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Messy Archives and Materials That Matter: Making Knowledge with the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers

SUZANNE BOST

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WHEN GLORIA ANZALDÚA DIED IN 2004, SHE GAVE BIRTH TO AN enormous archive. I was overwhelmed to learn, in the midst of writing about an author whose work I thought I knew forward and backward, that she left far more unpublished writings at her death than works published in her lifetime. What's more, Anzaldúa was a compulsive reviser, and her archive includes ten to twenty unique drafts of some works (including her dissertation, which she never defended). She revised some works *after* publication. This collection of material thus decenters what we previously thought constituted her literary corpus. It knocks the presumed author of *Borderlands / La Frontera* off her axis and replaces her with an Anzaldúa whose work ranges across many media, shape-shifting as much as her characters who oscillate between human and animal, male and female, alien and ghost. My obsession with this archive has led me to rethink the function of the archive and to theorize the ways in which we produce, reproduce, and coproduce knowledge in our archival work. These messy processes of knowledge production constitute the matter of this essay as it sifts through the contents of the Anzaldúa archive. In this moment when scholarship on archives has turned toward the digital, my experience has been decidedly material.¹ The messy materiality of her archive will figure here as an apt framework for rediscovering Anzaldúa.

As a literary scholar who loves to historicize, I have spent much time getting my hands dirty in archives. Yet I'm still often overcome with disciplinary anxiety as I try to explain—to myself and to others in my interdisciplinary fields, Chicana/o studies and feminist studies—what I do there and how my archival work is different from that of historians. Does my disciplinary training in close reading make my treatment of archival material different from theirs? Or am I

simply playing historian without training as a historian? I often find myself overwhelmed in archives, unsure what I should be looking at or what I should be doing with the materials I find. Is archival work simply a matter of discovery? And how is discovery related to the skills I've learned in my discipline? A key difference between literary scholars and historians is the temporality of our scholarship. Literary scholars write in the present tense and self-consciously create as they analyze, while conventional history is supposed to be focused on the past.² Yet the Anzaldúa archive is so new—indeed, it is still growing (as the librarians continue to process and catalog new materials)—that entering it is an encounter with the present, too.

In this essay, I show how recognizing the multiple material actants at work in an archive transforms research, in general, and Anzaldúan studies, in particular.³ For unraveling this new way of thinking about archival work, I borrow a genre Anzaldúa developed throughout her career: “autohistoria-teoría . . . a personal essay that theorizes” (“now” 578n). I begin with my own experiences with the particular materials of particular archives and then move outward to develop a theory of knowledge production that is built on the accidents, messes, and intrusions that disrupted my conventional research plan. Perhaps this is what literary scholars have to offer archival studies: a good story.

In my latest book, I wanted to historicize contemporary Chicana writers' invocations of Aztec and Roman Catholic sacrifice traditions. This desire led me to Mexico City, where these two traditions meet in nearly incandescent displays of pain and the sacred. When I arrived at Mexico's national archive, El Archivo General de la Nación, my fluency in Spanish was scared away by armed guards demanding my certification. Having never been trained to read early modern Spanish handwriting (as historians of Latin America usually are) and not being very certain about

what documents were going to be important for me, I felt totally illegitimate in my claims to whatever knowledge was housed in those thick walls designed to protect national (and implicitly patriarchal) history. What I gained from that trip to Mexico was an impression of the enormous signatures of seventeenth-century representatives of the Spanish Inquisition, who sometimes filled half a page with their names, and an impression of communal ecstasy-hysteria when I was caught in a torrential rainstorm on top of a pyramid full of sightseers taking advantage of a free-admission day. The knowledge I found was not in the content of texts but in material encounters: encounters with the bodies and signatures of patriarchal authority, encounters with thick-walled buildings and pyramids, encounters with weather, and encounters with people around me.

This experience became more remarkable to me when I found myself in the Anzaldúa archive years later. The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers are housed in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Austin. According to the eighty-four-page catalog, the archive measures 125 linear feet and consists of more than two hundred file boxes of materials, not including photographs, audiovisual materials, and oversized artifacts. I say “materials” because this archive pushes the limits of terms like “documents” or “writings” with things like doorknob placards, ticket stubs, appointment cards, fliers, doodles, and a number of recalcitrant rusty paperclips and staples that the librarian asked me to assist him in removing. My experience with these materials was in many ways literary, treating texts as created objects rather than transparent vehicles for recording truth. And the fact that I have received more training in post-modern theory than in archival methods certainly made it easier for me to abandon ideas about evidence and historical fact. But the research process I found/made in the ar-

chive exceeded disciplinary conventions. The Anzaldúa papers taught me that the archive is not a passive storehouse of history for scholars to explore; it is a setting that ignites a variety of processes. It is supposed to preserve the past but is mired in a material present.

As AnaLouise Keating writes, this archive “contains enough material to generate a small academic industry” (“Archival Alchemy” 164). “Generate” is an important verb here, and this huge archive has the potential to produce a great variety of responses, ranging from critical essays to *Facebook* posts to unauthorized leaks of unpublished texts. Anzaldúa was the first archivist of her library, saving, labeling, and storing all documents related to her writing career. According to Keating, “Anzaldúa had carefully packed and stored these materials in every room of her house in Santa Cruz, California” (161). Christian Kelleher, an archivist for rare books and manuscripts at the Benson library, traveled to Santa Cruz to pack up the boxes and ship them to Austin.⁴ Keating says she was initially worried about how the “randomness” of Anzaldúa’s notes and Post-its would travel to the archive and how they would be preserved (“Archive”). Though the library’s folders and boxes apparently standardize and protect all these materials, as soon as one opens them the randomness leaks out, and outside forces move in. While Keating calls the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers Anzaldúa’s “final, and most complex, text” (“Archival Alchemy” 160), I would not call this archive final or even solely textual; it is just the beginning of an uncontrollable process.

I went to the Anzaldúa archive with an idea in mind for a book about reclaiming dirt. Though we think of dirt as natural, what makes it dirty is really an unnatural designation. (After all, the stuff I suck up into my vacuum is lovely when on my dinner plate, in my yard, or on my cat, but intolerable when it shows up on the dining room floor.) Mary Douglas’s famous claim is that dirt is mat-

ter “out of place.” Things are marked as dirt when they are perceived as “a threat to good order.” Dirt is the “rejected bits and pieces” that “threaten the distinctions made” by any system (161–62). It is thus rich soil for encountering repressed knowledge; it threatens our assumptions about what is rational, good, and true. Anyone who knows Anzaldúa’s work well knows that she had little use for purity or conventional reason and, instead, had tremendous faith in spirits, dreams, shape-shifting, and extrasensory perception. In my efforts to reclaim these supposedly irrational phenomena, I’ve been looking at dirt as a metaphor for stigmatized emplacement, stigmatized being, and stigmatized knowing.⁵

Before my trip to the archive, I scoured the list of titles in the catalog, trying to determine which ones might be about dirt. Since Anzaldúa is known for her published writings about her family home in rural South Texas, working in the fields when school was out, and the (literal and figurative) murkiness of the United States–Mexico borderlands, I expected to sink my hands into more dirt from Aztlán. Instead, I found things like “Puddles,” a story about a waitress in Austin who catches a queer sort of infectious disease from a puddle that turns her into a lizard and gives her the ability to read others’ minds. This story was published in 1992, at 712 words long, but the archive contains multiple revisions in four different folders, several of them written after this date, each getting longer than the previous one. The most recent version is dated 1998, is 2,800 words long (four times the length of the published story), and is retitled “Velada de una lagartija” (“Vigil of a Lizard”). Does it thereby become a different story? Is the published version still the authoritative one? There are a number of unfinished stories, like “Werejaguar,” about a woman who turns into a jaguar while cleaning her house. My favorite is “Susto in the City,” about a Chicana punk dyke musician’s mysterious illness and wanderings through filthy Brooklyn

streets; I found variations on this theme with different titles throughout the archive. Mostly what I found, then, was a mess: no clear conclusions about dirt (or about anything!) to be drawn here. While “dirt” seems to imply clear lines of inclusion and exclusion, this archive, mirroring the content of Anzaldúa’s work, muddied any such boundaries.

Building on my research experience in Mexico City, I determined to relinquish my expectations and—instead of focusing on the files I had decided in advance would be helpful to me and thereby delimiting my archival pursuit to potentially misguided foreknowledge and speculation—to open myself to what the archive had to offer. Drafts upon drafts are complicated enough, but these are sometimes mislabeled, split apart, duplicated or partially duplicated, assembled in the wrong order, or scattered among different folders and boxes. The drafts of highly valued texts like *Borderlands* appear in multiple places, often undated, sometimes handwritten and scribbled over by Anzaldúa and her readers (friends, fellow writers, professors), and these drafts are thrown into folders with personal notes (some of which are not in Anzaldúa’s handwriting), drawings, clippings, and copies of, say, *American Way* magazine—producing a destabilizing heteroglossia.

Perhaps this state is not so unusual for an author’s archive, which typically gathers all her or his papers (personal and otherwise) into one place. But focusing on the form of this particular archive seems particularly appropriate for a writer like Anzaldúa, for whom “nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 79), and who claims as a homeland “*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifebloods of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (3). Her archive, I would say, replicates this process with contin-

ual friction among discordant materials and the ambiguity of perspective that this friction produces. The archive has, then, a *mestiza* consciousness.

Learning to navigate the Anzaldúa archive taught me to appreciate alternative boundaries, strange systems, surprise encounters, and unexpected affinities. After sifting through folders full of multiple drafts of similar, overlapping pieces of Anzaldúa’s writings, I felt that establishing clear boundaries around a single work would perhaps be undesirable, even if it was possible. No book will ever be able to replicate the experience of this mess. Though hypertextual facsimiles might be a good way of accounting for unresolved revisions, misspellings, and handwritten notations, the sense of surprise discovery might be lessened. Publication or digitalization would preserve the material and make it more accessible, but with prescribed channels of discovery. (Even hypertextual reading follows paths enabled by Web design.) The Anzaldúa papers offer an experience of disordered simultaneity in which it is impossible to separate literature from the author’s doodles, her notes, or the sometimes torn and folded napkins and fliers she wrote on the back of. Digitalizing would also be unable to capture the multidimensionality of coffee stains or the effect of reading a document printed while the ink was running out.

I was initially anxious about my inability to “master” this huge and messy archive. The materials I encountered forced me to process them in unconventional ways, making my research process more visible to me than the content of the materials I was supposed to be studying. For instance, when I opened folder 5 in box 5, a number of plastic-coated disks (which the archive catalog calls “candle affirmations”) came spilling out onto the table. I looked around to see if anyone had noticed the mess. I worried that I had violated protocol for the treatment of rare books and manuscripts. What was I supposed to do with this pile of

unfamiliar objects? The disks are divided into segments inscribed with commands, phrases, or single words that appear to represent goals or tasks.⁶ Unlike published documents, these disks are not just verbal traces but also material products of the author's hands; they are infused with her touch. Presumably Anzaldúa would place a lighted candle at the center of the disks and then—what? read them aloud? pray? Or was the ritual silent, allowing the disks to speak for themselves? Was I (re)enacting a rite when I held them in my hands? The disks are smudged, sometimes slightly melted, giving the illusion that they offer a glimpse into an actual event, material traces of a ritual, but the glimpse is not a clear one.

The handwriting on the disks is frequently illegible. Some of the photographs I took cut off portions of the circles, reminding me that my knowledge is always temporal, subject to change with future encounters. On my favorite disk, one wedge pretty clearly says, "Finish *Borderlands* by Feb. 28." "NEA for next yr." legibly fills another large segment (fig. 1). Other segments are crowded with less legible words. One says, "Trip to TX," which brings up the author's ambivalent relationship to her family after she came out as a lesbian as well as the passages in *Borderlands* about her simultaneous fear of going home and desire to return home. Other parts of the disk are less obviously relevant to literary scholarship. Directly across from the segment about finishing *Borderlands* and taking up equal space, two segments read "lose 20 lbs" and "Cut down on smoking, herbs." Concerns with health and appearance abut financial concerns. One piece seems to begin with "Remember impact" and ends with "royalties." (I'm tempted to read "Lute," for Aunt Lute Press, the publisher of *Borderlands*, in that wedge, but there seems to be another letter after what should be the final *e* if it were "Lute.")

Another might read "good promotion." Four smaller pieces say "shelves," "VCR," "car," and, enigmatically, "Music Box." One looks like "software" or "salt more." These are compelling to me since they describe matter that might contain the writer's life and work and occupy her mind. Think about the import of the shelves that hold your books and your notes. Think about how your organizational system facilitates thoughts and creates connections. Think about the time you spend in your car (or, perhaps, walking, if you have none) and how your body in motion produces ideas in dialogue with the sites you pass and the sensations of the passing. Think about all the associations one could generate from this enigmatic collection of prayers/wishes.

Another candle affirmation is written on a more evenly lined circle, but some spaces of this one are empty, and my camera shot only focuses on part of it so I could show my graduate students "Excellent QE exam topic, questions, & biblio. Pass with impressive flair and become eligible and am granted a significant fellowship for next year (90-91)" (fig. 2). Next to this is "groundbreaking, significant, & great collection, a 'bestseller,' financially successful, *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras*." These pieces return us to the



FIG. 1

Candle affirmation disc.
Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers.

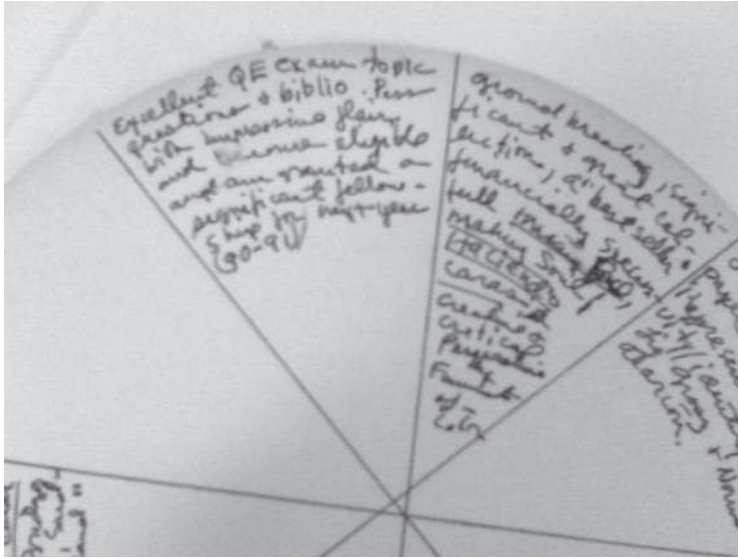


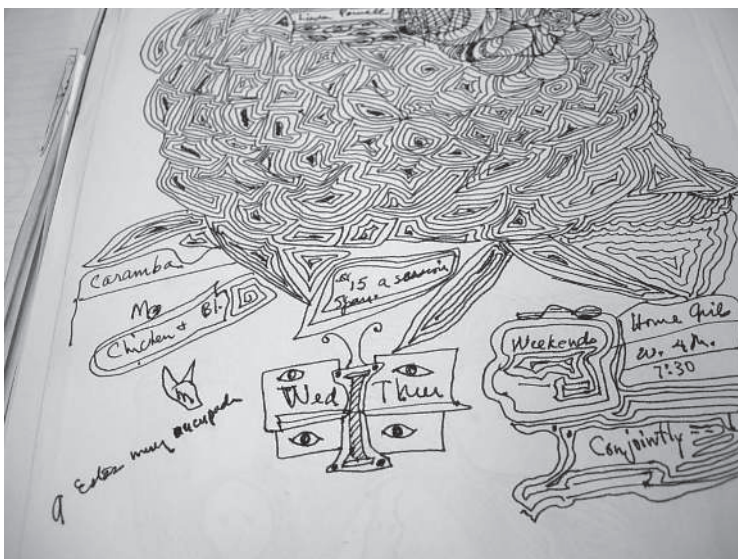
FIG. 2

Candle affirmation disc.
Gloria Evangelina
Anzaldúa Papers.

question of what an affirmation is, where it lies on the continua between desire and reality, goal and fantasy. What is its genre? Anzaldúa did indeed pass her comprehensive exams, though she never completed the dissertation, and she did publish *Making Face*, *Making Soul*, to some acclaim but without great financial success or “bestseller” status. These affirmations are not, then, archival supports, reinforcing what the scholar knows about the literature. Rather, they resonate with and exceed the bounds of reality, tinting

FIG. 3

Untitled sketch.
Gloria Evangelina
Anzaldúa Papers.

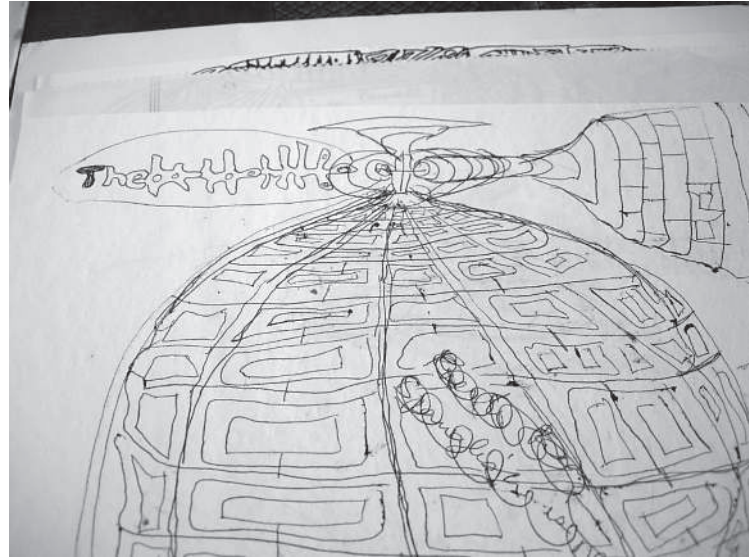


it with a wistful glow (much like literature itself). I know from working with historians that they use archives to back up their narratives with facts, that the archive solidifies their speculations. This archive seems to do the reverse: it smudges literary history; it creates mysteries instead of answering questions.

Anzaldúa was a visual artist before she came to poetry, and the archive also includes dozens of her paintings and sketches from over the decades. A page that seems to be the cover of a book in process reads “Poems and Doodles by Gloria Anzaldúa,” putting the two forms alongside each other as allied forms of communication. This page and others near it in the archive blend words and images in a way that highlights the harmony and the dissonance between the two forms of creativity. Some of these compositions look like representational works of art. Others combine apparently transparent or functional linguistic messages with ambiguous sketches that seem purely aesthetic, random, or impenetrably conceptual. One particularly thick visual-verbal sketch has apparent calendar notations (“Weekends,” “W. . . . 7:30,” “\$15 a session”) embedded within an amorphous drawing that vaguely resembles a brain (fig. 3).⁷ A butterfly shape at the bottom of the page has two eyes in each of its wings; “Wed” is written on one wing and “Thur” on the other. This emplacement of measured time within natural forms creates a conceptual friction that is highlighted by the juxtaposition of the heavily lined aesthetic shapes (which look like mazes) with the blank spaces in which the letters and numbers appear. It is also noteworthy that the “Wed” and “Thur” markings on the butterfly wings defy the natural symmetry of

the butterfly. Do we read this image as a critique of the imposition of measurement on nature? of work duties on free time? A comment written in the lower left, “Estás muy ocupada” (“You are very busy”), seems to confirm this interpretation. But other uses of language on the page, like “Chicken & Bl.” and “M.,” defy expectations for verbal communication. Indeed, the aesthetic function of these letters as lines and curves on the page might outweigh their potential denotative quality. Another “M,” inside a rough sketch that resembles a cat’s head, confirms this impression. Placed near this doodle in the archive is one (also with maze-like patterns) in which the word “The” blends into an abstract shape that reminds me of coral (fig. 4). The words written here—within a shape resembling a dirigible or sea creature—are scribbled over with squiggly lines. Perhaps the most important things to be gained from these visual documents are the experience of disorientation and the process of determining how to handle them, making up new ways of reading, getting lost in the maze. This is not to say that these documents cannot be treated as conventional artifactual evidence, but their matter also teaches us how to do otherwise.

Even the more conventionally textual materials challenge the boundaries between text and world, author and researcher. One stack of papers is clipped together (with one of those rusty paperclips) to a business card for dentists; written on the flip side is “Notes on ‘El Mundo Surdo’ [“The Left-Handed World”] Essay” (the S is crossed over with a Z because Anzaldúa was both a bad speller and a manipulator of spelling [figs. 5 and 6]). On the dentists’ side of the card, she has written, “Cancell app. for today”—suggesting what? An end to her dental troubles? Insufficient



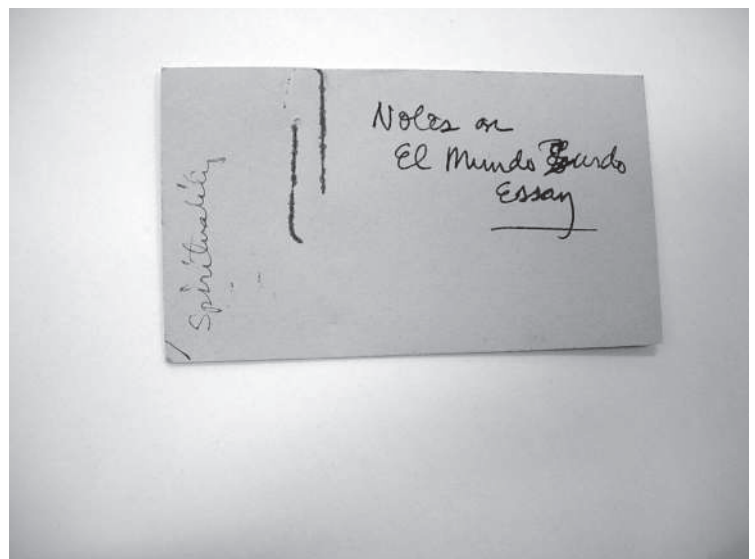
time or money to pay for the appointment? Perhaps the dentists are not even hers. Perhaps she did not even do the paper clipping. Without further information, I cannot make any claims about the significance of the dentists’ card in relation to Anzaldúa’s life or the composition of “El Mundo Zurdo” (the past), but I can make claims about how it shapes a research process in the present. Those notes are now forever associated in my mind with tooth pain and likely will be for future researchers, too. Regardless of how the paper

FIG. 4

Untitled sketch.
Gloria Evangelina
Anzaldúa Papers.

FIG. 5

Notes for “El
Mundo Zurdo.”
Gloria Evangelina
Anzaldúa Papers.



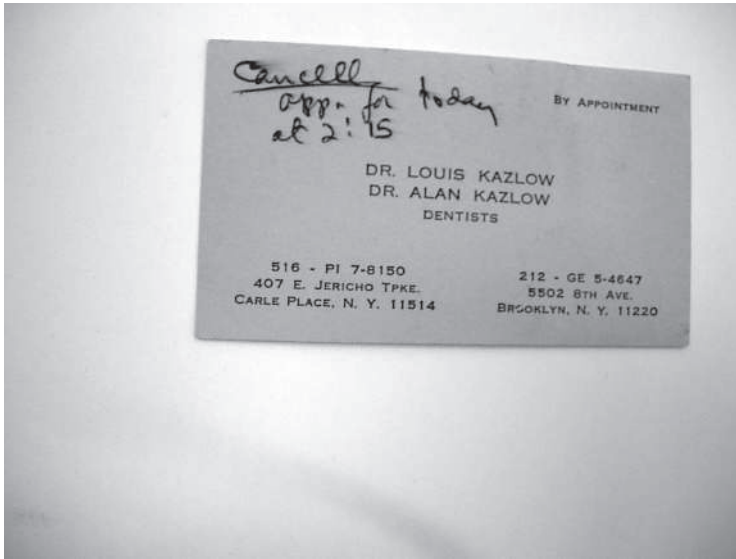


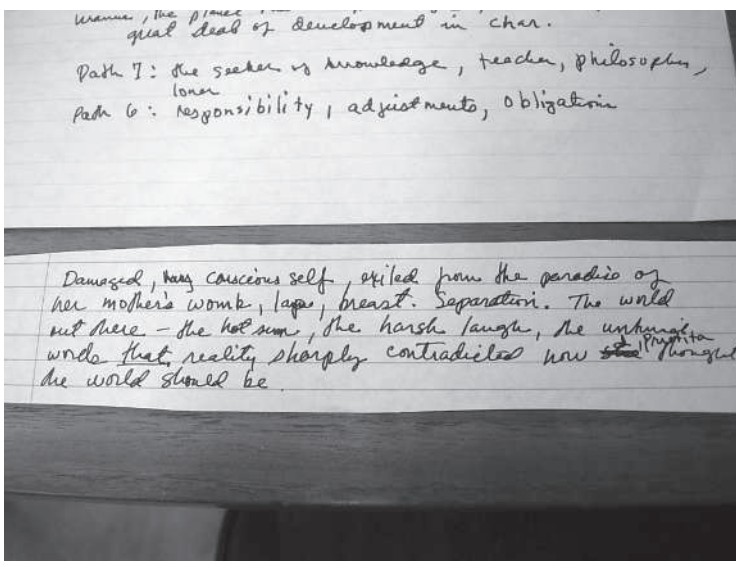
FIG. 6

Notes for "El Mundo Zurdo." Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers.

clip got there, it indelibly marks the knowledge gleaned from the papers: not only does it create affinity among the various papers gathered in the clip (including the business card), it also leaves a material indentation and a slight trace of rust on the paper. If I had disposed of the paper clip (which I did not), its material traces (and its absence) would invoke an even greater mystery, of which I would be the author. The process of authority is thereby continued into the present and future, into the work done in the reading room and beyond.

FIG. 7

Notes for "El Mundo Zurdo." Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers.



This group of papers is cataloged as notes for "El Mundo Zurdo" (its spelling standardized), a title that reappears throughout the archive. In addition to the dentists' card and pages produced in a word processor, the stack is made up of handwritten notes, doodles, and pieces of deconstructed and reconstructed text. Before taking up word processing, Anzaldúa often prefigured its cutting and pasting functions by cutting the pages of her writing into strips and rearranging them.⁸ She continued this practice even after adopting a word processor, seemingly out of love for the ritual. She describes the process in an early essay, "Speaking in Tongues": making "puzzle[s] on the floor" with her cut-up documents "to try to make some order out of [them]" (171). Strips of paper are taped to some pages in an order apparently imposed by the author. Other folders contain loose strips that fell out onto the table when I opened them, allowing me to position the strips in front of me however I wanted (in order to get as much into one photograph as possible) and to put them back in the folder however I wanted, to influence the next researcher's experience. What sort of order is this?

In one of those juxtapositions I created with my camera, a passage about alienation, birth trauma, and psychic damage is positioned underneath what appears to be a list of stages of a healing process (fig. 7). Though these two scraps are both written on lined yellow paper, the absence of the red margin guide on the top piece suggests that they come from different sheets. Are they meant to go together? Who would be the agent of that meaning? Anzaldúa? A library employee? Gravity? Perhaps the two only seem related since I photographed them together, thereby

creating a narrative with a sequence. Maybe the first piece is not about healing at all. Perhaps it's about work, teaching, writing, or a rite of passage. (The phrase "development in character" would fit any of these interpretations, but "development" and "character" would have different connotations.) The lower scrap of paper is about Prietita, the heroine of Anzaldúa's novel in progress, while the one on top seems to be about a general or hypothetical subject. As literary scholars, what sorts of claims are we justified in making about these texts other than the multidirectional speculations I have just offered here?

In another example that thwarts interpretive claims, I have placed an enigmatic fragment in Spanish below a quotation from Castellanos (probably Rosario Castellanos, but I haven't been able to locate the source, again highlighting the contingency of knowledge and ignorance [fig. 8]). The Castellanos quotation is about the failure of those who hold rigidly to doctrines rather than accommodate fluctuations, and the enigmatic fragment juxtaposes a dead cow being eaten by vultures and coyotes with a declaration that basically says, "I'm not messing around now. Don't fuck with me. Leave me alone." The passages appear in the same folder; both are printed from a word processor in the same font, on the same white paper. On the level of content, however, I see nothing but dissonance between these two fragments. Yet this dissonance is institutionalized for as long as they are stored next to each other in the file. The materials of their preservation create a logic of their own.

I have gained from my archival experience an appreciation for competing processes of meaning making, each with its own forms of circumscription, expansion, and collision. One might use Jane Bennett's theory of "distributive agency" to understand how the various material "actants" in

the archive work together to form knowledge (21). Drawing from Baruch Spinoza and Bruno Latour, Bennett develops a theory of "vital materialism" that, by acknowledging the agency of nonhuman objects, "chasten[s]" our "fantasies of human mastery" (122). According to this logic, the concept of agency must be "distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts" (23). The archive itself (re)produces knowledge in segments: the catalog sorts materials according to a certain logic; the sizes of standard file boxes and file folders necessitate folding, squishing, or bundling materials; and the small document-request forms, with which one can ask to see limited amounts of material, three folders at a time, fragment a research question to accommodate the structural limitations of the library.

The researcher can process the materials in these folders in many different ways, though, and some of my favorite photographs of the archive include my own hands, holding open pages, showing the thickness of a document, keeping slips of paper in place. But I am not autonomous in my access to information or the ways in which I produce knowledge

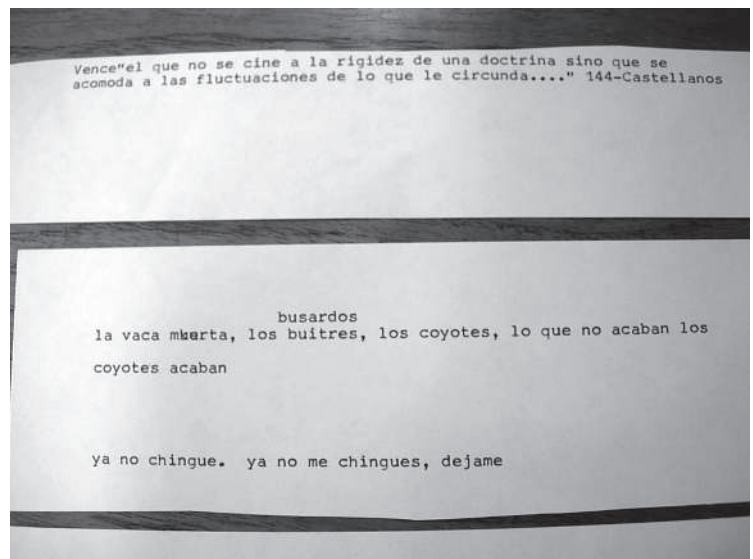


FIG. 8

Notes for "El Mundo Zurdo." Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers.

from the archive. The technologies I use for information gathering (digital photography, limited by the capacity of my camera battery; computer note-taking, restricted by my typing speed; and software, which I understand just well enough to collect on my flash drive hundreds of pages of photographed material as separate files that I can only open one at a time) enhance and limit the formation of my knowledge just as do my splitting headache, the light in the reading room, and the presence or absence of others around me. Instead of fighting these forces as nuisances, we might better understand them as the mechanisms that underlie and shape anything we feel we know. To call these forces intrusions demonizes everything outside the researcher as a corruption and creates a false ideal of making knowledge in a vacuum. It is chastening, but also more realistic, to embrace the messy and sometimes conflicting agencies at work in knowledge production. I see this view of archival work less as a loss (of certainty or history) than as a possibility (for more contextual and inclusive kinds of meaning making).

This conclusion resonates with feminist critiques of the authority of the author. Convention would seem to suggest that archival research strengthens our perception of an author as a person of note, one whose background presumably exerts a linear, causal influence on his or her writing. The author emerges from conventional research with great curlicues of authority drawing attention to his or her name and importance. (The same could be said of the authority of the scholar, whose reputation is solidified by archival “discoveries.”) One of the primary goals of feminist research has been to debunk the gender-biased authority that has eclipsed the achievements of women, to question the reality and the neutrality of what has passed as history, literary or otherwise. All truths are contextual. The author of the Anzaldúa archive signs her name “contigo Gloria,” drawing attention not to her individual import but

to communal embeddedness in the informal “contigo” (“with you”). This author has imperfect spelling, a sometimes troublesome body, and material needs and possessions that impede, enable, and modify her creative productions. Her writing is shaped by friends and roommates, professors, writing *comadres*, and critics. Her literary stature is not substantiated by the archive but, rather, complicated, muddled, and sometimes dismantled by it. The authority of this author is mediated by an open-ended, communal process.

This process is also consistent with feminist and Chicana/o historiography, producing intersecting counterhistories that challenge the form and content of history. By rejecting the patriarchal or Eurocentric historical narrative established for centuries, feminist and Chicana/o scholars have changed the rules for evidence gathering, challenged ideas of chronology and authority, and discarded that which has passed as history. In its place, they have developed new ways of making meaning from the events, cultures, and names of the past. “Third Space” or “decolonizing” historiography, according to the Chicana feminist historian Emma Pérez, critically recovers the repressed within the repressed: the queer and female voices that were marginalized by Mexican and Chicano histories. Chicana feminist histories are triply “decolonial” in their resistance to the narratives imposed by Spanish conquest, the forms expected by Anglo-American academic practices, and the narratives imposed by gender-blind or masculinist Chicano nationalism. From a Chicana feminist perspective, the past is not an ideal to return to but a contested terrain of competing truth claims.

Anzaldúa will be different by the time of my next research trip to Austin, depending on what ideas I have between now and then, how long my grant money lasts, and how much time I’ll be able to get away from home. My experience will depend on the environment of the archive (hot or cold, quiet

or filled with talking) and what materials are available then. It will also depend on how the preceding visitors to the archive have left the materials. I encountered Carolyn Steedman's 2002 *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* only after my second trip to the archive, but her work helped me process my reactions. Steedman, a historian, examines archival research, and dust functions as both a material object and a metaphor in her work. Materially, dust explains "archive fever" as not just a state of mind but also an illness induced by the bacteria found in archives (most notably, anthrax).⁹ According to Steedman, the book itself is "a locus of a whole range of industrial diseases" brought on by the decomposition of glue, leather, vellum, and paper (23–24). In an enactment of Bennett's distributive agency, the archive literally infects the researcher, and the researcher incorporates traces of the archive. Speaking of Jules Michelet's desire to rescue "the People," Steedman writes:

He inhaled the dust of the animals and plants that provided material for the documents he untied and read; the dust of all the workers whose trials and tribulations in labour formed their paper and parchment. He did indeed, breathe in the People, giving them life by the processes of incorporation that resulted in his terrible headaches, his Archive Fever, but they were not the People he named in his histories. (152)

As Steedman notes, the verb *dust* has a dual denotation: it signifies the removal of dust from the surfaces of things as well as depositing a "dusting" of material upon them (160). Researchers do not merely recover material of the past (often material they did not intend to find). They also leave a mark on the archive and alter the material they encounter—physically, by adding creases and fingerprints and removing old dust while turning the pages, and conceptually, by making materials public for the first time and offering new frameworks for understanding them. I have dusted

the Anzaldúa archive in both of these senses. Steedman concludes, "Dust . . . is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing or going away, or being gone. . . . The fundamental lessons of physiology, of cell-theory, and of neurology were to do with this ceaseless making and unmaking, the movement and transmutation of one thing into another" (164). Like the cells in a body, the materials in the archive are both preserved and transformed in the research process. Scholar, paper, and information slough bits of themselves onto one another.

I'm drawn to dust as an organizing principle because of its materiality as well as its symbolic associations with dirt and marginality. Dust is, moreover, subject to continual motion and reorganization. Knowledge is like dust; though it lacks the obvious materiality of Steedman's examples, knowledge is a product of material, transcorporeal exchanges (Alaimo). It is formed by movements and encounters with books, people, rooms, and weather. It is always subject to transformation, always ephemeral. Like dirt, what counts as dust, what counts as knowledge, involves a process of valuation, a decision about what to discard and what to keep. But dust is also somewhat beyond our control: no matter how hard we struggle, we cannot keep anything clean. The wind blows in new elements. The documents we want to read fall on the floor, turn out to be blurry, or are checked out by another. So we are left with a mess, a constantly shifting product of material actants, human and nonhuman, coproducing knowledge in friction with each other. Dirt, dust, and mess bear a stigma for purists, but embracing impurity facilitates the emergence of resistant knowledge.

Archival work has particular significance for scholars in Latino/a literary studies, a field developed in resistance to dominant national knowledge traditions (United States and Latin American). In its emergence, Latino/a literary studies has been growing backward

in time, to establish a lost or erased tradition, at the same time that it grows forward. Since 1990 the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project has been locating, publishing, and studying early Latino/a literary works that were never published or that went out of print. José Aranda has put much metacritical thought into the process of “recovering” Latino/a authors. He writes that, given “the difficulties inherent in archival research on minorities and women in the United States,” his work on the nineteenth-century Mexican American writer María Amparo Ruíz de Burton is less a recovery of truth than a construction formed with the limited archival and biographical materials at hand (“Contradictory Impulses” 552; see also Aranda, “Recovering”). Only a tiny fraction of the ideas and experiences of women of Mexican descent in the nineteenth-century United States was preserved. The fragments that remain are not representative of history as much as they are representative of what history has valued, what has been preserved in libraries rather than left to decay. The desire to search attics and basements rather than Ivy League libraries for traces of history is the product of a value shift, a new desire to know about the experiences of those marginalized by history. The author that emerges from this noncanonical archival research is an assemblage of various sources put together by the researcher, and researchers like Aranda are well aware of the contingency of this author and the fact that she is the product not simply of her own time but also of the conditions of her reassembly, which include the researcher’s bias. As Aranda has argued, much of the interest in recovering Ruíz de Burton as a writer results from contemporary Chicana/o scholars’ desire for a subaltern literary precursor. Though archival work claims to be looking into the past, it is always rooted in the present and always subject to future transformation.

This desire for a subaltern hero is certainly applicable in the case of Anzaldúa, who

was canonized (or at least tokenized) for writings that explicitly thematize her marginalization as a working-class, Spanish-speaking Chicana lesbian from the United States–Mexico borderlands. In the 1980s, when her work splashed into “mainstream” academic discourse (through the writings of feminist scholars like Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, and many others), critics needed a representative of these identities to bridge the divide between what was becoming a hegemonic postmodern mode and a resistant (and supposedly untheoretical) “woman of color” consciousness. And Anzaldúa stepped up to the plate with culturally grounded theories of hybridity, fluid margins, and nonbinary thought in *Borderlands / La Frontera*. These theories were embraced and applied across disciplines and across the world, from Mexico to Egypt to Siberia (e.g., Belausteguigoitia Rius and Gutiérrez Magallanes; Gomaa; Nakaznaya). The processes of publication and critical application produced an Anzaldúa that functions as an icon for counterhegemonic theory. But that Anzaldúa is an ephemeral formation of a particular critical moment and will change as materials from the archive permeate more published scholarship.

This moment presents an interesting critical juncture for Anzaldúan studies, which will be transformed by the order in which unpublished materials from the archive go into print, by the form in which these materials become accessible, and by how scholars respond. Other concerns include the possibility that, because of her fame, these works will attract large presses and, perhaps, profits. (Keating published *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* with Duke University Press in 2009, while Anzaldúa’s major works in the 1980s and early 1990s were published by small, struggling, women-of-color and feminist presses like Kitchen Table and Aunt Lute—producing very different avenues for encountering Anzaldúa.) And then what will happen when

people discover that the content of these previously unpublished works is not what they expected, perhaps not what they want to see? Maybe scholars do not like what Anzaldúa liked to write as much as they like the applications and adaptations of border theories credited to her. The Anzaldúa that most people know is limited to a few famous essays, but the poems, stories, pictures, revisions, and other materials in the archive overturn some of the conclusions of those essays. I found in the archive a very different body of work, one that thematizes urban dwelling, spirituality, science fiction, shape-shifting, illness, and the author's reluctance to share her sexuality with others. Though these works were written by the same feminist Chicana lesbian, they don't make an issue of those sociopolitical identities thematized in her early work.¹⁰ In fact, they relocate her somewhat outside them.

Aranda hoped to assemble "a Ruíz de Burton . . . that best approximates the complexities and idiosyncrasies" of her texts ("Contradictory Impulses" 552), refusing to flatten the contradictions that undermine her critical reputation as a heroic pre-Chicana foremother (such as her racism and her ambivalence toward the early feminist movement). In the case of Anzaldúa, however, it might not be possible to use the words "best" or "approximate" since she so insistently resists clear evaluation or approximation. While scholars have tried to iron out some of the contradictions in Anzaldúa's work and to ignore her potentially embarrassing investments in things that push the boundaries of reason, the opening of her archive makes it more difficult to imagine a coherent Anzaldúa. Publishing the unpublished Anzaldúa will be less an act of recovery than one of deconstruction. Perhaps there is a reason why the works that do not thematize identity politics were never published. The unpublished materials in the archive are the dirt that was repressed. Scholars seem to have enjoyed the ways in which Anzaldúa messes

with our understandings of race, nation, and language, but is the dirt on spirits, animism, and sickness something we want to reclaim?¹¹ Do we want to deconstruct the Chicana feminist border hero whose essays from the 1980s are now standard textbook material in courses on subjects ranging from American literature to composition to women's studies and queer theory? What sort of Anzaldúa do we need in 2015? The scholars who work on her today are partially responsible for answering these questions. Yet the matters that collide in the inscription of "Gloria Anzaldúa" exceed author and scholar and include agents beyond our control, like diabetes, computer technology, gravity, and archival environments.

The temporality of Anzaldúa scholarship defies movement toward greater clarity and knowledge as the unpublished materials create more questions and lead us to rethink our past assumptions about the author. In the words of the Chicana feminist scholar Norma Alarcón, Anzaldúa's writings "risk the 'pathological condition' by representing . . . [a] break with a developmental view of self-inscription" (362). We are not progressively inscribing a clearer picture of Anzaldúa; as scholars meet the archival materials in each new moment, the author (and the critic) are subject to dusting and transformation. I like Alarcón's use of "pathology" to characterize the stigma that comes with such an unclean and incoherent subject. The author that emerges in this work is, as Alarcón suggests, never fully "inscribed" or "whole" but, rather, "a crossroads, a collision course, a clearing-house, an endless alterity who . . . appears as a tireless peregrine collecting all of the parts that will never make her whole" (367).

This is not to say, in postmodern fashion, that the author is a fiction or even that she is dead. For Anzaldúa's materiality is palpable in the archive: her labor, her illnesses, her friends, her writing process, her filing system, even her computer and printer. But these pieces do not resolve themselves into

any circumscribed glimpse of the author, who, at every turn, mutates and exceeds the boxes that contain her materials. Entering her archive does not take us down a passageway toward the author, not even a dusty and circuitous passageway. We enter an open circuit full of mirrors and rabbit holes. Instead of finding Anzaldúa, we find ourselves, amid many other surprising materials, boundaries, and weird actants, and then we lose our train of thought. I have learned from the Anzaldúa archive how to embrace permeability, multiplicity, and uncertainty in my scholarship. Rather than insist on clarity or singularity of discourse, we should risk ambiguity so as not to exclude other sources of knowledge that might turn out to be more useful than the status quo. Making meaning should be a radically inclusive and continually open process, looking forward rather than back, welcoming surprises rather than searching to have the same “truths” confirmed again and again.

NOTES

1. See, e.g., Collins; Drucker; and the other essays in the section “Reading in the Digital Age” in the January 2013 issue of *PMLA*. My investment in matter here is not based on any resistance to new media or digital technology. Indeed, digital media have a materiality and sensory qualities that are not altogether distinct from those of archives made of paper, boxes, and shelves. (Drucker’s analysis of digital interfaces offers an example of the ways in which software replicates and elicits material processes.) My attachment to the palpable qualities of the Anzaldúa archive is probably romantic, but it is also related to Anzaldúa’s focus on corporeal and geographic matter. Digitizing the archive would benefit preservation and access, but I would miss the reading room, the ways in which papers shuffle around unexpectedly, and the hominess of sitting in Austin reading about Anzaldúa’s experiences in that city. Also see McGann’s discussion of digital and material archives.

2. In *The* , Certeau argues, “Modern Western History essentially begins with differentiation between the *pr* and the *past*” (2). The “intelligibility” of “modern Western culture . . . is established through a relation with the other . . . the Indian, the past, the people, the

mad, the child, the Third World” (3). The historiography of Chicana/o literature, however, denies this sort of “progress,” claiming the repressed past, the “Third World,” and “the Indian” as its present from which it was never ruptured. Identification with premodern Aztec culture began in the early days of the Chicano *movimiento*; Anzaldúa adapted this atemporal (or dually temporal) trend with a feminist bent, developing her theories from the models of Aztec goddesses like Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui.

3. I use *actant* in the sense that Latour does, to describe action in a nonindividualistic and nonanthropocentric way. I hesitate to use the terms *agent* and *agency*, which evoke autonomy and will (qualities the nonhuman actants of an archive lack). Latour’s account of actants, in actor-network theory, is distinct from earlier structuralist uses of the term. Latour differentiates actor-network theory from models of communication that “begin with well defined movers and moving objects” (379). By contrast, actor-network theory focuses on the “world-making” activities of networks in which “what is doing the moving and what is moved have no specific homogenous *morphism*” (380). While *actor* conventionally suggests a “human intentional individual” who “extends his power” by doing something, an actant “can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action” (372–73). Since actants function in the fluid relations of networks, their agency is contextual (rather than intrinsic), the product of intersecting forces (human, environmental, technical). Their actions (like distributing information) are coconstituted with other actants rather than discrete. I take this activity to be literal, material, or perhaps material-semiotic but not solely semiotic. Latour, too, rejects the ways in which semiotic accounts of actants are limited to discursive reference.

4. According to Keating, the archivists have made every effort to replicate Anzaldúa’s system of organization within the limits of their storage capacities. They rejected certain large nontextual objects (like Anzaldúa’s altars, which are now on rotating display at the University of California, Santa Cruz) and are struggling to find space to store the marked-up books from Anzaldúa’s extensive personal library (“Archive”). Though their aim is neutrality, the archivists have helped to shape knowledge production with the catalog they created, especially its biographical narrative, and the organization of materials into folders and boxes.

5. This metaphor is particularly apt for feminists (in terms of questioning the domestic tasks that occupy many women’s time and the unnatural policing of our bodies and homes) as well as for Chicana/o studies (in terms of analyzing how shifting borders and nationalist anxiety have deemed Mexicans in the United States people out of place even when their families have resided in the same place for generations). Dirt is about border crossings.

6. These segmented circles resemble the Aztec calendar as well as the “natal charts” collected in the Anzaldúa archive. Maybe the disks were part of a ritual designed to mimic these graphic predictions.

7. This sketch is undated, but a similar one placed near it in the archive folder, "Sleeping on the Wing," is dated 24 September 1988. Of course, I don't know whether Anzaldúa or an archivist filed the two together, but the sketch I'm analyzing might have been produced around 1988.

8. This literal cutting and pasting is certainly more messy than its Microsoft counterpart, and the slips of paper frequently become detached from the whole in the archive. Indeed, many scraps were never pasted in a permanent home, and they float around loosely, unmoored, until someone writes them into a document, such as this one. It's entirely possible that slips of paper are getting lost or even being purposefully removed by visitors to the archive; they then become permanently unmoored (rather than saved on a "clipboard" as in *Microsoft Word*), and the content of the archive is thereby reduced. This is one of the ways in which the Anzaldúa papers in material form differ from any potential digital replication.

9. My essay is also influenced by Derrida's *Archive Fever*, especially his claims that "the limits, the borders, and the distinctions have been shaken by an earthquake from which no classificational concept and no implementation of the archive can be sheltered" and that "the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archiving produces as much as it records the event" (5, 17). Yet Derrida's analysis of Freud's archive focuses on the private-public binary and the "psychic archive," while my work is more invested in feminist theory, material archives, and Chicana/o theoretical frameworks.

10. Likewise, her later writings resisted identity labels ("boxes" she called them) as she developed her theory of "new tribalism." The last essay published in her lifetime, "now let us shift," begins with diabetes as a source of meaning about identity and moves away from identity politics and toward an "interplanetary new tribalism" that "step[s] outside ethnic and other labels" to discover that "identity has roots you share with all people and . . . all planetary beings" (560). This call to recognize new filiations could bridge the new and old Anzaldúas, bringing more issues (and more scholars) into the evolving field of Anzaldúan studies.

11. For a discussion of how illness (diabetes, in particular) relates to Anzaldúa's identity theories, see my *Encarnación*.

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