the multiculturalist turn following the civil rights period as a neoliberal multiculturalism: “Like racial liberalism, contemporary neoliberal multiculturalism sutures official antiracism to state policy in a

²⁶ Chicago Cultural Studies Group, “Critical Multiculturalism,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring, 1992), 532.

²⁷ Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 92.

²⁸ Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism,” *Social text*, 24, no. 4 (2006), 2.

manner that prevents the calling into question of global capitalism.”²⁹ In this sense, the civil rights compromise—which was legislatively enacted by the Civil Rights Act of 1964—both outlawed racial discrimination *and* provided a narrative of racial inclusion that fueled the legitimation of US global hegemony during the cold war era.

Keeping in mind Melamed’s emphasis on suturing as a strategy to expand and perpetuate capitalism, I want to consider Chandan Reddy’s analysis of official amendments to the constitution. Focusing on the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act signed by Barack Obama, Reddy delves into the nature of the relationship between the amendment and the nation by analyzing how “the amendment seeks (as does US immigration policy after US wars abroad) to incorporate through its universal terms (of freedom from racist, sexist, sectarian, and homophobic violence) the heterogeneous histories and practices at its origin.”³⁰ The essential function of the amendment describes the conferred capacity for the amended entity—i.e., the nation—to perpetuate itself: “If amendments belatedly modify and authorize the prior textual body, it is because only through their frames can the body continue to figure as meaningful—indeed, to persist. This suggests that amendments as frames conserve and reactivate the force of their textual bodies, even while displacing the origins of that force and restructuring its appearance, through the bestowal of meaning upon the original body.”³¹ In other words, amendments provide the capacity to reshape the nation form while conserving its prior identity, its historical continuity as the US nation state.

²⁹ Ibid, 16.

³⁰ Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with violence: Race, sexuality, and the US state*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 15.

³¹ Ibid.

Both suturing and amending allow the conceptualization of multiculturalism's historical changes in terms of form—as perhaps the legislative counterparts of resilience and expandability. Which is to reassert that multiculturalism functions as cognate with the nation form. In this sense Balibar's concept of the delayed nationalization of society, the process by which a nation nationalizes its people, addresses an essential function of the nation form: the reconfiguration of the nation's constant becoming—through sutures and amendments—as its being.³² In connection with his conceptualization of neo-racism, Balibar argues that “in the history of every modern nation, wherever the argument can apply, there is never more than one single founding revolutionary event.”³³ To assume this in the case of the US allows a perspectival tilt that repositions the civil rights movement as the imperative revolutionary event for the multicultural US nation state, continually renegotiating its own terms of inclusion through an extended civil rights compromise. Such a historical repositioning accounts for the theoretical description of monoculturalist homo-hegemony's encounter with deconstruction qua difference.

Yet Melamed's and Reddy's concepts permit an understanding of these formal changes from a top-down perspective where the focus rests on the legislative implementations performed by the state and how they act on the whole nation. Parallel to these, I want to consider how the incorporated collectivities perceive this nationalization process. In Anzaldúa's case, for example, incorporation entails embracing a specific identity in relation to a specific peoplehood:

³² This is a formulation I borrow from Harry Harutoonian and that he applies to capitalism; more on his work below.

³³ Balibar, 87.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers united and *I am Joaquín* was published and *la Raza Unida* party was formed in Texas. With this recognition we became a distinct people. [...] Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.³⁴

Anzaldúa's case shows how along with the newly embraced identification a particular temporalization is enacted: the acquisition of an identity impinges upon the present by informing a history that aligns a past ("what we were, how we had evolved") with a future ("who we might eventually become"). Such an alignment frames this history within a specific form suitable to the nation's, where a fiction of origin pulls together the nation in empty time. It entails a temporal conceptualization of the nation form which proceeds by eschewing history and producing a homogeneous narrative of progress. With regards to the reconfiguration of the nation's constant becoming as its being, this process exhibits how the nation state generates and updates its myth(s) of origin as it simultaneously conceals the violence of how it comes to produce the peoplehood(s) that comprise it. Such an account of peoplehood partly responds to what Balibar terms a fictive ethnicity, a "community instituted by the nation-state."

As Laura Elisa Perez notes, the disruption of the national identity as homogeneous opened an array of different fictive nations, one of which were Chicana/os, who chose Aztlán as their origin myth:

Aztlán came into being during the United States' first massive national identity crisis, the 1960s, when visible sectors of the population refused to continue imagining, that is, producing the nation as usual. Unlike nations born and

³⁴ Anzaldúa (1987), 85.

operative through discourses of “order and progress,” the Chicana/o motto remains “disorder and progress.”³⁵

Revealingly, the Chicana/o motto also serves as the *modus operandi* of the rising multicultural nation: “disorder and progress” describe the various fictive ethnicities emerging with the nation state’s recognition and offering alternative ways to imagine the nation—yet they crucially retain the same temporal orientation towards progress, which implies a teleological alignment with an imagined past. Disorder marks an opening to a heterogeneity that is nonetheless reared in the form of the nation.³⁶

Therefore we can note that, although certainly inflected by her deconstructive practices, Anzaldúa’s historization of her collective identity bears the imprint of the nation form. Most importantly, the “mestiza” part of her “new mestiza” identity is particularly informed by a nationalist historiography that rehearses an appropriative narrative of the past, regardless of the deconstructive function that the neologism might play. Dating the concept back to the conquest, Anzaldúa explains: “*En 1521 nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before.”³⁷ Yet, if a mestiza identity provides a link with an indigenous past, it is nonetheless a past produced by the nation, by a sense of Mexicaneity. From the outset, in her opening paragraph on Chicano/a history, she projects a conception of the Mexican nation as

³⁵ Laura Elisa Perez, “*El desorden, Nationalism, and Chicano/a Aesthetics*” in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. by C Kaplan, N Alarcón, and M Moallem, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 20.

³⁶ Perhaps the best fitting interpretation of this disorder is formulated by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s idea of Empire, which “is characterized by a fluidity of form—an ebb and flow of formation and deformation, generation and degeneration.” Empire entails the passage into a society of control with “a production of subjectivity that is not fixed in identity but hybrid and modulating.” (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 220, 331).

³⁷ Anzaldúa (1987), 27.

timeless over the territory it currently occupies; for example, she asserts that “At the beginning of the 16th century, the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico and, with the help of tribes that the Aztecs had subjugated, conquered it.” In Anzaldúa’s account, Mexico is a nation that predates the historical process of its own becoming. Even going further to a moment before the Spanish arrival, Anzaldúa nationalizes the native populations that occupied the territory now belonging to Mexico: “Before the Conquest, there were twenty-five million Indian people in Mexico and the Yucatán.”³⁸

Beyond the formal implications of these and other nationalizing tropes as ground-laying for Anzaldúa’s understanding of the new mestiza, there is a specific politics that reproduces not only the nation form but state violence on both sides of the border. Anzaldúa’s deployment of mestizaje as an attempt to come to terms with the historical violence of the conquest’s genocides resonates with the negativity that she assigned to Coatlicue as a precursor to reconciliation, but also, inevitably, to multicultural recognition and national assimilation. This tendency to appropriate an indigenous heritage as resting strictly in the past—a heritage from cultures erased by the nation’s coming to be—is intrinsic to how mestizaje was reformulated during the twentieth-century as the paradigm of Mexican citizenship.³⁹ The history of mestizaje reveals how it has been mobilized in tandem with the complementing idea of indigenismo in order to posit a citizenship identity that subsumes the indigenous element as part of a shared past; as Josefina Saldaña-Portillo

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cf., Rebecca Earle’s *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810–1930*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

states, “the Indian dissolves into the formulaically more progressive mestizo.”⁴⁰ Mestizaje’s interior logic is one of exclusion wherein national identity performs a displacement of existing indigenous communities by defining them as belonging to the past, as a hindrance to the nation’s progress. There is, then, a certain phantasmagoria intrinsic to the deployment of mestizaje as an identity; which is to say that the invocation of an indigenous heritage at once materializes the spirit of the nation’s past, its fictive dead, at the expense of displacing the presently living. In an insightful passage that evokes the cunning of multiculturalism, Saldaña-Portillo notes how Anzaldúa imitates the official policies that the ruling Mexican party (PRI) had put in place to reproduce the nation form:

What Anzaldúa does not recognize is that her very focus on the Aztec female deities is, in fact, an effect of the PRI’s statist policies to resuscitate, through state-funded documentation, this particular, defunct Mexican Indian culture and history to the exclusion of dozens of living indigenous cultures.⁴¹

An important clarification needs to be made with regards to this and other critiques of Anzaldúa in that they correspondingly fail to recognize that Anzaldúa was not a social scientist, but primarily a poet and thinker drawn to different and variegated subjects. How Anzaldúa unconsciously incorporates governmental policies which were reared towards the implementation of a unified Mexican citizenry speaks both to the nation form’s capacity to reproduce itself and to her historical juncture in the borderlands as one where deconstruction and US multiculturalism meet. Deconstruction, on the one hand, provides the chaotic drive of life in the borderlands, where “keeping intact one’s shifting and

⁴⁰ Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “Who’s the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón” in *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. by Sonia Saldívar-Hull, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 407.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 416.

multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an ‘alien’ element.”⁴² Yet, in relation to the nation and against Anzaldúa and Keating’s reading, the potential disruption of such an identity grounded on its own undoing pertains to an anterior moment, a pre-civil rights moment. A moment based on a melting-pot ideology, not to the multicultural phase of formal resilience which outlives its deconstruction. After all, for Anzaldúa, this alien element she inhabits “has become familiar—never comfortable [...] but home.” Correspondingly, such a reading practice allows us to see how Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* lives its own deconstruction through and in multiculturalism. Anzaldúa argued, in the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera* that

The actual physical borderland that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middles and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.⁴³

This passage maps the geographically localized borderlands at the edge of the nation state’s jurisprudence; but the passage also connects these specific borderlands with a conceptual-yet-physical borderlands—“wherever two or more cultures edge each other”—which provides the general locus of multiculturalism. Anzaldúa’s preface allows us to grasp the way in which multiculturalism’s general state of affairs is connected with the nation state’s jurisprudential edges, that is, with the nation form’s dynamics.

In the following paragraphs, I will retrace Anzaldúa’s path from the geographical specificity of the US-Mexico borderlands to the internalized nation-wide borderlands in

⁴² Anzaldúa (1987), 18.

⁴³ Ibid.

order to analyze how, as a dominant presence, the nation form works through her texts by reiterating the nation's spatiotemporality. By paying heed to the anthropological work of Michael Taussig, I will argue that Anzaldúa's position in the US-Mexico border functions as a gateway for the delayed nationalization of society that informs the multicultural mode of the nation. Instead of the permeability that a transnational form might offer, I argue that resilience and expandability mark multiculturalism as a strengthening of the nation form.

The Borderlands and Mimesis

In relation to the boundaries of the US, the figural and geographic site of Anzaldúa's writings has been read and located differently through the history of their reception. Already in the twenty-first century, for example, Shelley Fisher Fishkin argued in favor of a transnational perspective in her Presidential Address to the American Studies Association by taking Anzaldúa as the paradigm of the transnational voice. Quoting a passage from *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Fishkin predicts that practitioners in the field will have to attend to perspectives like Anzaldúa's situated beyond the nation state's border: "we will probably make more of an effort to seek out the view from *el otro lado*."⁴⁴ On the opposite end of the spectrum, and both in response and opposition to Fishkin's reading, Debra A. Castillo contends that "Anzaldúa is irremediably an iconic United States figure, not a transnational one."⁴⁵ Lastly, I want to juxtapose a third view from Anzaldúa herself, which argues against

⁴⁴ Fishkin's quotation from Anzaldúa, which is a common idiom in Spanish, translates as "the other side." Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005), 23.

⁴⁵Debra A. Castillo, "Anzaldúa and Transnational American Studies," *PMLA* 121, no. 1 (2006), 263.

locating her work beyond the border, i.e., in Mexico, or within the US itself, by claiming a different status wherein she belongs to no nation: “As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out;”⁴⁶ once again choosing the term ‘country’ in its synonymous-yet-disjointed identity with ‘nation,’ Anzaldúa claims an expelled condition of interstitial detachment. In the following, I analyze how this equivocality regarding Anzaldúa’s position has enabled a specific multicultural resilience that in the long run reasserts the nation form. My reading is in agreement with Castillo’s rejection of a transnational status, yet it also attempts to dwell in the implications of Anzaldúa’s country-less self-description in relation to the nation form.

As I have argued, for Anzaldúa, her Chicana identity was one with a historically forged language that responded to a geographical and historical position: “A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.”⁴⁷ As she claims elsewhere, language for Anzaldúa manifests her borderlands location, straddling Mexico and the US as she weaves Spanish and English. However, partly pushing back against Anzaldúa’s claims, I want to read her use of Spanglish as a braiding of two languages in order to analyze how it relies on an imbalance between English and Spanish. This imbalance can be initially perceived in *Borderlands/La Frontera* as the editorial decision to render all the Spanish fragments in italics, thereby distinguishing them from English—if

⁴⁶ Anzaldúa (1987), 102. The passage continues: “yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

not subordinating them to English. The effect of such italicization is intertwined with the overall grammatical irregularity of her use of Spanish. Returning to the first passage I quoted, the word ‘paíz,’ for example, provides an instance of this irregularity in its divergence from the standard Spanish word ‘país’—which provides yet another sense in which her chosen inflection stranges its synonymous identity with ‘nation.’ As opposed to her almost impeccable thread of standard English, the Spanish thread that Anzaldúa incorporates to her weave is characterized by errancy and irregularity.

The point is that Anzaldúa’s Spanglish displays a specific set of dynamics where her use of English would tend towards perfect normativity were it not for the presence of an italicized Spanish which is, in turn, irregular; in other words, language in Anzaldúa exhibits a general border interaction wherein English performs as the official standardized counterpart to an irregular and extra-official Spanish. After all, Anzaldúa was the first to defend her irregular Spanglish against policing on both sides of the border but especially against the normativization of her Chicana Spanish: “Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia*.⁴⁸ [...] Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.”⁴⁹ An insightful set of correlations is offered with this rectification of the status of Chicana/o Spanish: Anzaldúa insinuates that the force of a living language may appear as incorrect with regards to the existing grammar rules, but it is actually the case that the current rules are no longer suitable for the living language.

⁴⁸ “They want to put locks on our mouths.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-7.

In a scaled down perspective, this interplay of linguistic flow and grammar regularization adumbrates the cycles of a general economy quintessential to the nation state: Anzaldúa's defence of a living language calls attention to the transformation of the extra-official into the official, the passage of the irregular or corrupt into the sphere of its standardization as the normative. This transformation lies at the core of the symbolic power of the nation state, fueling forth its cohesive imagination of a community and reinstating the sovereignty of the state. Michael Taussig's analysis of these mystifications of stately being proves helpful here, especially with regards to the interplay of the "Official, and Extra-Official. You can never have one without the other. The point here is neither descriptive nor moralistic concerning corruption. The point here is the need to uphold law so that corruption can occur."⁵⁰ In this sense, Anzaldúa's linguistic ambitions serve to reveal a general movement of the extra-official into the framework of the nation state—which is instantiated, at this historical juncture, by multiculturalism. In continual oscillation, the interdependence and exchange between the extra-official and the official amplifies the nation form to the extent that it encompasses its official façade, standard English in this case, along with its extra-official obverse, irregular Chicana/o Spanish. Even more to the point, the dialectical drive of "the need to uphold law so that corruption can happen" affords the nation form a specific resilience and expansion in its extra-official guise, which are then coupled with normalization and stability with its official counterpart. Perez's aforementioned Chicano motto, disorder and progress, also captures this interplay,

⁵⁰ Michael Taussig, *The Magic of The State*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 58.

as disorder describes the extra-official irruption that is shaped and assimilated into the nation state's official purview as progress.

The passage from the extra-official into the official can be formulated and localized as a place of transfiguration and embodiment, where the extra-official sheds its prefix by acquiring an image or body recognized within the context of the official. In short, this is a symbolically liminal topos (akin to Anzaldúa's internalized borderlands) which Taussig connects to the magic of the state and articulates as both gateway and shrine brought together under the semantic umbrella of a portal:

For the newcomer whose unaccustomed ear discerns the freshness of metaphor, providing through the juxtaposition of images the entrance to a new world, the *portal* itself was more than an apt metaphor joining *gateway* to *shrine*. It was beyond perfection, the image, indeed the metaphor, of metaphor itself, no less than its stunning literalization—a wondrous metaphor-machine designed to set the scene of spirit passing into body, possession as embodiment activating images made precious by death and stately remembrance.⁵¹

To read such a metaphor-machine of embodiment in Anzaldúa serves to glean how the cluster of tropes, symbols, characters, and deities that she summons throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera* becomes embodied in her living presence and that of Chicanas/os. In a gesture concomitant with the nation form, the act of historical appropriation is fused with the act of embodiment, as Anzaldúa claims that her poetic artifice belongs to a time “Before the Conquest”: “In the ethno-poetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. [...] The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller

⁵¹ Ibid, 35.

and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a *nahual*, a shaman.”⁵²

It is at this point that I follow AnaLouise Keating’s call for a keener understanding of Anzaldúa’s spiritualism through the phantasmagoria of *mestizaje*: as shape-changer and *nahual*, storyteller and shaman, Chicana/*mestiza* and Indian, Anzaldúa appropriates and reincarnates a past made available and shaped by the nation. While the contradictory embrace of these figures (e.g., *mestiza and Indian*) already foreshadows *nepantla* and the central theme of the next section, here I want to dwell on how embodiment entails the materialization of Coatlicue, La Llorona, La Malíntzin, of Olmecs, Aztecs, Mayans—all dead spirits gathered in the historiography of the Mexican nation state—as they return to life through Anzaldúa’s language. We can observe, following Taussig, how death in *mestizaje*’s alter-stately remembrance, in its commemoration of dead indigenous populations, is transfigured through the intercalation of metaphor and presence into a living Chicana identity. “I think of them as performances and not as inert and ‘dead’ objects” Anzaldúa comments on her writings, “the work has an identity; it is a ‘who’ or a ‘what’ and contains the presence of persons, that is, incarnations of gods, or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers.”⁵³ Through the figural interplay of incarnation and identity, resuscitation and appropriation, at once the portal displays the movement that incorporates collectivities into the nation—the officialization of Chicano identity—as it excludes others—namely *mestizaje*’s occlusion of contemporary indigenous collectivities.

⁵² Anzaldúa (1987), 88.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 89.

This process unfolds in the borderlands as a site of transfiguration, a site that confers the shaman with the capacity to drive the passage of the extra-official identity into the purview of the US nation state. Yet, if transfiguration requires the embodiment of difference—i.e., Anzaldúa embodying another nation’s stately dead—transfiguration also requires the embodiment of sameness. Borderlands’ transfiguration, in other words, is hinged upon the *mimetic* capacity to bridge alterity and sameness, to translate the extra-official into the official. For Taussig, such a focus on the frontier in relation to the formation of a national identity is crucial for the scrutiny of the interplay between sameness and alterity with regards to mimesis:

Pulling you this way and that, mimesis plays this trick of dancing between the very same and the very different. An impossible but necessary, indeed an everyday affair, mimesis registers both sameness and difference, of being like, and of being Other. Creating stability from this instability is no small task, yet all identity formation is engaged in this habitually bracing activity in which the issue is not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity.⁵⁴

Mimesis involves a careful management of the national symbolic economy; while it entails the embodiment of difference through the adoption of a set of extra-official conceptualizations—*mestizaje*’s phantasmagoria, in this instance—it also entails the incorporation of the living body into the symbolic economy—the nationalization of the Chicana/o body. It is a mutual adaptation.

On this account, let me address an instance of how Anzaldúa instantiates sameness with the US. However, it is first necessary to note Anzaldúa’s position on the portal itself, straddling not two nations but the US’s extra-official and official counterparts by

⁵⁴ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and alterity: A particular history of the senses*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 129.

embodying the passage from one to the other. It is thus that Anzaldúa's borderlands subordinate transnational exchange to the circuit of national symbolism. By this I mean that Anzaldúa's interaction with Mexico develops through a conspicuous exchange of symbolic goods that partakes of the sameness necessary for mimesis. Even though she imports and repurposes a mestiza identity, she detaches it from its historical purpose within Mexico as a symbol of progress by offering a flattened and retrograde portrayal of Mexico. Aware of the complicity of US transnational capitalism in Mexico's situation, Anzaldúa provides numerical data about its population: "One-fourth of all Mexicans work at *maquiladoras*;" and "Half of the Mexican people are unemployed."⁵⁵ Recalling the fact that Anzaldúa is not a social scientist, I want to stress the fictionality of these claims, because beyond the implausibility of such a portrayal of Mexico's economy, these claims provide the setting for a US identification of sameness. In their remoteness from reality, Anzaldúa's description reasserts a national symbolic economy that requires such quasi-racial fictions to categorically separate the US from Mexico.

These observations, while serving to reject Fisher Fishkin's reading of Anzaldúa as a transnational voice, reproduce a nationalist narrative that counterposes the progress Anzaldúa embodies as a new mestiza against the stagnancy of a nation that does not progress. Along these lines, Anzaldúa deprecates the influence of the US on Mexico on both politico-economic terms, but also on an essentializing and fictional projection of a national way of life: "The infusion of the values of the white culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture, is changing the Mexican way of life."⁵⁶ The latter offers illustrates how

⁵⁵ Anzaldúa (1987), 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

Anzaldúa partakes of the interplay of sameness and alterity that allows her to embody difference while reproducing certain narratives of sameness with regards to Mexico. There is a tendency akin to the exclusionary logic of *mestizaje*'s phantasmagoria inherent to this fiction of Mexico: by its own account, as the Mexican way of life vanishes south of the border, Chicanas/os (as new *mestizas/os*) now embody this repertoire of past cultures. This is what I mean by a conspicuous exchange of symbolic goods where the actual transnational flow is subsumed under the regulation of the frontier and the fueling of the general economy of the nation.

Such a mimetic management recalls Balibar's concept of the delayed nationalization of people. Mimesis carries out the balancing of alterity and sameness in accordance with a fictive ethnicity already present in the extra-official imaginary, thus already recognized or in the process of recognition by the nation state.⁵⁷ In Taussig's words, "Mimesis sutures the real to the really made up—and no society exists otherwise."⁵⁸ The living body and living language, donning the tropes and fictions of the stately dead, enact this mimetic performance as it reshapes and perpetuates the nation state. Mimesis as shape-shifting affords the resilience of sutures and amendments to the nation form at the individual level. That is, mimesis enacts the delayed nationalization of people.

In order to fully describe the resilience and expandability conferred upon the nation form by Anzaldúa's mimetic performance, I want to offer a characterization of her role within this structure as that of a customs agent regulating the flow of symbolic goods; a

⁵⁷ Anzaldúa refers to this extra-official presence when she reports that "The oldest evidence of humankind in the U.S.—the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors—was found in Texas and has been dated to 35000 B.C." (Ibid, 26)

⁵⁸ Taussig (1993), 86.

customs agent that is simultaneously a shaman partaking of the transfigural potential of the borderlands, here understood in the sense of a portal powering the general economy of the nation state. Her linguistic practices provide the cue to an embodiment of identity that binds race and self: “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.”⁵⁹ The latter registers the importance of embodiment in the mediation of the official and extra-official for the nation state. As Taussig notes, this “is where death, mediating the spirit of the state with the body of the people, meets its toughest task without which there would be no language; the task of giving life to the coming and going of figuration itself.”⁶⁰ To conclude this section, I want to offer a singular passage of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where Anzaldúa’s customs agent/shaman role can be observed more persuasively. This section finds Anzaldúa invoking the US constitution to legitimate her Spanglish: “Attacks on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment.”⁶¹ Assuming her position as straddling the official and extra-official, Anzaldúa fully embraces her role in the nation’s symbolic economy by mediating the legitimization of her Chicano/a language. Furthermore, such juridical abiding expounds “the need to uphold law so that corruption can occur,” as it incorporates Chicanas/os under the nation state’s juridical framework.

⁵⁹ Anzaldúa (1987), 81.

⁶⁰ Taussig (1997), 103.

⁶¹ Anzaldúa (1987), 76.

Anational Projections: Nepantla and Formal Subsumption

In this section I will analyze Anzaldúa's interaction with the multicultural nation form by focusing on the formal affordances at play in social relations of dominance. Caroline Levine, departing from a conception of form as "transhistorical, portable, and abstract, on the one hand, and material, situated, and political, on the other,"⁶² defines affordances as the capacity of formal attributes to be shared, repeated or adapted. Affordances describe form's capacity to migrate from one historical, geographical, or scalar context to another. Put in words more specific to this context, affordances reveal formal permanence across time and space, and across abstraction and concreteness—much in the way Anzaldúa's adoption of *mestizaje* does, were we to consider the form of the concept.

The *mestizo* label emerged in the New Spain as part of a racial taxonomy instituted by the dominant class whose purpose was to hierarchize the colonial population. Since the notion was part of a system deployed to favor the colonizers at the expense of indigenous populations, the idea of *mestizos/as* already displayed a form that would be adopted during the twentieth century to promulgate a miscegenated national identity embracing an indigenous past at the expense of an indigenous present. *Mestizaje's* form, as enabling specific spatiotemporal perceptions of colonial society, exhibits a catalogue of its different uses, including Anzaldúa's, which allows us to see its transhistorical migration.

By keeping formal affordances in mind, I want to consider the morphology of national suture and amendment from a different perspective. More specifically, and recalling the interaction between capitalism and the multicultural nation state that

⁶² Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 11.

Melamed stresses, an emphasis in affordances reveals the historical exchange and adoption of different forms as they effectively provide *or fail to provide* sutures and amendments.

The theoretical link I want to propose here states that the distinction between the felicitous affordance of a supplement and the infelicitous one is a distinction which can be translated to Marxist terms as the distinction between real subsumption and formal subsumption. For Marx, subsumption described capitalism's expansive movement as it incorporated historical practices belonging to other modes of production. Real subsumption defined a successful incorporation of an activity whose productivity had been fully assimilated into a capitalist logic; in this sense real subsumption entails the felicitous adoption of an alien form or affordance already assimilated as a suture. On the other hand, formal subsumption defines an ongoing process where the alien element hasn't been fully digested into capitalism's logic—which would correlate to the infelicitous incorporation of a formal affordance, a still-rejected transplant.

Let me elaborate further through Harry Harootunian's work; Harootunian argues, by noting the similarities between the nation form and the commodity form, that the nation "served as capital's factotum"⁶³ in naturalizing capitalism's dynamics. Yet, Harootunian continues with a significant caveat, the nation state did not always succeed in this endeavor. Formal subsumption stands as evidence of the nation form's failure to metabolize alien activities within capitalism. In other words, formal subsumption captures and retains processes of incorporation which in turn entail different historical moments pointing to different temporalities beyond the nation's and capitalism's empty time. Formal

⁶³ Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism*, (Columbia University Press, 2015), 35-6.

subsumption is a phenomenon that “embodies the inscription of experience of the encounter between capitalism and what it found from previous modes of production.” Such a record of capitalism’s encounters with its others allows the crucial observation that “the logic of formal subsumption acted to interrupt the temporal continuum of the very process of capitalist production it also fueled.”⁶⁴ In other words, capitalism’s expansion depends on the absorption of its outsides whose varying degrees of assimilability in turn reveal a range of different and *present* temporalities.

Mestizaje exemplifies formal subsumption inasmuch as it has been fully assimilated into the nation form, and contributes to a homogeneous surface. As Saldaña-Portillo’s comparison of different biological metaphors of race employed in the US shows, mestizaje’s effects tend towards uniformity: “Unlike quantitative biological metaphors of race in the United States, where, for example, the ‘one drop’ rule rigidly determines your status as African American, or the ‘one-eighth’ rule your status as Native American, in mestizaje a third term gets produced in the mixture that subsumes previous categories.”⁶⁵ Whereas the “one drop” and the “one-eighth” rules strive to reinstate hypodescent, thereby reproducing colonial difference by having it structure contemporary racial hierarchies, mestizaje’s logic obfuscates the history of its deployment by always asserting a new identity arising from miscegenation regardless of the relations of dominance at play. As a homogenizing strategy, mestizaje imposes an always-already temporal identity of presentness in America for which the conquest is only an originary myth always in the past. In this context

⁶⁴ Ibid, 58.

⁶⁵ Saldaña-Portillo, 407.

mestizaje can be described as real subsumption, as an idea dating from a pre-capitalist moment that has been metabolized to serve capitalism's logic.

Unlike real subsumption, formal subsumption is an irregularity in the homogeneous surface of empty time that extends the complexity of spatiotemporal tropology by distinguishing loci whose temporal logics remain unincorporated, indigestible. In this sense, formal subsumption grants a hermeneutics to read instances of the porousness of the nation form through the identification of those practices which remain inaccessible to capitalism's, and consequently, to the nation state's metabolism. For Marx, the category of formal subsumption "was first and foremost a form rather than a singular event, a one-time content or theme reflecting a historical moment" which means that formal subsumption's "form, in this regard, is external to whatever its immediate content."⁶⁶ Such a contentless form confers formal subsumption with a radical versatility that nonetheless qualifies the conditions of its perception or apprehension in specific ways.

Although the imperative centrality of mestizaje for Anzaldúa's thought cannot be ignored (after all, the subtitle of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, her major work, is *The New Mestiza*) it cannot account for all of Anzaldúa's interaction with history, especially in her later work. In "now let us shift," for example, she offers an alternative to mestizaje's empty time in the way of a second-person confession about her relation to the conquest's violence: "You still grieve for this country's original trauma—the most massive act of genocide in the world's history, the mass murder of indigenous peoples."⁶⁷ Again building on the synonymous-yet-disjointed relation between 'nation' and 'country,' Anzaldúa here

⁶⁶ Harootunian, 58.

⁶⁷ Anzaldúa (2002), 533.

displays a temporal orientation which lies beyond the dominant presence of the nation form inasmuch as it unveils and dwells in the violence constitutive of the US nation. She thereby pries open the nation form by arresting the process by which the nation's becoming is rendered as the nation's being. Such a divergent approach to the nation responds to the presence of residual forms that are already figured in the non-identity areas of 'country' and 'nation.' I thereby argue in what follows that if mestizaje summons the predominance of the nation form in Anzaldúa, then we can turn to nepantla as the counterpart to mestizaje.

Still stemming from her experience of dwelling on the borderlands, yet in a manner contrasting with the assimilative drive of Coatlicue, in her later work Anzaldúa explained how she perceived "something from two different angles [which] creates a split in awareness that can lead to the ability to control perception, to balance contemporary society's worldview with the nonordinary worldview, and to move between them to a place that simultaneously exists and does not exist."⁶⁸ Such a split awareness, in the sense of marking an interruption, bears resemblance with formal subsumption as an anomaly in the experience of reality, capitalist or otherwise. Anzaldúa continues: "I call entering this realm 'nepantla'—the Nahuatl word for an in-between space, *el lugar entre medio*. Nepantla, *palabra indígena: un concepto que se refiere a un lugar no-lugar.*"⁶⁹ By adopting this concept as a defining trait, Anzaldúa unearths an alternative orientation to living with history, and the violence of conquest in particular, by entering the mystical condition/place

⁶⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in The Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 28.

⁶⁹ "the place in-between. Nepantla, indigenous word: a concept referring to non-place place." Ibid, 28.

of nepantla. Even though Anzaldúa's adoption of the concept as an identity marker still envisioned the projection of a future contiguous with mestizaje, that is, one of homogeneity—"Las nepantleras envision a time when the bridge will no longer be needed—we'll have shifted to a seamless nosotras."⁷⁰—nepantla nonetheless yields an experience of the historical present that is disruptive to the nation form. As I will elaborate in the following, nepantla denotes an irreducible space that conserves the moment of the encounter of historical violence in order to qualify contemporary relations of oppression; nepantla opens the experience of the nation form to a plurality of interjections.

Anthropologist Miguel León-Portilla traced the history of this concept to Dominican friar Diego Durán's sixteenth-century treatise *Historia de las Indias de Nueva-España y islas de Tierra Firme*. Durán, who was fluent in Nahuatl, reports a dialogue with a Nahuatl Indian whom he had reprimanded for his behavior because it was not in accord with the ancient indigenous customs and morals, to which the native replied: "Father, don't be afraid, for we are still '*nepantla*.'" León-Portilla reads the episode as exhibiting "the risks, so closely related to cultural identity, that can present themselves in attempts at inducing acculturation," by explaining the concept of nepantla as "'in the middle,' or as he [the native] later added, 'we are neutral.'" León-Portilla links nepantla to the experience of colonial violence as it sentenced those conquered into a state of estrangement: "The ancient institutions had been condemned and mortally wounded, while the ones the friars imposed were still strange and at times incomprehensible. Consequently, the Indians found

⁷⁰ Anzaldúa (2002), 270.

themselves *nepantla*, ‘in between.’”⁷¹ At this point a clarification is due concerning the translation of the episode in that *nepantla* is not meant, etymologically, to indicate a fixed place, but rather a temporal and contingent condition of place.⁷² With this etymology in mind, I want to draw attention to how *nepantla* acts as a trope that assumes a spatial location as a metaphor for a temporal condition, i.e., the experience of the site of violence as the prevailing condition since the conquest. Similarly, James Maffie, in his study of Aztec philosophy, has emphasized *nepantla*’s adverbial quality, warning that “we need to resist the temptation to reify *nepantla* that comes with treating *nepantla* as a noun.”⁷³

The historical baggage of *nepantla* could yield a different context for Anzaldúa’s early and most famous description of the borderlands were it attuned to its spatiotemporal conceptualizations: “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.”⁷⁴ Although the open wound could connote an in-between place of encounter, this early description still tends to diminish the conceptual strength of *nepantla* as it reifies in-betweenness into a third element, a third country. By reifying *nepantla* into a third element, Anzaldúa traces a synthetic trajectory, as it were, that anticipates the homogeneity she and her ‘*nepantleras*’

⁷¹ Miguel León-Portilla, *Endangered Cultures*, tr. by Julie Goodson-Lawes (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 10.

⁷² This clarification relates to the translation of the episode from Spanish to English (since the transition from Nahuatl to Spanish is not available) with regards to the specific verb that translates as ‘to be.’ Durán reports that the native phrased his condition as “*estar en nepantla*” where the verb ‘*estar*’ qualifies the condition as temporal, contingent, much in the sense of reporting a location, as in ‘I am home.’ The important aspect to note here, is that ‘*estar*’ diverges from the other verb that can translate as ‘to be,’ ‘*ser*,’ which rather entails an ontological trait.

⁷³ James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2014), 362.

⁷⁴ Anzaldúa (1987), 25.

envision—she thereby sketches precisely the kind of movement that Maffie warns against, a movement reminiscent of the homogeneous nation in dialectical sublimation.

The central break to be noted here regarding nepantla separates the different logics that oppose nepantla to mestizaje and Coatlicue. An oft-cited poem from *The Borderlands/La Frontera* titled “To live in the Borderlands means you” provides an insightful example showing how mestizaje’s logic is inherently incompatible with nepantla’s. The poem is structured through the anaphoric repetition of the title’s semantic structure; the first line, which finishes the title’s sentence, begins: “[you] are neither *hispana india negra española / ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed.”⁷⁵ The reasoning behind the poem, and behind *The Borderlands/La Frontera*, is one that juxtaposes different cultures in neither, both, and in-between relations in order to construct an embattled yet sublimated identity. Yet, as the poem shows, the construction process is inverted in that the point of departure has already conciliated all these contradictory relations through signification: the borderlands, as the site of contradiction, already means something, and, in that process, it already makes available a subject of enunciation. This brings us back to the complementary relation of citizen and nation that orders Anzaldúa’s ideas of universality; even though in her early work this citizen-nation bind is more subtle, it does manifest through a framework that sublimates contradictions. Nepantla, on the other hand, symbolizes the site of a temporal condition wherein an attunement to historical resonance renders incommensurable the articulation of such a neither/both/in-between logic: contradictions are not worked out but grasped as

⁷⁵ Ibid. 216.

heterogeneous temporalities, as separated by in-betweenness. Put differently, the diachronic orientation of nepantla impedes sublimation in order to contemplate the interstitial presence of other temporalities—these, in turn, render the nation form porous.

Part of the disruptive potential I am attempting to evoke here through the historical implications of nepantla relates to denying a categorization of this in-betweenness, and to a rejection of a conciliatory posture. The “trauma of nepantlism,” as León-Portilla calls it, is intimately bound with an experience of oppression—with a reframing of Anzaldúa’s perpetually open wound. In order to relay a second instance of this trauma, León-Portilla refers to another sixteenth-century report by the Franciscan friar Bernardo de Sahagún concerning the response of Nahuatl wisemen to hearing a condemnation of their ancient beliefs:

We cannot be tranquil, and certainly we still do not believe, we do not accept as true that which you say, even though this might offend you.... It is enough already that we have lost, that it has been taken from us, that our ancient way of life has been impeded. If we remain in this place, we will only be made prisoners.
⁷⁶

The unapologetic rejection of the dominant account in the face of dispossession authorizes an understanding of this report in terms of what James C. Scott calls a hidden transcript. Hidden transcripts are alternative accounts of events and situations which are held by an oppressed group both in secrecy from and against the public domain. (Or, in connection to the first section of this chapter, hidden transcripts can be described as strategically concealed instances of monolingualism.) The informer-anthropologist relation, in this case between Sahagún and the Nahuatl wisemen, allows a breach of secrecy through which we

⁷⁶ León-Portilla, 10.

can glean the discontent and diverging perspective of the dominated. As a hidden transcript, this figuration of nepantla's in-betweenness depicts a place where the dominated "will only be made prisoners." That is, coupling the site of nepantla with the site of domination, to be in the middle produces a condition of oppression formulated temporally as a present that projects an always-imminent imprisonment. Nepantla, then, posits a diametrically opposed perspective of the conquest by privileging the experience of the dominated in contrast to mestizaje's emphasis on the dominant.

Nepantla's critical thrust affords a historical orientation consistent with formal subsumption. Both describe specific corporeal and psychological dispositions towards the past. For example, Harootunian describes the conditions required for the perception of formal subsumption by recalling Walter Benjamin's understanding of the past as "'splinters shot through' the present,"⁷⁷ yielding the idea of a past intruding in the present in the form of flashes. Echoing both Anzaldúa's open wound and León-Portilla's trauma of nepantla, Taussig also refers to Benjamin in order to sketch an understanding of the historical present as a displacement of the self:

[taking one outside of oneself] accounts for one of the most curious features of Benjamin's entire philosophy of history, *the flash* wherein "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at an instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again." [...] This flash marks that leap "in the open air of history" which establishes history as "Marx understood the revolution" as "the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the 'now'."⁷⁸

Displacement of the self, disembodiment, taking one outside of oneself, stands here as the marker for the moment one perceives formal subsumption. In a way, it serves to construe a

⁷⁷ Harootunian, 40.

⁷⁸ Taussig (1993), 39.

complementary understanding of mimesis where mestizaje's embodiment, in its assertion of an empty time, is counteracted by a disembodiment manifesting as a temptation to step out of one's self and into space. Nepantla's spatiotemporal tropology partly captures this temptation by describing *a place that is a different time*—a heterogeneous present. In this sense Taussig's use of Roger Caillois's account of mimesis helps us understand such disembodiment as "being tempted by space," playing out in

a drama in which the self is but a self-diminishing point amid others, losing its boundedness." Caillois tries to describe this drama in its most extreme form where the mimicking self, tempted by space, spaces out: "I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself. To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put.*" Scary enough. Then comes the punchline: "He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is the convulsive possession."⁷⁹

In Anzaldúa's later work, particularly in the essay "Putting together Coyolxauhqui," this drama plays out in strikingly similar terms.⁸⁰ Although the embodied knowledge of mimesis for her is not so much a temptation but rather a feeling of exalted empathy, the sense of being not similar to something but just similar is shared: "A hyperempathic perception fuses you with your surroundings; you become what you observe—a face bulging out of the wall as in a sci-fi film, a woman lurking behind the wallpaper. Shifting and fluid, the boundaries of self-identity blur. You accommodate all identities."⁸¹ There is a

⁷⁹ Ibid, 34.

⁸⁰ It's worth mentioning that "Putting together Coyolxauhqui" was composed as a companion piece to "now let us shift."

⁸¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Chapter 22: Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: A Creative Process." *Counterpoints*, 90 (1999), 250.

drastic shift from the articulation and promulgation of a Chicana identity in its citizen-nation bind, to this nebulously bound self which accommodates all identities without sublimating them into one. Hyperemphatic perception describes the kind of positioning that can perceive the juxtaposition of heterogeneous temporalities without conflating or reifying them. Furthermore, such a 'being not similar to something but just similar' allows to channel formal subsumption's contentless form. It sketches how the self's experience of disembodiment grants access to history in the sense of a structure, as Benjamin would have it, whose site is not homogenous, empty time. That is, history beyond the purview of the nation form, as an anational projection.

Nepantla coordinates history and politics in order to maintain open the wound of conquest. By asserting the irreducibility of its in-betweenness the wound configures a contentless space whose form, by virtue of its permanence as a hidden transcript, remains open as a resource of disruption within the nation. Nepantla-as-wound in this sense marks a site where in-betweenness opens to the expression of hidden transcripts, wherein colonial violence denotes Balibar's delayed nationalization of people yet this time articulated from and coded by the minorities' perspective. In the heuristics of conceiving the civil rights movement as the imperative revolutionary event of the multicultural US, mestizaje impels the continual renegotiation through which minorities work out their own terms of inclusion to the nation; in this extended civil rights compromise, nepantla locates the excluded, the inherently intransigent that turns away from conciliation by foregrounding the continual founding violence of how the nation continually comes to be.

This is why Taussig attributes a specific risk to minority mimesis in that the excess of these histories of violence saturates the official transcript: “There is furthermore a strange mapping of what is defined as sensuous excess whereby the ‘minorities’ spill out, escape the grid of the normative, and therefore conceptuality itself. As sheer substance, matter out of place becomes matter with a vengeance, sensuosity shredding the very notion of conceptuality.”⁸² While mestizo/a is a minority condition of assimilation, nepantla not only maps a site of minorities, but more importantly, a site of the minor as understood in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms. Whereas, in literary terms, the major departs from a specific content to find an expression; the minor, on the other hand, departs from expression that only later finds content and form. “Expression must break forms,” Deleuze and Guattari advance, “encourage ruptures and new sproutings. When a form is broken, one must reconstruct the content that will necessarily be part of a rupture in the order of things.”⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari construe the minor in relation to a living drive that evokes how Anzaldúa conceives of Chicanas/os as expressing themselves in a living language; however, the aim here is neither juridical recognition by the state nor containment by grammar. The minor coordinates with formal subsumption’s contentless form by charting the trajectory of an expression that precedes both content and form, thereby calling attention to an anterior moment before subsumption altogether, but mainly an anterior moment before the delayed nationalization of people—an anational moment.

⁸² Taussig (1993), 68.

⁸³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 28.

Nepantla, in this sense, offers an opening for expression to break the existing forms otherwise shaped into uniformity with the nation state. By yielding to the nation form's porosity, nepantla's in-betweenness exposes how the emergent and the residual escape the linearity of their temporal attributes: following Levine's contention against how "the residual and the emergent are always marked as either 'past' or 'future' in relation to the dominant,"⁸⁴ we can observe how these temporalities actually meet through the nation form's porosity. Furrowing through the homogeneity of empty time allows to conceptualize as interchangeable both formal subsumption as a residue and the anational as an emergence: formal subsumption describes an anational potential through a past active in the present to the same extent that anational potentials describe formal subsumption as a future active in the present. That is, together they trace the historical limits of the nation form.

There are subtle instances of such historical delimitations in Anzaldúa's writings: "In gatherings where we feel our dreams have been sucked out of us, la nepantlera leads us in celebrating la comunidad soñada, reminding us that spirit connects the irreconcilable warring parts para que todo el mundo se haga un país, so that the whole world may become un pueblo."⁸⁵ Again employing the notion of 'country' yet this time in its standard Spanish spelling, Anzaldúa projects forward a unity emerging from the nepantla trauma, where nepantleras embody the initiative of a future community. Interestingly, 'country' as the unity of the whole world is here located in divergence from the nation: its appositional counterpart most closely translates as 'peoplehood,' which enables the possibility of

⁸⁴ Levine, 63.

⁸⁵ Anzaldúa (2002), 568.

interpreting the referred collectivity as at once more denationalized and less reified—a collectivity anterior to the nation and thus potentially anational.