

## DECOLONIAL PHENOMENOLOGIES: THE LANGUAGES AND AFFECT OF IN- BETWEENNESS IN GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA'S AND JOSEFINA BÁEZ'S EARLY WORK

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This article explores the intersections between Gloria Anzaldúa's and Josefina Báez's theories of in-betweenness, as they pertain to issues of textuality and, more broadly, relationality, in their early work. In her life-long philosophical search Anzaldúa devised a phenomenology in which the metaphors of the border, borderlands, or bridges, and the concept of *nepantla* signal the place of writing in the context of coloniality, decoloniality, and migration. From her early thought, these concepts often capture not only issues of location, but also of relationality, intentionality and decolonial change. Similarly, Dominican American (Dominican York) author, director, and performance artist Josefina Báez explores the unstable spaces and temporariness of in-betweenness in the context of im/migration and colonization by centering the experience of Dominican diasporic communities and her own. Báez proposes concepts such as *dominicanish* or "bliss" as imagined, relational spaces and states that are non-territorial, fleeting, and resist the fixity of oppressive categorizations of the subject. Both authors are interested in finding a poetics that may be appropriate for such *transfrontera* spaces and personal and collective states, as well as in theorizing new practices of reading (or viewing) and writing from these spaces. This article describes those theories in the early work of these authors, and shows how, by presenting readers with unorthodox textual encounters, the *I* must enter unstable, hardly *mettable* spaces, both culturally and linguistically, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and *Dominicanish* (2000). Here the writers, as textual hosts, invite readers and audiences to engage in a phenomenology of shifting where unsettling experiences of in-betweenness and impermanence may result in decolonial transformation.

KEYWORDS: writing, phenomenology, affect, reception, borderlands, blackness, migration, hospitality, decoloniality.

**Fenomenologies decoloniales: els llenguatges i l'afecte de l'*intermundi* a l'obra primerenca de Gloria E. Anzaldúa i Josefina Báez**

Aquest article explora les interseccions entre les teories textuais de l'*intermundi* de Gloria Anzaldúa i Josefina Báez pel que fa a qüestions de textualitat i, de manera més àmplia, de relacionalitat, en els seus primers treballs. En la seva recerca filosòfica, Anzaldúa va idear una fenomenologia en què les metàfores de la frontera, les terres frontereres o els ponts i el concepte de *nepantla* assenyalen el lloc de l'escriptura en el context de la colonialitat, la decolonialitat i la

migració. Des del seu pensament primerenc, aquests conceptes solen capturar no tan sols qüestions d'ubicació sinó també de relacionalitat, intencionalitat i canvi (decolonial). De manera similar, l'autora, directora i intèrpret dominicana-nordamericana (Dominican York) Josefina Báez explora els espais inestables i la temporalitat de *l'intermundi* en el context de la immigració/migració i la colonització, centrant l'experiència de les comunitats de la diàspora dominicana i la seva pròpia. Báez proposa conceptes com *dominicanish* o "goig" com a espais relacionals i imaginats i estats que són no-territorials, fugaços i resisteixen la fixesa de les categoritzacions opressives del subjecte. Ambdues autores estan interessades a trobar poètiques que puguin ser apropiades per a aquests espais *transfrontera* i estats personals i col·lectius, així com a teoritzar noves pràctiques de lectura (o visionat) i escriptura des d'aquests espais. Aquest article examina aquestes teories en els primers treballs de les autores i mostra com, en oferir a qui llegeix trobades textuales poc ortodoxes, el "Jo" ha d'entrar en espais inestables, difícilment solubles, a *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) i *Dominicanish* (2000). Com a amfitriones textuales, les autores conviden lectors i audiència a participar en una fenomenologia del canvi en què les experiències inquietants de *l'in-betweenness* i la impermanència poden donar lloc a una transformació decolonial.

PARAULES CLAU: escriptura, fenomenologia, afecte, recepció, frontera, negritud, migració, hospitalitat, decolonialitat.

#### **Fenomenologías decoloniales: los lenguajes y el afecto del *intermundi* en la obra temprana de Gloria E. Anzaldúa y Josefina Báez**

Este artículo explora intersecciones entre las teorías de la existencia *intermundi* propuestas por Gloria Anzaldúa y Josefina Báez en lo que respecta a cuestiones de textualidad y, más ampliamente, relacionalidad en sus primeros trabajos. En su búsqueda filosófica, Anzaldúa ideó una fenomenología en la que las metáforas de la frontera, las tierras fronterizas, los puentes, o el concepto de *nepantla* marcan el lugar de la escritura en el contexto de la colonialidad, la decolonialidad y la migración. Desde sus primeras teorías, estos conceptos a menudo incluyen no solo cuestiones de ubicación, sino también de relación, intencionalidad y cambio (decolonial). De manera similar, la autora, directora y artista de performance dominicano-estadounidense (Dominican York), Josefina Báez, explora los espacios inestables y la temporalidad del intermundo en el contexto de la inmigración/migración en contexto colonial al centrarse en la experiencia de las comunidades de la diáspora dominicana y la suya propia. Báez propone conceptos como *dominicanish* o "bliss" como espacios y estados imaginados y relacionales que son no-territoriales, fugaces y resisten la fijeza de categorizaciones opresivas sobre el sujeto. Ambas autoras están interesadas en encontrar poéticas apropiadas para tales espacios *transfronterizos* y estados personales y colectivos, así como en teorizar nuevas prácticas de lectura y escritura desde dichos espacios. Este artículo describe esas teorías en sus primeros trabajos y muestra cómo, al ofrecer a los lectores encuentros textuales poco ortodoxos, el *yo* debe entrar en lugares inestables, de difícil fusión cultural y lingüística, en *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) y *Dominicanish* (2000). Aquí, las escritoras ejercen de anfitrionas textuales, invitando a los lectores y al público a experimentar una fenomenología del cambio en la que lo inquietante del inter-mundo y la impermanencia pueden dar lugar a una transformación decolonial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: escritura, fenomenología, afecto, recepción, frontera, negritud, migración, hospitalidad, decolonialidad.

## Introduction

Despite the much-celebrated “affective turn” of 21st-century literary theory, formal scholarly writing reigns uncontested as *the* form of theoretical discussion of utmost recognition, influence, and prestige in academic circles and endeavors (academic departments, syllabi, book publishing, journals, etc.). Barring a few notable exceptions, the hierarchy regarding the languages and genres that govern our exchanges on philosophy and theory remains practically uncontested throughout the Western and Western-influenced academy, with disciplines serving as dominant spaces which affirm the limits of possible exchanges, create welcoming or hostile environments to certain discourses, and sanction the languages of knowledge. Within this paradigm, the contributions of literary authors and artists whose philosophical and theoretical inquiry takes forms other than the conventional scholarly book or essay—especially those by minoritized women authors—are consistently relegated to the fringes, or effectively outside the limits of, philosophical or theoretical discourse. This is true even in fields of study that have historically made the case for the transformation or the dismantling of traditional intellectual and cultural hierarchies, such as Feminist Theory, Queer Studies, Ethnic and Decolonial Studies, Latina/x/o Studies, and even decolonial thought and affect theory.

This article proposes to address such complex web of asymmetries, with its intellectual and practical demarcations, by examining the proposals for *doing theory* offered by two foundational, late-twentieth-century works by US Latina literary authors who, I argue, *do philosophy* precisely from and about the genres typically denied sanctioning by academic and educational institutions: Chicana multi-genre author and thinker Gloria E. Anzaldúa and *DominicanYork* writer, performer, and thinker Josefina Báez. I consider, specifically, how the languages and aesthetics deployed in their early publications, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and *Dominicanish* (2000), underpin particular (yet concurrent) theories of writing that compound practical phenomenologies of writing with decolonizing potential within the United States.

At stake in the broader project is not only the recognition of decolonizing knowledges, but also the very health of both literary and philosophical inquiries, among other issues. The stark, longstanding separation between literature (i.e. creative, imaginative, fictional, autobiographical, performance writing, etc.) and formal philosophy, with its deep roots in Euro-American thought, has over the centuries generated a schism that, as more and more philosophers and theorists begin to admit,<sup>1</sup> does little service to either discipline. Amir R. Jaima, for instance, notes

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<sup>1</sup> While early phenomenologists such as Heidegger (1975) or Sartre (1969), and phenomenologists of race, such as Frantz Fanon (2008), had made the issue of philosophical *writing* central to

the dire consequences of the split when it overlooks literary authors of color as *thinkers*, which generates a double marginalization: on the one hand, their literature, as such, is read as minor theoretical discourse, if at all; on the other, due to the perceived particularity of their experience, it is often disregarded as unable to make the general, universal claims expected of theory and philosophy. Paul Ricoeur's concept of linguistic hospitality and his search for a middle expressive and hermeneutic pathway is pertinent in this regard, as it helps us think through the relationships between the languages, registers, and genres sanctioned by the established scholarly host and those articulated by the creative, immigrant or border-dwelling Other.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the exclusionary, boundary-affirming discourses of formal philosophical traditions may be inhospitable to alternative forms of thinking and impact both the circulation and the reception of those works, a marginalization which may be exacerbated in the case of work published (and unpublished!) by authors of color in the context of im/migration as is Bález's case, and in border-dwelling contexts, such as Anzaldúa's. And so this multilayered set of exclusions results in missing key opportunities for inquiry as posed by historically minoritized thinkers of language who may not necessarily be trained in continental or analytic traditions or who may choose to write in genres other than the philosophical essay.

Further, when approaching literary works by women (women-identified) writers who are also immigrants or who inhabit colonial/decolonial spaces, it is worth remembering that the enduring dichotomy philosophy/literature is congruent with the near-fixity of other hierarchical binary systems, such as those drawing gender, racial, sexual or cultural demarcations, which are often also linked to the reason/affect dyad. As Sarah Ahmed reminds us, in Western thought the idea of emotion, seen as "beneath' the faculties of thought and reason" (with the

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their work, contemporary affect theorists such as Susanne Langer (1953) or Vivian Sobchack (2004), Ahern (2019), and philosophers such as Linda M. Alcoff (2006), Amir R. Jaima, or Sara Ahmed (especially in *Living a Feminist Life*, 2017) have also centered their efforts in connecting strands and genres of philosophical thought as a crucial method to access new insight and, at times, challenge established, academic discourse.

<sup>2</sup> For an understanding of Ricoeur's proposal of ethical action, including face-to-face encounters with the Other and the possibility of justice, see *Reflections on the Just* (2007). For a fuller understanding of his concept of linguistic hospitality, see *On Translation* (2006). Here, Ricoeur explains: "Bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and of betraying two masters: this is to practice what I like to call linguistic hospitality. It is this which serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that I think resemble it: confessions, religions, are they not like languages that are foreign to one another, with their lexicon, their grammar, their rhetoric, their stylistic which we must learn in order to make our way into them?" (2006: 23).

emotional being associated with having “one’s judgement affected”), resulted in placing both emotion and women in subordinate positions, with women being “represented as [...] less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement” (2015: 3). Considering further intersections, Jaima underscores the cumulative impact of overlapping structures policing theoretical boundaries on race, gender and sexuality as “the black voice, the woman’s voice, and the queer voice” are perceived as “too mired in their subjectivity to provide insights that bear upon humanity in general” (2019: 13-14). The dichotomy also finds expression in the migrant-host binary at the core of many hospitality theories, often articulated along the phenomenological concept of the encounter between a subject or a group adopting the role of host and those considered guests as well as through the sanctioned languages deployed in such encounter.<sup>3</sup> These interrelated social and theoretical systems complicate the deconstruction of the well-established hierarchy between reason and emotion that feminisms have historically insisted on undoing. They also add further layers of complexity to our approach to the work of Latina women authors such as Báez and Anzaldúa, who seek to destabilize the very paradigms that have historically rendered the literature of women of color literature in the United States as unneeded (or unwanted) contributions to theory and philosophy. As perceived guests to the scholarly intellectual nation, their literature is often received as always-already foreign (always that of a guest or an othered interlocutor), exoticized (tropicalized), tokenized, or minimized as theory. An exception to these rigidly upheld binaries is perhaps the reception of Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s work, which is often studied nationally and transnationally as that of a unique thinker with long-range impact. Her first published solo book, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), is indeed considered a theoretical foundation in fields as diverse as Border Studies, Chicana/x Studies, Women of Color Theory, and US Third World Feminism, and is a constant inspiration for Latinx authors and thinkers in the twenty-first century. And yet, *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Anzaldúa’s other books and manuscripts continue to be kept at the threshold of formal philosophical study, and understudied for the concepts and holistic system of thought that they may contribute to both literary theory and philosophy.

But what could theory and philosophy gain if we considered that the work of these authors truly offers, as Jaima puts it, *insights that bear upon humanity*? What would we gain if we included their work in formal academic discussions and recognized the theories intrinsic to their literary fiction, memoir, or poetry, etc.?

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of hospitality as the encounter with the Other, where the realization of subjectivity itself relies on welcoming the Other (1980). Manzanos Calvo and Benito Sánchez’s (2017) work on Michaud also identifies literature as a refuge and a locus for hospitality.

What if the particularities of US Latina women's and other minoritized literatures were read as central to both American philosophy and decolonial theory, rather than outside the gates of philosophical and theoretical discourse? I propose to consider Anzaldúa's early work alongside that of Josefina Báez, a Dominican American (*DominicanYork*) author, director, performer, and thinker who also states an intention to contribute to the field of philosophy on questions such as writing, language, and hybrid cultural practices. While highly regarded in some academic and literary circles, Báez's work has received much less critical attention than Anzaldúa's as a theorist or a thinker, and is mostly studied from literary — and specifically theater/performance studies— perspectives.<sup>4</sup> I suggest reading *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) in tandem with Báez's first published book, *Dominicanish* (2000), in order to draw relevant insights regarding the languages, registers, and affectual dimensions of writing that may serve as transformational phenomenologies especially in feminist decolonial studies.

Anzaldúa and Báez are among a number of US Latina and women of color authors who, during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s attempt to bridge the divide between formal theory, literature, and political transformation through the deployment of experience-based, self-referential writing, which also contains affect-inflected thought. Contextually, their experience as witnesses of —and to different extents participants in— cultural nationalist and feminist movements' activities in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be underestimated, while, at the same time, their writings develop distinct, unorthodox textual forms and genres to address well-differentiated concepts and concerns. Many of their innovations are already present in their early work as they reexamine the aesthetics, ideologies, and methods (overall, the approach to writing) inherited from movement literature, whether it is that of Chicana/o, Nuyorican, Dominican/DominicanYork, Cuban American, or of other US Third World Feminist discourses. Thematically, both writers address questions in philosophical areas as diverse as ontology, epistemology, ethics, the philosophy of language, or phenomenology, more intentionally than any other Latinx authors publishing in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. It is no coincidence, thus, that Anzaldúa's theoretical proposals, genres, and terminologies have produced decades of critical readings, creative output, and personal and scholarly reflections in several fields of study, and that Báez's work has become increasingly attractive to

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<sup>4</sup> Practically no critical literature focuses on the philosophical insights that her writing suggests or her theories on writing, performance, and other matters. For critical studies regarding identity, nationalism and performance in Báez's work see, for instance, Lorgia García Peña (2008, 2016, and 2022), Durán Almarza (2010), or Florencia Cornet (2020).

academic readers (students and scholars)<sup>5</sup> and beings to be treated as that of a thinker.

But what exactly are Báez and Anzaldúa theorizing about in their works? And what might their “philosophies” of language and writing contribute to our approach to, and our own writing in, fields such as feminist, queer, or decolonial studies? With theoretical interests wide-spanning and diverse, their concepts and ideas do not align neatly with established branches of philosophy or any particular schools of thought. In fact, they often write *against* formal schools and legacies and their concern with finding philosophical affinities and adequate ways to convey their theories, concepts, and methodologies is ongoing. In the sections below I identify some of the particular questions that Anzaldúa and Báez raise through the recurrence of their ideas on, and practices of, writing, which are visible in their early works. I pay close attention to their approach to issues of language, which in Ricœur’s terms constitutes “the first boundary of the literary object” (2006: 442) and, therefore, the first potential demarcation of exclusions and inclusions. I analyze the authors’ innovative, disruptive communicative forms (including languages, dialects, genres, registers) as well as their discussions on how those forms align with their conceptual vocabularies of in-betweenness, which challenge both established scholarly writing and other expressions in the cultural, linguistic, and intellectual orders. I look into their proposals for new hybrid (mestiza or creole) vocabularies and syntaxes as quotidian, embodied forms of resistance emerging from an acute awareness of the affect and power of the text as encounter. I approach these questions on communication through the lens of phenomenology, and the text as relational meaning-making (i.e. *intentional*)<sup>6</sup> space, which I find particularly enlightening in discussions of decolonial, feminist theory, and in analyzing literary encounters around *mestizaje*, blackness, and/or *afrolatinidad*. I also keep in mind that these authors must write outside of academic institutions, which they often find devoid of affect, spirit, and corporality, as Báez’s lines remind us (“I did not see no class, department,/major, minor, sororities, fraternities/**groovin’ with soul**”, 34).<sup>7</sup> I note how, while displaying distinct approaches to, and notions on, writing, both Báez and Anzaldúa conceive of the moment of

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<sup>5</sup> In February of 2023 Columbia University announced the acquisition of the author’s archive as part of its Latino Arts and Activisms Collections: <<https://neighbors.columbia.edu/news/josefina-baez-dominican-york-icon-whose-archive-now-housed-columbia-university>>.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term “intentionality” as is typically used in phenomenology, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s definition as “the invisible thread that connects humans to their surroundings meaningfully, whether they are conscious of that connection or not” (Freeman and Vagle, 2009: 3; Vagle, 2014: 27).

<sup>7</sup> All emphases are reproduced as per the original.

reception as a transformative one with the capacity to prompt new becomings and new intentionalities beyond the scholarly environment.

Drawing then from both authors' own persistent interests in philosophical thought from the threshold of and through the disruption of scholarly discourses alike, my concern centers on their efforts to understand and practice new languages for theoretical writing as inclusive vessels of creativity where personal, affectual experience does *have a bearing on humanity* and where hybrid forms expression allow for diverse readers to part-take in philosophical discussion. Here I also borrow from hospitality and affect theorists to observe how works of literature may enact writing as an affective and welcoming space and may generate moments of intensity steeped in a series of cultural and linguistic layers or sedimentations that allow the reader to "dwell" in the text differently.<sup>8</sup> Some key ideas of Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) particularly shape my considerations of the notion of intersubjective, affective encounters through and within language, and my reading of the rhetoric of separation/inclusion in the work of these Latina authors. My method also draws from hybrid, flexible approaches to both literary criticism and philosophy, which do not pit one discipline against the other. I am inspired by "reflective" literary theorists such as Rita Felski (2009) or Eve K. Sedgwick (2003), whose rejection of "suspicious" or "paranoid" readings implies recognizing our own attachments and affective style, which may allow us to shed deep-seated conjectures on literature as being inevitably "prone" to emotions that hinder the ability to develop thought, as well as on emotion as an undesirable quality for a thinker or a critic. I am also encouraged by recent feminist philosophical initiatives, such as Ashby Butnor And Jennifer Mcweeny's volume, *Feminist Comparative Methodology: Performing Philosophy Differently*, with its focus on philosophical traditions of liberation, and the work of other "unruly" philosophers attempting to decolonize academia from within.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In their essay "An Inventory of Shimmers", Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg offer the following illuminating description/definition of affect, which guides my discussion and is reflected in the literary works at hand: "affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body [...], in the resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds [...]. Affect [...] is the name we give to those forces [...] that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension [...]" (2010: 1).

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the resistant writing of Maria Lugones's *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (2003), the poetical and rebellious style and content in Cleila O. Rodríguez's *Decolonizing Academia: Poverty, Oppression and Pain* (2018) and other writings, Norma E. Cantú's *sentipensante* transdisciplinary work (as literary author, folklorist, teacher, mentor, institution-builder and transformer), Chandra T. Mohanty's foundational transnational decolonial feminist publications and her work with the Decolonizing Knowledge collective, or Lorgia García Peña's work, particularly her recent *Community as Rebellion: A*



All in all, the ideas of these critics and thinkers and the tools of phenomenology help me consider the authors' awareness of writing as a dynamic exchange that captures our being-in-relation (with a focus on colonial-decolonial intersubjective relations),<sup>10</sup> and better describe their proposals for theories of textuality where writing and reading are embodied, sentient practices and spaces situated in the "real world". These "real world" implications are precisely at the core of fields of inquiry, such as feminist, queer, or decolonial studies, for which I hope this in-tandem study will be useful, as we develop modes of writing theory and criticism that better align with the fields' overall goals of liberatory and decolonial transformation.

### **Anzaldúa and Báez, Phenomenologists?**

My interest in studying the work of Anzaldúa and Báez through the lens of phenomenology begs a word on the adequacy of this approach, as neither author claims to be a phenomenologist, or takes an active part in formal philosophical discussions.<sup>11</sup> What elements can we find in their early works that merit such reading? What relevant insights might we draw? Báez's and Anzaldúa's formal and thematic experimentation at a number of levels is a first reason to consider studying their theories as phenomenologies. In consonance with the rhetoric of the culturalist and feminist movements, they appear intent on making us experience textuality in disruptive, transformative ways. As the writings of early phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty or Levinas, *Borderlands/ La Frontera* and *Dominicanish* are "undisciplined" works that make the processes and languages of knowledge and philosophy a topic of explicit contention. In fact, three different, interlocking elements are present in both books —as well as in earlier published

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*Syllabus for Surviving Academia as a Woman of Color* (2022), published with the independent, non-profit Haymarket Books, which lays bare the abuses of academic establishments, to name just a few relevant interlocutors.

<sup>10</sup> I purposefully do not include here the theories of "hospitality from below" by Gayatri Spivak because her terminology may appear not only misleading, but also counter to the argument this article makes regarding intellectual and epistemic hierarchies. While acknowledging them, a theoretical framework that states the below/above binary would only reify those positions and is not apt to analyze the focus on in-betweenness wrought in the writings of Anzaldúa and Báez.

<sup>11</sup> Anzaldúa often speaks of herself as a theorist and as a shaman who practices the powerful art of writing. See, for instance, "Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink" (1987), or "Unfinished Notes on a Writing Process" (2014), where she sees her craft as one serving to connect the shores of dream world/imagination and reality. Báez describes herself on her website as "Storyteller, ArteSana, performer, writer, theatre director, educator, devotee. Founder and director of Latinarte/Ay Ombe Theatre (April 1986). Alchemist of artistic/creative life process, Performance Autology" (<[www.josefinabaez.com/](http://www.josefinabaez.com/)>).

and archival work— which lie at the intersection of philosophical, affectual concerns,<sup>12</sup> and writing: 1) a palpable interest in abstract thought accompanied by special attention to *research* through diverse philosophical, historical, and spiritual sources; 2) a visible awareness of reading and writing (and performance) as embodied, affective, practices with potential for decolonizing, liberatory change; and 3) an ongoing inquiry into the processes, methodologies, languages, and genres of writing (or performing and other creative practices) that may result in transformative textual encounters (consider, for instance, Chapter 3 of *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, “Entering Into the Serpent”, where dream and goddesses drive the writing). In philosophical terms, these concerns relate to the established areas of aesthetics, ontology, metaphysics, and ethics,<sup>13</sup> but also phenomenology, and specifically, to the phenomenology of writing as a site of consciousness and relationality. They do so in the “real” contexts of, and in reference to, border dwelling and migration, in/hospitable cultural spaces, which are essential issues in US decolonial studies, and—in the case of Anzaldúa— explicitly also in the fields of queer and feminist studies.

Among the feminist philosophers applying phenomenology to contemporary decolonial, feminist, and/or queer thought, Ahmed may be the most eloquent. As she suggests, its critical tools assist us in theorizing key aspects in the studies of minoritized groups, since it addresses questions pertaining to lived experience in the body, relationality, communication and its hierarchies, and intentionality—that is, relational meaning-making grounded in bodily experience (Ahmed, 2006: 2). In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) she explores, for instance, the phenomenological concept of *orientation* (i.e. how our consciousness is always directed at or towards something) as inextricably and historically linked to issues of writing (famously deployed in discussions on the philosopher’s body orientated towards a desk). As she notes, *orientation* and other related terms help us think through “the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated or habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (2). Applying a phenomenological concept such as this to our reading of Báez and Anzaldúa is productive, as they

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<sup>12</sup> It falls beyond the scope of this article to analyze the different strains of Affect Theory and to attempt to align our authors with any of them in particular. And yet, notions drawn from the interdisciplinary Affect Theory (i.e. Raymond Williams’ “structure of feeling”, Walter Benjamin’s “mimetic faculty”, or Roland Barthes concept of “the neutral”) may be useful in future readings to discuss the ideas proposed by Anzaldúa and/or Báez as concomitant with this contemporary field.

<sup>13</sup> It is also worth considering here AnaLouise Keating’s detailed discussions on the genesis and implications of key terms and theories throughout the Anzaldúan archive, including borderlands, el cenote, conocimiento, la facultad, etc., which she approaches primarily from ontological and epistemological perspectives in her recent *The Anzaldúan Theory Handbook*.

speak of the interconnectedness between textuality and quotidian experience, with writing understood as a relational, embodied meaning-making phenomenon and a site where literary and critical hierarchies may be upended. For Anzaldúa, “Writing Is a Sensuous Act” (93) and Báez’s protagonist has “the **vocabulary found in wet tongues**” (33). Foregrounding the world of corporeal and affectual otherness, in-betweenness, liminality, or belonging, their work is phenomenological as far as it addresses issues of intentionality, habit, affect, embodied relationality, and materiality. This approach may be useful in detangling the problem of particularity vs. theory posed above, as our authors seem to reconcile—or rather integrate—relevant aspects of their discrete positionalities and experiences (i.e. women of color in the United States, or (im)migrant women, inhabitants of in-between cultural and linguistic spaces, diasporas and borderlands), with the expected “globalness” of philosophy and theory. All in all, then, Anzaldúa’s and Báez’s phenomenologies of writing, articulated between tongues, genres, and nations, pose key questions in long-held discussions regarding embodied experience and decoloniality at all three levels—language, literature, and nationality.

Thus, while acknowledging that neither author is a conventional (nor certainly Western) phenomenologist, reading their work through a phenomenological lens at the intersection of decolonial and feminist studies is useful to describe their philosophies as laid out in the genres and languages that they intently craft and their proposals for a new, transformational relationship to text and theory, a relationship which deeply questions cultural and epistemological hierarchies established by the guest/host dichotomies of colonial and migratory processes. Below I discuss both authors’ first publications paying particular attention to the intricate connections that they establish between experiences of liminality and in-betweenness and writing as a relational, embodied decolonial practice. I consider how their reflections, hybrid languages, and formal experimentation lay out new concepts on writing, reception, and social transformation through non-confirming, transgressive texts.

### **Writing (Ex)Changes: The Tongues and Aesthetics of Liberatory In-betweenness**

In an essay in which she reflects on her experience in the Middle East, the poet, critic, and artist Jill Magi notes: “[l]iving in a place that does not require blending or even performances of blending enables me to see, more clearly than before, how ideas of equality in the States mask policies that functionally instruct: ‘believe in

our version of whiteness or do not be at all”<sup>14</sup> Magi’s reflection on conditioned belonging in the US inevitably resonates with the tensions highlighted by hospitality theorists such as Derrida, who interrogates the Levinasian notion of infinite hospitality, since the subject’s welcoming of the other is constantly challenged in the public arena by discourses on borders and the state.<sup>15</sup> Magi notes, however, that in the US welcome and belonging are predicated not only upon the adoption of the dominant language and culture, but also on the acceptance of a racial paradigm where whiteness reigns most prestigious above all other racial and cultural demarcations. Her reflection on compulsory “performances of blending” also runs parallel to the questionings that both *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Dominicanish* perform at the level of language, race, aesthetics, and their ideas on how resistance to whiteness functions as both a practice and a philosophy of writing.

Báez and Anzaldúa situate their self-referential speakers as late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Latina of color (a border-born and border-raised Chicana mestiza and a Black Dominican immigrant woman in New York, respectively) face-to-face with the languages and motions of whiteness, the limits of belonging that Magi alludes to. As women of color aware of centuries of colonization, forced assimilation, and migration, rather than seeking the congealing of any pan-American, US American, or Latinx American cultural and linguistic space, their autobiographical protagonists reject compulsory blending into the proverbial American pot as a passport to social, intellectual, and cultural belonging. Geographically, they exist on the US-Mexico borderlands or in New York City in ever-changing, unmeltable, and intersectional locales vis-à-vis the centers of US mainstream culture of fixity, *straightness*, and whiteness, and educational progress. From there, they question the establishment of the hostile physical or metaphorical lines that create limits and diasporic regions within (or at the margins of) the nation. From there also both protagonists transform the affect of rejection into the infinite possibility of creation through new languages and cultures, and paradigm shifts. Anzaldúa describes it like this in Chapter 7, “La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness”:

As a *mestiza* I have no country [...] (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me [...]). I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-

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<sup>14</sup> Magi’s observation refers to the United Arab Emirates, specifically, where she explains, “guest workers from across the Islamic world make [it] a pan-Islamic place. Yet in that fellowship there is not necessarily assimilation” (2019).

<sup>15</sup> For an illuminating commentary on Derrida’s ideas and limitations on the notion of hospitality and the state, see Judith Still’s *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (2010).

Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (102-3)

Anzaldúa's belief in the possibilities of creating new cultural worlds relies on our ability to tell stories and theorize through new symbolic languages and systems from decolonial, fesminist, queer, non-white, uneasy convivial spaces. Báez also seeks to inscribe and theorize new complex, intimate, social, cultural, and racial experiences into theory in *Dominicanish* by generating hybrid languages, metaphors, and textual experiences grounded in quotidian reality. Through personal, innovative vocabularies, thus, they both conceptualize and incorporate notions of resistant in-betweenness adequate to their desire for antiracist, decolonial change through writing. Let's first pay attention below to how they perform this undoing through language itself.

In her life-long philosophical search, Anzaldúa devised an ever-evolving theory in which metaphors of the border, borderlands, or bridges, as well as the concept of *nepantla*, signal existential spaces of hybridity and non-whiteness, in which the everyday practice of writing is performed amidst pressures to conform to certain languages and registers by creating "a new language—a language of the Borderlands" (20), which is in a dynamic, contradictory relationship of belonging and non-belonging. Her ongoing conceptualization of these liminal sites of *mestizaje* captures not only a particular positionality, but also shifting ideas on writing, reading, speaking, and other forms of embodied and linguistic relationality. Josefina Báez, on the other hand, explores the unstable spaces and temporariness of in-between states in the context of im/migration and education in the inner city, intertwined with processes of colonization and liminality throughout her work, centering mostly on the specificity of daily vocabularies and cadences of Dominican diasporic communities and their collective—and her personal—history of linguistic re-creation and resistance. Báez proposes terms such as *dominicanish*, *el Nié*, and "bliss" as non-territorial concepts that may capture experiential and relational experiences of creolization in the US, rejecting the fixity of oppressive categorizations imposed on the black, immigrant woman subject. Both authors converge, however, in their interest in theorizing shifting, liminal spaces and inter-mundi phenomena and conditions through languages and genres that convey uneasy forms of inhabitation in relation to compulsory, colonial whiteness.<sup>16</sup> Inherent and

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<sup>16</sup> My brief close reading of Báez's performance text *Dominicanish* here is influenced by my reading and experience of her later work, *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* as a viewer and reader. The close reading of *Borderlands/La frontera* is similarly guided by Anzaldúa's subsequent writing, especially the posthumously published volume *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo oscuro* (2015) which

often addressed in both of their works are, thus, the linguistic, cultural, and political presence and the colonial and neocolonial power that the Anglophone United States has exerted over the Caribbean and its im/migrants, and over what today is the US-Mexico borderlands and its im/migrants, through language. Consequently, the authors' formal choices almost inevitably capture the tensions between dominant discourses and works of multilingualism and cultural and linguistic hybridity, which are typically kept outside, or at the threshold of both white culture and knowledge-sanctioning institutions. The response in both cases is the exploration of literary and conceptual in-betweenness through language.

The “unruly” formal experimentation linked to liberatory, resistant tongues and literary vocabularies in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Dominicanish* must be revisited, then, from a philosophical, phenomenological perspective. While focusing on very different personal and collective experiences and deploying disparate hybrid genres, both books not only lay bare the effects of coloniality in the everyday reality of linguistic and literary normativity, but also offer concepts and opportunities for decolonial meaning-making. As noted, partly in consonance with the antiassimilationist and emancipatory stance of the 1980s cultural nationalist and feminist movements and post-movements,<sup>17</sup> Báez's and Anzaldúa's rhetoric

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sheds light on how some of her phenomenological concerns evolve, and my visit to her archive in Austin, TX. I thus read the early texts vis-à-vis other work by the authors, which is more clearly methodological and abstract in nature. Among the works by Anzaldúa that we might describe as more theoretical in regards to reading and writing (but also highly hybrid and poetic), is the posthumously published *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo oscuro*, as well as lesser known, archival pieces preceding, and the final versions of writings, such as “The Woman Who Reads (Me)” (1997) or “Queer Conocimiento” (2000). In Josefina Báez's *oeuvre*, theory tends to be woven, succinctly, into poetic performance texts, especially in *Comrade Bliss Ain't Playing* (published in 2008; in composition since the mid-1990s). Quite often, reflections on method are threaded in both early texts, with theories being articulated in poetic ways which disrupt conventional methods and languages of theory, thus rendering the distinction between creative and methodology work an artificial taxonomy.

<sup>17</sup> In terms of aesthetic legacies and approaches to writing, it is worth noting that, albeit attempting to participate to very different degrees, both Báez and Anzaldúa write contemporaneously to cultural nationalist movements through the 1970s and 1980s. They are certainly in dialogue with the Chicano/a and the Nuyorican movements, respectively, primarily as writers, but also as a speaker in the case of Anzaldúa, and in the case of Báez, as a performance artist. Both authors' aesthetics and language, however, deviate purposefully from both mainstream rhetoric and genres of cultural nationalism—which sets them apart from most of their contemporaneous Latina/o/x authors—as well as, of course, from established forms of scholarly theory and philosophy. Both *Dominicanish* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* are more experimental and unorthodox than most movement and post-movement publications, reflecting their acute theoretical searches.

and registers purposefully resist established genres, grammars, and scholastic vocabularies. Both authors favor vernacular or “everyday poetics” and avoid the formalities of scholarly language, but they also coincide in re-examining movement rhetoric and an array of approaches to writing, coupled with efforts to expand the legacies, concepts, and forms governing Latinx literature at the time. They do so in part by engaging in discourses inherited from mainstream and white intellectual traditions and non-white and non-western legacies. This is clearly reflected, for instance, in Báez’s mocking repetition of the teaching prompt “repeat after me” throughout her book, while simultaneously seeking to process and overcome the tensions of English language learning. In Anzaldúa, as she acknowledges in “On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*”,<sup>18</sup> her use of, in her words, “mestiza style” and vernacular sources are combined with “the knowledges and histories of the white cultures, of other ethnic cultures” in order to “be able to deal with certain theories, to be able to philosophize” (189). Báez also notes her purposeful “[e]clectic use of symbols, times, and places/where the past, present, and future happen in the here today now/com fortable comfor table. comfort able” (sic. 6)<sup>19</sup> through which she is able to make sense of specific experiences of migration living in the instability of the ever-changing present. Through diverging symbolic systems and aesthetics, thus, the authors engage in hybrid explorations of literary and linguistic mixing that allow for the coding of complex theories of writing in the context of in-betweenness and liminality.

In fact, the imbrication of aesthetics, genre, affect, and phenomenological inquiry is nowhere more visible than in the use of language and the expression deployed by the authors’ autobiographical speakers. At the center of *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Dominicanish* are the habitual, intimate, relational acts of speaking, writing, teaching, reading (and dancing, in Báez’s case) as meaning-making, affective exchanges, which are key to understanding questions of decolonial intentionality and change. Anzaldúa’s self-referential “I”, transformed into the *new mestiza*, and Báez’s disruptive and multi-vocal “I” growing up and speaking *Dominicanish* consistently use hybrid, resistant, and rebellious vocabularies, registers, and grammars. They conscientiously code-switch and work on words to create mixed terms, cadences, and ultimately new *languages* that may aptly inscribe their everydayness and articulate the authors’ philosophies of textuality. Their specific forms of hybridity include language mixing, neologisms, and blended genealogies, among other forms of resistance to compulsory English-language monolingualism. In

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<sup>18</sup> This piece, formerly a talk delivered by Anzaldúa at Pomono College in 1991 was revised by the author later and posthumously published in *The Anzaldúa Reader* in 2009.

<sup>19</sup> This quotation corresponds to the book’s English-language opening note (or preface) titled “In inglis”, where Báez refers to the different locations that her character inhabits.

*Dominicanish* the processes of embodied rupture and reassemblage often take place through ongoing grammatical disruption, focus on repetition, metalinguistic play, and mixed dialectal and vernacular performance codes and movements, with references ranging from swing or basketball. The work's very title affirms linguistic blending by affirming a Dominican creole of sorts ("**chewing English / and spitting Spanish**", 49). As I reflect in an earlier, non-academic publication,<sup>20</sup> the work plays with precise forms of Spanglish, which include dialects and registers of Spanish and of English learned in the Dominican Republic and New York City barrios, home to immigrant, Black, Latinx and other minoritized city dwellers, but also on TV, at home, or at school. Importantly, the book constitutes the first instance in which the blended urban vernacular of Dominican immigrants to New York (*dominicanyorks*) is given a name in print literature. "Dominicanish" is the dialect of the corner bodegas of Washington Heights, of barbershops and salons, hardware stores, the hand-written adds of store windows, where the island's Spanish is mixed with the city's "Englishes", and especially its Black vocabularies, phrasings, and cadences resisting pressures from white culture and formal parlance. Particularly illustrative is the scene where the author-as-child protagonist of *Dominicanish* expresses, in a succinct montage of sorts, her resistance to the tortuous process of learning English, the imposed language of the colonial metropole:

No way I will not put my mouth like that  
 No way jamás ni never no way  
**Gosh** to pronounce one little phrase one must  
 become another person with the mouth all  
 twisted Yo no voy a poner la boca así como  
 un guante

An' da' si (22)

With her fragmented, syncopated, code-switching tirade (concluding with Bález's version of "and that's it"), the passage inscribes the clunky, uncomfortable, embodied process of learning formal English while refusing to give in to the pressure to adopt it as an apt expressive form for the immigrant Dominican girl, who will rather learn the English of the Isley Brothers and their "[d]iscos del alma con afro" (26). The scene casts language learning as an affective, embodied process and, as Danny Méndez observes, "an emotional code [...] —just as an emotional code attaches to the movements expressive of disgust or desire" (2017: 157). Méndez also highlights the bodily gestures or codes at other moments of the performance text, which accompany the recognition of bias and simultaneously reject

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<sup>20</sup> See "Las casas de Josefina Bález" (<[www.zendalibros.com/las-casas-de-josefina-baez/](http://www.zendalibros.com/las-casas-de-josefina-baez/)>).



assimilation to the “crooked city” (a phrase used by Báez later in the piece) “with a crooked face appropriate to the crooked and crooked-making English she is learning to speak” (157). This rejection of the racist, exclusionary ethics of coloniality and of the physical and oral codes of the host city signals that, culturally, the unnamed girl will grow not towards acculturation, but towards the messy, rich, resistant hybridity of the *dominicanyork*, or as Méndez suggests, towards *creolization* and later towards the integration of other codes such as that of the Indian ragas (37). This cultural resistance and almost stubbornness to inhabit the in-betweenness and expand to infinite inclusion gives way to a new expressive home for the speaker. It also reflects Báez’s multiple and hybrid “chosen geography, La Romana, New York, and India”, which as she states in her Spanish-language preface (“Pikin epanis”), “me otorga una infinidad de estímulos constantes y variados” (6-7). *Dominicanish* thus —with its publication in 2000 with performances in multiple countries between 1999 and 2009—<sup>21</sup> provides the author, readers, and audiences with a new language with which to name, reconfigure, and articulate Black Caribbean diasporic urban experiences, the in-betweens of migratory life, the language and home of constant openness and becoming. This is conjured up in the title, *Dominicanish*, which also alludes to lack of purity and correctness, as well of completion or finality, motion, and continual change (both encrypted in the ending “-ish”). Moreover, the rootedness of Báez writing practices in the disruptions of ordinary embodied language inscribes the fissures and suturing of the corporeal, everyday acts of speaking and writing, the quotidian reality of immigration and constant movement, with its lack of cultural continuity. The moments of cultural and linguistic discomfort of *Dominicanish* are thus transformed into moments of possibility through the very writing of this text —the possibility not only of “letting go of a homogeneous conception of *dominicanidad* [...]” as Méndez notes (2007: 157), but also of continually becoming other, of always dwelling in such becoming, in the in-betweenness of multiple, simultaneous locations and languages. The in-betweenness of being and speaking *Dominicanish* allows Báez, in her own words in “Pikin epanis”, to remain “viva, cambiante, llena de contradicciones y posibilidades, estoy en camino a la casa de lo constante” (7). And in this “house of the constant” —free from both the constraints of anglophone educational institutions and of narrow conceptualizations and emotions of Dominican nationalism and belonging— lies the present of rupture and the liberation —in the personal and cultural acts of creolization and decolonization in *Dominicanish*.

The awkward, subversive juxtaposition of codes —both linguistic and symbolic— of *Dominicanish* mirrors the unstable locale of in-betweenness and the

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<sup>21</sup> First performance of *Dominicanish* in 1999 is available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpFY7GM0WGU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpFY7GM0WGU).

ensuing uncomfortable relationship with language (and genre) that *Borderlands/La Frontera* both captures and theorizes. Here reflections on language as a series of embodied gestures also lead to the development of new concepts on the role of speaking (and also writing) in the context of hostile cultural thresholds and in the context of colonial hostility. The oft-quoted listing of the languages spoken by the Texan Chicana in Chapter 5, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”, and their use throughout her work explain the complex linguistic choices that permeate the Anzaldúan archive and *Borderlands* in particular. Her list of the “languages” (her word) that border Chicanos/as speak at the time reads:

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) (77)

The specificity and diversity contained in Anzaldúa’s list are a concrete reminder of her indomitable use of the languages of in-betweenness—the very matter of her embodied experience of language and textuality. The contentious relationship with monolingual discourses appears in this chapter also as a series of bodily inscriptions: the dentist who complains about the autobiographical speaker’s unruly (physical) tongue, the ruler used by the Anglo teacher to hit the child’s knuckles when speaking Spanish, the speech class required for Chicanos/as at Pan American University, and the more metaphorical desire of Spanish speakers who “nos quieren poner candados en la boca” and “hold us back with their bag of reglas de academia” (76). These experiences lead Anzaldúa to speak of the enforcement of monolingualism as “linguistic terrorism”, as it has historically generated fears and a sense of illegitimacy to speakers of Chicano English or Chicano Spanish vis-à-vis mainstream American and Spanish-speaking cultures: “[w]e are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*” (80). As in *Dominicanish*, the emphasis on the corporeal dimensions of language mixing here functions as both testimony and memory, and as a metaphor for the sociopolitical pressures of white acculturation under conditions of coloniality, where control of gender, sexual, and racial boundaries is intensified. The context, in this case, is not the “crooked city” where crooked police watch and abuse black and immigrant communities, but the usurped and also hyper-patrolled geography of the US-Mexico borderlands, and again, the educational or

academic institutions that serve as structures of repression pressuring the speaker's tongue to conform.

More explicit and explicative than Báez's syncopated tirades, Anzaldúa's exploration of the non-normative languages that may aptly convey cultural and racial *mestizaje* in her literary text (as well as her gender and sexual in-betweenness) is theorized through elaborate reflections on affect.<sup>22</sup> Also in Chapter 5 she states, "if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language"; and vows to "no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing" (81) by having her forms of expression suppressed. Further, both experiences of linguistic and sexual expression are inextricably linked for her as bodily phenomena. This includes her own community's norms, as she renders it in the prose poem "Cihuatllyotl, Woman Alone": "Raza father mother church [...] as I grew you hacked away the pieces of me that were different attached your tentacles to my face and breasts put a lock between my legs" (195).<sup>23</sup> The poem, punctuated by blank spaces, creates crevices or "holes" between words, as if to visualize the silences and cracks within culture and self, its form reflecting the fissures and the quelling that the words allude to. Then, in opposition to all censoring and limitations—in Anzaldúa's corporeal metaphor, or "mutilations"—, the poem shows a particular awareness not only of the affective impact, but also the potential for personal and social transformation, inherent in the embodiment of rebellious language. Through writing, the poet fashions a new being of personal legacies and vocabularies: "I am fully formed, carved by the hands of the ancients, drenched with the stench of today's headlines. But my own hands whittle the final work me" (195).

### Guests and Hosts: Race, Genre, and the Academy

In her essay "On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*" Anzaldúa states that her purpose in this work was to produce knowledge and to philosophize, which as a mestiza lesbian she must do against educational institutions or those "producers of knowledge" who are middle- and upper-class white people—those with power in the universities, science establishments, and publishing and art houses" (188). In this context, writing—and specifically writing theory—is particularly healing for Anzaldúa as it incorporates the personal vernacular, the author's own modes of code-switching, and even forms of composition that "push against the boundaries of what's accepted and traditional" (189). Her theoretical writing counters both the ideas and the forms practiced by "those who produce

<sup>22</sup> For discussion on the relationship between mixed language and mixed genre in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, see, for instance, Garza (2003) and Henley (1993).

<sup>23</sup> The prose poem lends its title to Part IV of "Un agitado viento, Ehécatl, the Wind", *Borderlands/La Frontera*'s poetry section.

the theories and books that we read” as part of the canon (188). But more importantly, finding a personal way to philosophize is described in *Borderlands/La Frontera* truly as a matter of physical, spiritual, and intellectual survival for the Chicana, mestiza, queer theorist, both vis-à-vis Chicano/a patriarchal culture (referred to as “Chicano malestream”)<sup>24</sup> and vis-à-vis white academic culture.

As she develops her thinking, becomes more published, and advances her formal studies and her system of thought, Anzaldúa attempts to make specific interventions in scholarly environments through essays, poetry, short stories, method writing, guest talks, classes, and workshops. The academy was, in fact, the institution that Anzaldúa held the closest and most contentious relationship with throughout her adult life, always from an uneasy positioning. Sustaining and nurturing a personal theoretical voice is an all-encompassing effort for her, for instance, as she writes her two unfinished Ph.D. dissertations and carries out multiple teaching jobs. The poem, “that dark shining thing”, found in the fourth part of “Ehécatl/ Un agitado viento” of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, already spoke of her harrowing sense of foreignness in university circles, even among those who she might have expected to be allies:

Colored, poor white, latent queer  
 passing for white  
 seething with hatred, anger  
 [...]

I am the only round face,  
 Indian-beaked, off-colored  
 In the faculty lineup, the workshop, the panel  
 And reckless enough to take you on.  
 I am the flesh you dig your fingernails into  
 mine the hand you chop off while still clinging to it  
 the face spewed with your vomit  
 I risk your sanity and mine. (193)

Thus the poem captures disturbing moments of enmity within the academy, but also how, in the face of such violence, Anzaldúa chooses to be “reckless enough” to sustain a theoretical voice of her own. The strenuous effort of constantly having to serve as a bridge between cultures, between races, between the activist and the academic world, informs her choices of language and register, inscribing moments of fear and courage, as the speaker is left with the sense of a

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<sup>24</sup> See “On Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*” (189).

fleshy, dark truth of shunned difference, that “numinous thing” of racism and rejection that she must overcome. To capture these affective dimensions of intellectual recognition or lack thereof, Anzaldúa’s images of the bodily and psychic pain provoked by tokenization and rejection of the only Chicana lesbian voice in multiple academic settings conjures up the harshness of the institution and the fear and disgust generated by the schisms existing between intellectual castes based on race, as well as between the creative and the theoretical. In the decades that followed, Anzaldúa continued to develop her theoretical writing (always seeking a connection to political and personal transformation) precisely by exploiting the possibilities of the eight border languages listed in *Borderlands* (and those of Nahuatl). Rather than suppressing her original dialects, she allows these terms and their symbolic dimensions to guide her evolving philosophy. Specifically, the imaginaries associated with hybridity captured by terms such as “*pochó*”, “*nepantla*”, “*nos/otros*”, “*naguala*”, or “*Coatlicue*”, will become key, complex concepts in her system of thought and writing, centered on the power of in-betweenness. As she explains regarding her process, she develops a practical phenomenological method of writing that is “elliptical, spiraling” texts that “start with a theme, a figure, a symbol, and then that symbol becomes a motif and gets maybe hinted at in another chapter and then explored further in another chapter [...]” (189). All along, she will write her concepts apart from scholarly genres, registers, and institutions, composing her texts word by word both contra, and in dialog with, established discursive currents, and well aware of the possible impact of her texts on academic readers.<sup>25</sup>

Anzaldúa’s work on language and code-switching in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, thus, clearly goes beyond dialectal choices and points towards a wholesome decolonial phenomenology of reading and writing, especially as it concerns the writing of philosophical ideas. Writing for her is a constant aesthetic effort with key relational implications.<sup>26</sup> As she explains regarding the process of writing *Borderlands*, “I jerk the reader around by also code-switching genre [...] and “[h]opefully when you read the book the poems become integrated with the essays [...] The reader has to put it all together” (190). As a phenomenological experience, reading the writing of in-betweenness must also follow the motions and emotions of border-dwelling, of constant elision, and shifting.<sup>27</sup> And in *Borderlands/La Frontera*

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<sup>25</sup> For a further reflection on affect in academic environments, see Megan Watkin’s “Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect” (2010), where she discusses Spinoza’s distinction between *affectus* and *affectio* (the force and the impact of affect, respectively) and analyzes the impact of interactions between students and teachers.

<sup>26</sup> For further discussion on Anzaldúa’s usage of relationality, see Zaytoun (2005).

<sup>27</sup> For further discussion on Anzaldúa’s methodology of shifting, see Lara-Bonilla (2019).

this urge to shift implies a change in consciousness, interpreting ourselves and the world anew, and transforming our relationship with textuality and theory into a nuanced, decolonial form of *mestizaje*.<sup>28</sup> In fact, from this publication (1987) to her posthumously published dissertation/book *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), to her edited anthologies and a myriad of archival texts, Anzaldúa's theoretical discussions on writing are inseparably linked to reflections on decolonial relationality from and within in-between spaces such as the *borderlands* or *nepantla*, on writing as an embodied, quotidian, relational, and historically situated practice. This place of ambiguities, which is neither fully conscious nor fully unconscious, is the generative space that *Borderlands/La Frontera* proposes for the writer/creative, but also for the personal and political transformation of the engaged reader. This new textual home assumes the relational nature of theory and puts forth the phenomenological intent of inscribing the embodied experience of in-betweenness in order to make decolonial meaning in dialogue.

As Anzaldúa's, Báez's phenomenology of writing is also linked, inevitably, to reading and reception in cultural and intellectual homes outside the academy. An equally generative, paradoxical, and uncertain terrain of shifting and relational meaning-making undergirds the written text and the performance of

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<sup>28</sup> The imperative to shift our approach to writing and reception is even more prominent in Anzaldúa's texts written approximately in the last decade of her life, including the manuscript of the posthumously published *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*. Here Anzaldúa herself has shifted her language and attention from the notion of *borderlands* to that of *nepantla*, from the power of theorizing identity and subjectivity as a form of consciousness to articulating a new phenomenology—a personal decolonial embodied process involving constant change, and transformation, relationality, and communication, involving dreaming, imagining, feeling, writing, meditation, taking care of mental and physical health, doing, etc. Zooming in on specific personal and collective daily experiences, she offers the concept of *nepantla* as a relational space that is generative and transformative on several planes: as a form of intentionality, in terms of the writing process, as a trigger of political awareness, and ultimately as alteration of reality, as the subtitle of *Light in the Dark* suggest. Anzaldúa explains the relationship between *nepantla* and changes in awareness as follows:

Nepantla is the threshold of transformation [...] that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another; when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another; when traveling from the present identity to a new identity [...]. En este lugar entre medio [...], two or more forces clash and are held teetering on the verge of chaos, a state of *entreguerras*. [...] Here the watcher on the bridge (*nepantla*) can “see through” the larger symbolic process that is trying to become conscious through a particular life situation or event. *Nepantla* is the midway point between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted. *Nepantla* is a place where we can accept contradiction and paradox. (56)

*Dominicanish*. Here formal shifts happen (in writing, reading, seeing and listening) also between music, bodily movement, and nonlinear actions to settle into the details of the daily, or as Báez notes, “an acute awareness of the ordinary/from my gladly, not so unique life” (6). Language merging and the non-logical sequences in the new codes convey the playfulness and relational nature of such shifts, as musical discoveries in African American culture and language learning from English language teachers, for instance, are interwoven in a series of non-sequiturs, deconstructing and reconstructing what is learned:

Aquí los discos traen un cancionero.  
Discos del alma con afro. Con afro black is  
beautiful. Black is a color. Black is my color.  
**My cat is black.**  
But first of all baseball has been very very  
very good to me  
Repeat after me repeat after you (26)

The constant raptures and enraptures of the daily sounds and music thus find their way in the nonlinear text, which integrates references ranging from Black American to Dominican and other Caribbean music, and to Indian ragas and scriptures. As Báez acknowledges in “In Inglis”, her text is “enriched by works from my favorite: Advaita Vedanta philosopher (Adi Shankara), jazz singer (Billie Holiday), stories (from the Panchatantra) and soul singers (Isley Brothers)” (6). Further, in her performance of the text, Báez’s deployment of hybrid vernacular phrasings is accompanied by facial gestures and hand movements informed by Kuchipudi classical Indian dance, ofrecimientos Pushpanjeli, Shiva Shambo (danza a Shiva), and jazz music in a palimpsestic layering of multiple codes requiring viewers to alter our relationship to both textuality and encoded movement. And all of this takes place while the child protagonist rejects the constraints of formal education. As Méndez reflects on the political implications of such fusing, “the audience is supposed to ‘get’ a reference —and does or doesn’t” and “[t]hus, this writing/performing construes itself outside the confines of an imagined national space” (2007: 154). Together, these hybrid codes announce a new collective sensibility of belonging, as well as an awareness of the ordinary, the personal, and the “glocal”, new capacities to name experiences of cultural and linguistic in-betweenness that we might have thought to be familiar with. As Mendez also notes, the fusion of *Dominicanish* is “a rich in-your-face elaboration on nationality, gender, and ethnic discourses in the context of immigration” (154), and we may add, also an “in-your-face” recreation of philosophical language. Báez’s inscription of the quotidian of diasporic blackness, with its chaotic mixing and disruptions, opens up the space for new languages and emotions that signal the promise of

transformational meaning-making from within the terrains of uncertainty and unbelonging:

*There's no guarantee*

Now I'm another person  
Mouth twisted  
Guiri guiri on dreams  
Guiri guiri business  
Even laughing

*Laughing in Dominicanish*

There's no guarantee  
Ni aquí ni allá  
Not even with your guiri guiri papers  
There's no guarantee  
Here, there, anywhere (sic. 47-48)

Such territory devoid of certainty and security, such home of the “[p]oor, dreamers and fools exile” (41), so similar to Anzaldúa’s *borderlands* as the land of “the crooked, of the squint-eyed....”, is the place of generative, transformative, decolonial writing.

Ultimately, through their unruly forms of philosophizing, Báez and Anzaldúa conceptualize the act of writing as a phenomenological experience which inscribes and shares the uncertain terrains of in-betweenness, *creolité*, or *mestizaje*, and resistance as, in Anzaldúa’s words, a “threshold of transformation” (2015: 56). This layered purpose has a clear bearing on the development of decolonial studies, for if, as Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vázquez notes, “public and intimate moments of corporeal epistemological, and ontological domination” are “effects of the intimacies of coloniality” (2020: 31), our writing, as a quotidian and embodied habit of relational meaning-making, is a site where those structures and intimacies—and their effects—can be undone. And thus, in their early works, and from their concrete positions, the Chicana theorist, and the Dominican-American (*DominicanYork*, as she would have it) self-referential poet, dramaturg, and thinker, experiment with hybrid languages and codes of resistance to explore their philosophical concerns. They conceive of textuality as a phenomenon that is part of the daily, the habitual, and the nearby in the complex states of coloniality, but also as a site of theoretical intervention and of transformation of the collective and the self.

From a phenomenological perspective, in our encounters with *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Dominicanish*, we are asked to embark ourselves on a phenomenological experience that may serve simultaneously as a new home and as a challenge



to the way we read, live, think of, and write philosophy and decolonial theory. In both works the acceptance of and search through constant shifts and in the in-between territory of migration and borderlands has the taste of a newfound home and the province of the promise of continued change. Through the authors' unmeltable aesthetics, we as guests are asked to enter border-crossing spaces, which are both geographical and symbolic, personal and cultural, theoretical and literary, personal and political. The works thus complicate the guest-host relation at multiple levels. On the one hand, their linguistic resistance to conform challenges structures inherent in the immigration/immigrant-host paradigm of established English-language, academy-sanctioned theory. It also serves as a reminder of colonial histories that have made—and still make—the US an intruding guest to their respective cultural and political spaces. In addition, both texts propose a phenomenology of writing that attempts to decolonize theoretical language by creating literary spaces where philosophy can be articulated in the authors' own terms. And thus, by writing hybrid theoretical texts outside or contra knowledge-sanctioning institutions, both linguistically and genre-wise, both authors question and alter not only the host-guest relationship of the conventional immigration model (the texts have become hosts of a linguistically hybrid, culturally hybrid reader/viewer), but they also welcome all readers into the generative world of creative writing and performance where to experience theory outside the limits and in conversation with, the hallways of colonial or dominant/established academic institutions.

Consequently, the omission of works by US Latina literary writers such as Anzaldúa and Báez from theoretical and philosophical debates constitutes a multilayered void that occludes key ideas, feelings, and approaches to crucial concepts in decolonial and feminist studies in the Americas, such as the nature and experience of textuality and public discourse in colonial and multilingual settings, which in turn clearly impacts the circulation of such ideas and our very philosophical thought. With the omission of their voices and their particularities as women of color theorists, we have historically lost decades of critical questions, forms of emotionality, theoretical critique, and philosophical contributions that could have advanced considerably several fields and subfields in the humanities.

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