NAVIGATING THE ABYSS: A QUEER CHICANO SEMIOTICS OF
LOVE AND LOSS

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Gibran Guido
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The undersigned Faculty Committee approves the

Thesis of Gibran Guido:

Navigating the Abyss: A Queer Chicano Semiotics of Love and Loss

Adelaida R. Del Castillo, Chair
Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies

Norma Iglesias-Prieto
Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies

Irene Lara
Department of Women's Studies

August 8th, 2012
Approval Date
DEDICATION

For Those Whose Love Transcends.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved, in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

--Pablo Neruda
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Navigating the Abyss: A Queer Chicano Semiotics of Love and Loss
by
Gibran Guido
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The thesis represents spiritual activist and public intellectual work. The text is a scholarly exercise to comprehend how the process of writing about pain and loss permitted the recuperation of all aspects of self. It seeks to encode a dynamic of love and loss by participating in the cultural production and inscription of a spiritual sign-system or semiotics for the discourse of same-sex desire and Chicano identity. Inspired by the work of Anzaldúa and Aztec iconography and philosophy, the thesis explores ways of writing about the queer Chicano subject in the face of despair and heartbreak. Fortunately, Anzaldúa’s work on the narrativization of self and culture, its theoretical implications (autohistorias and autohistorias-teorias), and recourse to indigenous Náhua concepts offer direction. These help to name and distinguish differential consciousness as altered states and make possible the crafting of a poetic language with which to write about descent into the abyss. As such the thesis reconfigures and narrativizes the spiritual quest as decline into despair resulting from loss of the object of desire. What is more, a methodology or system of practices for spiritual reflection and healing through change and transformation is identified and presented as a sacred and ritual process.

The above is framed by the native belief that the heart is an integral part of one’s being as well as the seat of wisdom, memory, knowledge, and perception and was instrumental in the construction of the thinking heart imperative. The latter serves as a theoretical tool for the recollection of the self in the past in order to obtain wisdom and knowledge of the self in the present. It also assists in the deployment of a renewed sensibility of queer Chicano and cultural identity. The mapping of this process through the act of writing is vital to self-awareness and the acquisition of a renewed consciousness or conciencia.

Lastly, the construction and practice of a new ethical activity or consciousness is presented as resulting from queer Chicano desire, failed love, despair, and recovery. This process is metaphorically comparable to descending into and re-emerging from the abyss of Anzaldúa’s Coatlicue state or the journeys of ancient shaman ancestors who searched the underworld for lost souls. Using a combination of the indigenous notion of the blooming heart and Anzaldúa’s technique for “putting Coyolxauhqui together” recovery and return from the darkness of despair is made possible. This process gives voice to a differential consciousness of queer Chicano identity marked by catastrophic experiences.
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PREFACE

A letter from in-between pain and love…
Cariño

I share these theoretical tools because they can be used to help us, a generation that is seduced by notions of instant sexual gratification, rather than by the weight of one’s depth of their soul, intellectual and political grounding or bonds created by shared experiences. No, instead we are reduced to the size of our cocks, the availability of ass or the measure of our sexual promiscuity. There is so much more to who we are. This is why the need to compartir, to write and give voice to experience, going beyond simply reducing this thesis to an academic exercise. I don’t write with an individualism that affords me a degree, because this academic project has been crafted and bared witness to the growing number of youth suicides motivated by rejection, fear and constant threat of being “found out”; the continued marginalization of LGBT people of color in a narcissist hegemonic gay community that continues to validate and make the obvious: racism, classism, sexism and internalized homophobia invisible; and a cultura that continues to reject us as sons, brothers, tios and potential fathers because of their own short-sightedness. Pero, I’m here to tell you, corazón, que eres fuerte, your very presence, honoring these words with your time, energy and love is testimonio of your search for self, search for comunidad. Aquí estoy contigo entre estas letras. It is a luxury to write for the sake of personal/academic merit. I know that there is no guarantee that I will see tomorrow, see a new generation of jota/os. I write because my existence is fragile, my physical being is always in constant threat by the everyday reality of physical violences motivated by homophobia. The ravages of HIV/AIDS continue to spread in our community and may come at any point in my life, or the socio-cultural pressures that have us question our own self-worth each and every day of our lives. I’m here to tell you,
share my words and decirte que you are valid, your worth is priceless and health/intellect are contributions to your community. Come from a place of love, a place of self-affirmation, self-determination and reject—with every ounce of who you are—a place of pain/fear that would have you believe that you are just simply a “faggot,” “damaged goods,” or just simply a fuck. I write from my own borderlands, San Ysidro/Tijuana and I recognize the violence I see every day. I write desperately to that young joto questioning his own sexuality and the threat(s) to his life at any moment. I write from a space of pain/trauma and I tell you, reader, that in the traversing of your own abyss there is life, you just have to choose to live. Mark your own terrain, sustain, nurture and preserve your life. If there’s anything I could bestow upon you, perhaps a contribution from my life/lived theory is that you are beautiful. Your tonalli is a gift. I only ask that you learn from tragedy, learn from that place of pain and rather than succumb to it, rather than risk all faculties of you, challenge yourself to learn to (re) love and (re)live again. We condition ourselves from our tragedy; this is how the body remembers. Your piel holds memory, it holds the damaged aspects of who we are and it wants to let go, it wants euphoric release. When we condition ourselves to be consumed by our own desires we allow for a consciousness and way of knowing. But when you become consumed and lost, when others seek out and look to consume, you are vulnerable you are baby’s breath—sweet, loving and pure. They look to consume you and your well-being but I’m here to tell you that you can choose to be something more. My own life/lived experience is testimonio que es posible.

Con todo mi amor y alma,

Gibran
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This academic endeavor would not have been possible without the unconditional love and support from my mother, Maria Lozano and my brother Omar Guido. The continued love and support from my uncles, aunts and cousins is also what kept me grounded and helped me during moments of frustration, anxiety, pain and struggle. Among them are: Jose Lozano, Gina Lozano, Cindy Lozano, Rosean, Rosemary and Adrian Moreno.

For the youth who continue to inspire and give me hope. They remind me that there is beauty in vulnerability, and how precious and fragile our lives are. To: David-Alexander Moreno Ramirez, Cristian Andrew Ramirez, Castiel Samuel Ramirez and Logan Gabriel Amezcua for your youthful spirit.

The crafting of this thesis, from beginning-to-end is indebted to the vision and support from my thesis chair, Adelaida R. Del Castillo. For being my “academic santa” and providing the moral and emotional support needed to finish this thesis. Thank you for the many working meetings that felt like therapy sessions, for bringing light despite the darkness, for continuing to believe in my work even when I doubted myself.

Many thanks to my thesis committee: Dr. Norma Iglesias-Prieto and Dr. Irene Lara for their love, warmth and energia invested in the completion of this thesis.

This thesis is also written to recognize, honor and celebrate the lives of our queer antepasados, among them: Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Gil Cuadros, Arturo Islas and Nazaria Rosa Duarte (my maternal grandmother). May we listen to the wisdom they bring as they continue to watch, protect and guide us. May they help those who are here with me and future generations of queer babies to come.
The Creator and Yemaya for this life and the blessings I have received.

For all those that have provided counsel, guidance, hope, love and nurturing from friends who are more like family: Jonathan Lowe, Sergio Sanchez, Vincent Arreguin, Pablo Alvarez, Omar O. González, Inés Hernández-Ávila, Daniel Enrique Pérez, Michael Hames-Garcia, Rosiangelo Escamilla, Wendy Aguirre, Alicia Chavez, Francisco Carlos Mendoza, Alicia Valle, Oscar Guerra-Vera, Juan Carlos Espinoza-Cuellar, Yosimar Reyes, Alicia Nunez, Mariela Nunez, Monica Delgadillo, Sara Solaimani, Jaime Aceves Equihua, Monica De La Torre, Alma Leticia Martinez, the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at San Diego State University, the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Joto Caucus and The Association for Jotería Arts, Activism and Scholarship

In honor of the many memories and moments I shared with my former love. May we find what we are both searching for in life.

And finally to the spirit, strength and unselfish love given by Chavela Vargas, Amy Winehouse, and Etta James who tragically passed during the crafting of this thesis. Their music and lives influenced my ability to know what it is to love fully and deeply despite the pain.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: CONSCIOUSNESS AND INSCRIPTION OF QUEER CHICANO DESIRE, DESPAIR, AND RETURN

Why does one write, if not to put one’s pieces together?

--Galeano

This introductory chapter as its subtitle suggests serves as both a preliminary statement to the work herein as well as a kind of theoretical bookends with Chapter Four since much of the content presented here has theoretical implications. To begin with, the writing of the thesis was both a remarkable and dangerous process having emerged organically as the enactment of a new ethics of Chicano queer desire, failed love, and ultimate despair caused by what Roland Barthes described as a kind of “catastrophe” and permanent “remov[al]” of the object of desire (Sandoval, 2000, pp. 140-141). The work presents the writing subject’s uninhibited queer evocation of states of desire and despair as content for discourse, although it is unusual and most unlikely as text for academic discourse in Chicana/o studies. Such an approach was inspired by the work of the queer Chicano theorist Omar González (2008) and made possible by Gloria Anzaldúa’s living theories, of whom it has been written, “In Gloria Anzaldúa we have a name, a method, a language, a linguistic terrorism aimed to lift us higher” (Sandoval as quoted in Keating, 2005, pp. xv-xvi). The crafting of this thesis was an organic process and is organized in the way that it was crafted. The methodology (Navigating the Abyss) chapter begins the thesis, followed by the
findings (The Feeling Heart Through the Written Act), and finally the theoretical framing (Theoretical Codes of Heartbreak and Transformation).

Anzaldúa describes an organic process of writing as the interaction of “multidimensional versions [of] body, mind, and spirit…in more complex ways” (Keating, 2005, p. 5). In particular, her techniques of autohistorias and autohistorias-teorías guided the structure of the thesis and allowed for the freedom of expression involved in the making of differential consciousness. Though these two notions were in the process of development before Anzaldúa’s passing, Keating (2005) tells us autohistorias can be understood as the use of personal experiences to filter the rereading and rewriting of culture and self, whereas autohistorias-teorías are explained by Anzaldúa in her interview with Professor Lara (2005) as “bring[ing] theory into the personal anecdote” and its story of the self and one’s culture “[i]nstead of working from the intellect, laying out certain theories, concepts, I’m working from the body and the feelings, experiencing these things, then the mind thinks…” (Anzaldúa as quoted in Lara, 2005, p. 53). Both techniques frame the master’s thesis as a spiritual activist and public intellectual work for the encoding of a “physics of love” (Sandoval, 2005, p. xv) and loss.

As such there is undeniably a spiritual and shamanic aspect to this process of writing that involves access to different levels of knowledge and comprehension including entry into an altered state of consciousness guided by a faculty that is alert to things of the spirit (Lara, 2005, pp. 52-53). Access to particular realms of understanding or enlightenment is in turn determined by one’s own present state of being. Needless to say, the writing subject was in a precariously emotional and spiritual state, deeply troubled due to heartbreak and loss. Given these circumstances descent into an underworld or abyss appeared to be the only direction
possible. The articulation and revelation of such a descent by the subject represented a spiritually significant and sacred experience described in Chapter Two as a methodology for accessing states of consciousness.

According to indigenous thought the underworld is a place of many levels of descent and challenging circumstances initiated by the death of any human being who dies from natural causes (León-Portilla, 1963; López Austin, 1988). Chapter Two locates the underworld as a place of abjection as does Anzaldúa’s Coatlicue state. It is where the subject, in an attempt to find balance, experiences heartbreak, misery, and pain through the ritual practice of _ceremonia_ on earth.\(^1\) Through a rigorous and repetitive evening ritual, which the subject approached with awe and veneration, a sequence of acts were performed ceremoniously to create a sacred space by burning sage, playing heartfelt music, and drinking alcohol. The last of these practices requires some explanation.

In many shamanic traditions throughout Mexico, Central, and South America hallucinogenic substances such as peyote, mushrooms, the _ayahuasca_ vine, and other plants sources are used to arrive at altered states. There are shamanic cultures that make use of moderate amounts of alcohol for the spraying of sacred items or suppliants themselves. Chapter Two of the thesis, however, reveals the excessive use of alcohol as part of the ritual process. This was not intended to disrespect or dishonor cultural traditions and practices. On the contrary, the author has great respect and reverence for cultural traditions and practices, spiritual beliefs, and all that is sacred. I realize there are others who are far more knowledgeable and who have learned from the guidance of spiritual leaders the proper methods and ways to pay homage to the _antepasados_, saints, or to mourn the loss of loved

\(^1\) Although according to the Aztecs, earth is the first level of the nine levels of the underworld.
ones without the use of controlled substances. Instead Chapter Two allows the reader access to very personal and sensitive moments that could expose the author to criticism. It is true, I have no special training or apprenticeship experience with a healer that would help inform me about the proper way to conduct *ceremonia*. However, should this keep one from the ecstasy of prayer and our own ways of honoring those who bring us hope and deliverance in times of trouble? I would suggest that to honor one’s *antepasados*, loved ones who are no longer among us, and by reconnecting with all aspects of self is to pay homage to them. In so doing the seeker bears and risks everything for something new and forgiving and by giving oneself to the darkness of our deepest fears one may find what is most in need.

Through the performance of the ritual practice mentioned above the subject/seeker explored ways of attaining an altered state of consciousness for entry into the underworld of ancient ancestors to find the self and a resolution to physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual imbalance. The use of poetry and artistic modes of expression such as music, imagery, and sounds were used as vehicles for descending into abyss and for returning. In the end, the construction of a differential Chicano queer consciousness and mindful way of being in the world emerged that helped to bring resolve to the self. Chapter Two renders this process explicitly with a moment-by-moment recollection of lived experience, arrival at a renewed self-awareness and comprehension or *conocimiento*, and the spiritual healing of the emotional, psychological, and physical self. This helped to name and distinguish differential consciousness as altered states and made possible the crafting of a poetic language with which to write about descent into the abyss. As such the chapter reconfigures and narrativizes the spiritual quest as decline into despair resulting from loss of the object of desire. What is more, the Tzolzel Maya belief that the heart is an integral part of one’s being as well as the
seat of wisdom, memory, knowledge, and perception was instrumental in the construction of the “thinking heart imperative.” The latter provided a theoretical tool for the recollection of the self in the past in order to obtain wisdom and knowledge of the self in the present.

Finally, the description of this ritual process in Chapter Two allowed for the making of a Chicano semiotics of despair by carefully plotting, stage by stage, a textual production of the abjection of queer subjectivity not yet captured in the literature on Chicano/Latino desire and sexuality. In their effort to honor ancient indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, mestizo queer poets and practitioners of living theory such as Omar González (2008, n.d.), Yosimar Reyes (2010), and the late Gil Cuadros (1994) have and are giving voice to an indigenous Chicano queer sensibility, some of which is not unlike the acknowledgement and reverence paid ancient native ways by Chicana/o groups of the past and present.2

Conscious and altered states were elicited and given expression in the thesis through various discursive practices (Foucault, 1978) intended to be subversive, in their same-sex desire, to masculinist literary traditions still prevalent in Chicana/o studies as well as disrupt what is considered acceptable subject matter for academic discourses and theses writing. These discursive practices were engaged in several ways. First, by crafting differential consciousness as the outcome of love (and its betrayal), which Sandoval (2000) identifies as the process and positionality of the knowing, growing, and transformative self. This is first presented as a series of stages initiated by the subject’s entrance into what Sandoval describes as an “unhabituated space and form of being [that] does not altogether depend on [the] lover…When one becomes engulfed by love, entry to this other place of meaning is

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2 Aztec danzante groups comprised of Mexican and Chicana/o practitioners throughout Mexico and the southwestern United States, respectively, have for more than forty years followed Náhua sacred ways of being in the world. (For a discussion of this tradition see Aguilar, 2009).
permitted…” (p. 140). That place for the writing subject was the murky, smoke-filled abyss of the paralytic Coatlicue state (Anzaldúa, 1987), the transgressive and exclusionary abjection of otherness (Kristeva, 1982), and the shamanic-traversed underworld domain of indigenous ancestors (León-Portilla, 1963; López Austin, 1988; Séjourné, 1976). Second, the act of writing discussed in Chapter Three kept the subject on the task by documenting his descent into the abyss and journey back through a kind of cartography of affective and spiritual signposts for others to follow should it be necessary. Third, giving voice to a theory and technology for descent into the abyss and re-emergence through change and transformation discussed in Chapter Four completed the discursive practice and its disruption of heteronormative and positivist writing practices of the self. Theoretically, this process is presented as a contribution to Chicana/o semiotic knowledge production by using an indigenous sign-system of codes of long-standing in Chicana/o discourses of cultural identity discussed in Chapter Four.

The mapping of descent documented through the written act described in Chapter Three raises questions of phenomenological value and that area’s study of the meaning and significance of experience, self-awareness, and the subject’s varied states of consciousness from a first-person point of view. There is something very attractive and promising in a phenomenological approach to making sense of altered states or moments of trauma in one’s life. There is a phenomenological aspect to this project of tracking descent into, discovery of, and emergence from the abyss of the speaking “I.” In writing about this process, poetic expression and the use of an altered sensibility is used to convey the inexpressible. Anzaldúa offers direction on the crafting of a poetic language with which to reference descent into the abyss through her work on *la facultad* (a sixth sense), narrativization of altered states,
recourse to Náhuatl (language of the Aztecs/Mexica) to identify and name the experiential, and through the use of indigenous notions of the sacred and spiritual. These are all used in the writing of Chapter Three and throughout the thesis. In contrast, phenomenology’s positivism appears restrictive, as does its stress on the structure of experience or its efforts to measure and objectify the world by prioritizing perception through the five senses to the neglect of spirit and intuition. Hopefully, as the content and purpose of phenomenological studies begin to explore realms that go beyond the study of conscious experience, a first-person point of view of, say, descent into the abyss could help us to better understand change and transformation of the self. Still there was a need to write about the meaning and significance of descending into despair as spiritually transformative and to communicate that to the reader. In this sense, ancient indigenous culture seems to offer alternatives for understanding things of the spirit.

The Náhua highly regarded the attainment of knowledge and used the poetic metaphor “the black and red ink” (see Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 65-75; Hill Boone, 2000, pp. 12-27; León-Portilla, 1963, pp. 10-12) or “writing and wisdom” to “symbolize… the presentation and knowledge about things difficult to understand” (León-Portilla, 1963, p. 12) including the afterlife. Self-knowledge was equally important and comprised part of the educational mission of Aztec pedagogy since there was after all a “divine spark in man’s heart which transformed him into an artist, a poet, or a sage” endowing humans with the capacity to “mak[e] things divine” (León-Portilla, 1963, p. 105). It is this capacity that holds transformative power for those who seek it through great discipline and sacrifice. Chapter Three captures an urgency to will and document change, the very act of writing was vital and necessary to this process – a life saved through it.
Lastly, Chapter Three addresses the notion of writing with heart or corazón, which contributes to a transformative experience and the making of a differential consciousness. The latter becomes evident when those very experiences and emotions that drove the subject to the abyss remain significant, but no longer demand all the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical faculties of the self. When one is able to come to terms with difficult experiences, embrace and learn from them, and transition to a new stage in one’s life this signifies how writing with corazón can heal through profound reflection of the past and the feelings associated with them. Writing with corazón facilitates this process but it can only be a useful tool if one strives for something more by believing that their experiences can be useful to others. Writing with corazón validates, draws from, and allows both the writer and reader to understand how these varied experiences are useful to personal growth. In doing so, one is able to recognize and appreciate the force of the experiential on emotional-spiritual-intellectual growth. Writing with corazón means listening to all our faculties and understanding that within this complexity and dynamic there is meaning that brings transformative self-awareness.

Finally, the construction and practice of a new ethical activity or consciousness is presented as resulting from Chicano queer desire, failed love, despair, and recovery. This process is metaphorically comparable to descending into and re-emerging from the abyss of Anzaldúa’s Coatlicue state or the journeys of ancient shaman ancestors who searched the underworld for lost souls. Using a combination of the indigenous notion of the blooming heart and Anzaldúa’s technique for “putting Coyolxauhqui together” recovery and return from the darkness of despair is made possible. This process gives voice to a differential consciousness of queer Chicano identity marked by catastrophic experiences. (See Figure 1).
Figure 1. Navigating the abyss: A methodology of despair.
CHAPTER 2

NAVIGATING THE ABYSS: A METHODOLOGY

OF DESPAIR

Wailing, I pull my hair
suck snot back and swallow it
place both hands over the wound
but after all these years
it still bleeds
never realizing that to heal
there must be wounds
to repair there must be damage
for light there must be darkness.
--Gloria E. Anzaldúa
Healing Wounds

With any journey one must always equip themselves with the proper tools in order to
adequately explore un-navigated terrain. Proper tools would be those that aid in providing
clarity in the realm of the unknown. These tools become invaluable in order to survive. I
arrive home and I have a tremendous burden. A burden that begins with memory; the
memories of loss, of pain, of loves. Feeling in this state of solitude, out of habit, I find myself
preparing for ceremony. Not a ceremonious act of retribution to a deity, but to those lost,
those loved, those who evoke emotion. My ceremony requires an ofrenda of thoughts,
beginning in remembrance of those who are no longer present. In this preparation I initiate
ceremony with the lighting of candles, one for each of my guiding patron saints. The first is
in memoria de Anzaldúa (and my other Queer Patron Saints: Arturo Islas and Gil Cuadros);
the second is to Nazaria Rosa Duarte, my grandmother who has since passed; the last and
final candle is to my (Queer) antepasados, some of whom I never met, whose thoughts and
energies I hope to channel in my endeavors. I first strike the match. See the tip of red and
white turn to flame and the voluminous smoke rise towards the heavens. I slowly place match and candle together and watch how one exchange is met with the other. Reflecting on the irony of this situation, one passes their flame onto another, without question, without reservation. The final candle lit, I offer to you, my memories of you, all of you. I light my last candle for all those who have provided me with a sense of self, a sense of longing, an abyss that remains to be traversed.

En la noche que se incendio
Estrella de oscuridad
Que busca entre la tiniebla
La dulce hoguera del beso
Que mal amor es sus labios
El infierno es este cielo. (Downs, 2002, track 1)

After lighting my candles I begin preparation for my journey. I pour my intoxicating liquid into a glass and situate myself. Wine, tequila, anything to begin the process of remembrance. A liquid that brings forth a trance-like state that consoles the ability of remembrance. Here I am reminded of the saying once told to me by my mother, un dicho, handed down by generations, “The difference between Mexicans and others is that they drink to forget, but Mexicans drink to remember.” But drink is not the only requirement for my ceremonia. I require sage or copal to transform space. For the time being I only have sage, enough to begin my journey. The smoke from my sage fills the room with its mesmerizing aroma. The sage is necessary because before I begin my journey, the place I physically occupy must be made sacred. This sacredness affords some safety while on my passage. Without this offrenda of sage I am not able to evoke, conjure and reflect on memories. I

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3 Similar to the pulque used by indigenous peoples of Mexico to initiate the process of shamanistic ritual. According to Taube (1993), in his book *Aztec and Maya Myths*, pulque is “[a]n alcoholic beverage made from the fermented sap of the maguey plant, pulque played a major role in Aztec ceremonial life both as a ritual drink and a sacrificial offering” (p. 40). I parallel the use of an alcoholic substance as a means to my own ceremonia.
place the sage on my altar and watch as the smoke remains translucent, rises to the heavens as well as descending downwards into the underworld leaving a smokey trail of gray.

No me lloros no, no me lloros no.
Porque si lloras yo peno.
En cambio si tu me cantas
yo siempre vivo y nunca muero.
Si quieres que te recuerde
Si quieres que no te olvide
Canta sones del alma, ay mama.
Musica que no muere. (Downs, 2009, track 10)

I begin my first offering, the offering of “flor y canto,” flower and song, so that I may offer drink and song. My “in xochitl in cuicatl” (flower and song) is how I am able to provide prayer and poetry. My xochitl are moments in my past. Like a flower, my xochitl has gone from bud to blossom, each moment, a petal. I “lay” this petal out in the open and as I reflect it begins to bloom. This blossoming of memory and song is evoked further not simply by just sitting and remembering but by cuicatl, song. In accordance with ritual, I begin my ceremony by selecting song but not any kind of song will do. Though there are an abundant amount of songs to select from, not all of them have their association with specific moments in my life. To begin a journey, one requires specific songs sung by specific artists. These songs or canciones are the sacrifice I offer. At times there are many when I need to journey, further, farther into the abyss. Othertimes I’m not able to go deep into that abyss. It requires time, dedication, commitment and sacrifice-sometimes the demand is too much on the physical body.

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4 Flor y canto has its origins from the Náhuatl language, flowers were the symbol for truth, and song was a symbol for poetry. Flor y canto is symbolic of “profound truth”. Stated in Náhuatl as “in xochitl in cuicatl” flower and song symbolic of prayer and poetry. See my chapter “Theoretical Codes of Heartbreak and Transformation,” for further discussion of this topic.
For this reason I’ve selected, or rather, Chavela Vargas has selected me to journey with her. As a curandera, healer, queer, lesbian, Costaricana/Mexicana and as my muse, she allows for the possibility of traversing the sacred, the forbidden, in topan, what is above us (the world of the gods), in mictlan (that which is below us) the region of the dead; the metaphysical beyond, the unknown. Finding a comfortable place, I begin my trance. I take my first drink and prepare for whatever I may encounter. Candles, sage, flower and song, all preliminary steps but what is required for my descent into the underworld is my yollotli or Corazon, heart. According to indigenous thought the yollotli, or “thinking heart”, is more complex than simply the location where emotion is evoked.\(^5\) With indigenous thought I begin to open the compartments of my yollotli, wisdom, memory, knowledge, and perception are all integral to entering the underworld. Before I am able to descend I need more than to make offerings.

Fool that I am
For hoping you'd understand
And thinking you
Would listen, too
And, oh, the things I had planned.

But we couldn't see eye to eye
So, darling, darling, darling
This is goodbye
But I still care, but I still care
And oh, fool that I am. (James, 1993, track 10)

I begin to reflect to my conscious self. I ask, “What brings me to this place? Why must I evoke or conjure the past?” What is it in my present state that demands I pursue this

\(^{5}\) For this reason I used the concept of the “thinking heart” as explained in further detail in the previous chapter. The yollotli was an integral part of one’s being in that it holds wisdom, is the seat of memory and knowledge, and it is believed “through it perception takes place” (Marcos, 2005, p. 91). Also, see the chapter “Theoretical Codes of Heartbreak and Transformation,” for an in-depth discussion of this topic.
journey into my abyss? It is the thought of you, all of you who remain with me. Memories connect with my feelings of longing for a past, a glimpse of a time where our paths crossed. The price to pay for these “glimpses” is the emotional residue that is left behind. A burden that I am left with when I come to this space of reflection, listening to the songs that have evoked all of you.

As I begin this ceremonia, I take sip after sip, “I remember after every kiss I used to think to myself that you were the one that was meant for me.” I see the reflection of myself in the glass as I take another sip. “Remember how after the first time we made love and I played Billie Holidays’ I’m a fool to want you’, with one candle lighting the room and the shadows playing along the walls. Sip-after-sip with words in the background that evoke these first memories of you, “Que me importa que quieres a otro y a mi me desprecies.” [what does it matter that you love someone else and you despise me].6 When you would lay on my chest whenever you were unsure or needed to be held to feel safe. “No me importa que sola me dejes llorando tu amor. Eres libre de amar en la vida y yo no te culpo. Si tu alma, no supo querer como te quiero yo [It doesn’t matter that you leave me alone crying your love. You’re free to love in life and I don’t blame you. So what if your soul didn’t know how to care how I care for you]” (Vargas, 2008, track 3).

The first glass is empty and I’m already beginning to feel the warmth of the wine envelop my body. I look around the space I’ve made sacred and I’m reminded of you; not overwhelming as though the room were shared (as it once was with you) but rather by the invested ways you come to me (like a snake). The memories begin with a wave and now

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6 I distinctively use “otro” to contextualize the same-sex connotation for myself as did Chavela Vargas who sang for same-sex lovers.
becomes a tide relentlessly consuming me. *Remembering that you laid on me and I told you I loved you. I caught myself immediately after, but hoping to hear the same words back. It wasn’t until days later that you told me most of what I wanted to hear, “I love you, too, boy.”* I’m in my room and I continue to stare around and now it’s as though this space becomes strange and alien to me. I can’t make out this sense of dismemberment. It’s as though my other senses are compelling my memories aided with the smell of sage, the lights to a dim and candles flickering in the background. The sounds of my musa bruja singing, consoling while she continues to plead for me too some unwavering threat that’s uncompromising, relentless, peligroso. She moans, “Si ya te he dado la vida Llorona, que más quieres, quieres más?! [If I’ve already given you my life Llorona, what more do you want, want more?!]” I pour another glass of wine, Merlot, and succumb to memory. *Remember I told you once before how I loved drinking wine while eating spicy foods. It reminded me of what I described as passion. Why? I explained it to you. (Secretly I would never tell you I thought of the passion I felt over you whenever we would lay next to each other). The wine intoxicates me while the chile reminds me of the heat of our passionate moments.*

I take another drink, two gulps, without reservation. My body becomes unattached as though every sinew, muscle and part of my body becomes relaxed. My corporeal shell becomes vulnerable and willing to be susceptible to let go of any physical connections it has to this dimension. I gaze around my room and come across a photo of you and I together. *Remember when I graduated, you and I took a photo kissing while I was in my cap and gown. In the background there’s a rainbow flag. You’re wearing the stole I dedicated to you at the ceremony along with a pink rose. This photo captured that day, with our eyes shut close and our connection with one another strong. All my desires, hopes and dreams for us were*
captured during that moment. As I look at this photo I smile as I see the smaller flower I also placed on your ear, while my father’s family looked at us with confusion and a slight disgust. Their feelings of anxiety could not hold back the public displays of affection I showed to you that day. I’m forced back into the present moment by groans of Chavela and the smell of sage and I take another gulp, not a sip as before because moderation isn’t important anymore. The frame that holds this photo, that moment in time reads with an inscription on the glass case, “Believe.” I want to get lost, lose myself in my own grief, self-depreciation, and sorrow. I am overwhelmed by how ashamed I feel. All was lost and here I am reminded of what’s left--my sorrows.

When routine bites hard,
And ambitions are low,
And resentment rides high,
But emotions won't grow,
And we're changing our ways,
Taking different roads.

Then love, love will tear us apart again. (Joy Division, 1995, track 2)

I drank because I wanted to drown my sorrows, but now the damned things have learned to swim. (Frida Kahlo as quoted by Herrera, 2002, p. 467)

As ceremony is long and arduous so too is this ceremonia. Consuming glass after glass I’ve come to what people would assume to be a drunken stupor, pero no es. This state brings me to an emotional, psychological and spiritual space where I can now enter. I prepare myself as I take one more drink from what have been countless cups as Chavela pleads to the diosas for my safe passage back. She moans to them as she fervently lulls…

Todos me dicen el negro, Llorona
Negro pero cariñoso.

Will I be me when I return?

Yo soy como el chile verde, Llorona,
Picante pero sabroso.
How much more do I need to endure?
Ay de mí, Llorona, Llorona
Llorona, llévame al río.

Will this be the last time?
I’m so tired of feeling alone and lost.

Tápame con tu rebozo, Llorona
Porque me muero de frío.

Help me to understand what more I need to give up? Santas/os ayudame!

Si porque te quiero quieres, Llorona.
Quieres que te quiera más?
Si ya te he dado la vida, Llorona.
¿Qué más quieres?
¡¿Quieres más?! (Vargas, 2004, track 13)³

Stealer of songs, my heart!
Where will you find them?
You are needy and poor,
But grasp firmly the black and red ink,
And perhaps you will no longer be a begger. (León-Portilla, 1963, p. 114)⁴

In my room I’m caught in a whirlwind of emotion, anxiety, displacements, frustration, anger. A range of emotions that have no order, chaotic and overwhelming. Not being able to differentiate between my (un)conscious self(s) I’m finally able to go further, and farther into my inner self, fade into my abyss. Go back to black. Though I’m fearful of this process, I know I’ve been here before but my familiarity into my abyss doesn’t keep the

³ I use this stylistic form to parallel the use of chanting to evoke a final, trance-like state where the physical, emotional, psychological space becomes neither distinctive and converge into a vehicle which I symbolically use as a means to submerge in my own abyss.

⁴ León-Portilla uses this poem which contextualizes it as a means to describe, “…the wise man’s heart as ‘destitute’ and ‘stealer of songs’ associates the heart with the dynamic quality of the ego, which endeavors to fill its own emptiness by search for wisdom and art. At times the heart wanders, going nowhere. At other times it arrives at the only truth on earth-poetry, ‘flower and song.’” (León-Portilla, 1963, p. 114)
fear away. This act of *Tlamacehua* (penance), demands all of self.\textsuperscript{9} I am forced/move towards my place of myst, and like the narrative of Coyolxauhqui, my different selves are pulled apart and now I only rely on my ofrendas, trusting that if I do come back, I do so transformed, somewhat healed.\textsuperscript{10,11}

\begin{verbatim}
Ya me canso de llorar y no amenecer
Yo no se si maldicirte o por ti rezar.
Tengo miedo de buscarte y de encontrarte.
Paloma Negra, Paloma Negra, donde, donde andaras.
Si tus caricias ande ser mias de nadie mas. (Vargas, 2002, track 2)
\end{verbatim}

I slowly drift away and darkness begins to take over; blackness envelopes me, almost similar to what some would refer to as blacking out, but transition is slow, soft and steady.

I fade….
Losing all sense of selves fade…
Not knowing who or what I may encounter fade…
Only knowing that my loss has brought me here

**FLOWERING HEART IMPERATIVE**

…the heart is made to yearn for what the world can’t give.

--John Rechy
City of Night

I delve into my abyss and like my *in xochitl in cuitl*, my bud begins to blossom and I’m caught in a state of nepantla.\textsuperscript{12,13} In this silent, obsidian-black-like space, I’m suspended

\textsuperscript{9} The use of the Náhuatl word, Tlamacehua, that means “to deserve something,” and also “to do penance,” “to practice sacrifice.”

\textsuperscript{10} Here I make reference to the myth of Coyolxauhqui is recorded in the Florentine Codex, compiled by Spanish missionary Bernardino de Sahagún. For more information please read on Coyolxauhqui in the previous chapter

\textsuperscript{11} Along with this mythic tale of Coyolxauhqui, I also invoke the use of Anzaldúa theoretical framework of the Coyolxauhqui imperative. Keating (2009), describes this theoretical framework as, “Drawing from the story of Coyolxauhqui, Anzaldúa developed this concept to describe a self-healing process, an inner compulsion or desire to move from fragmentation to complex wholeness” (p. 320). More information is provided in the previous chapter.

\textsuperscript{12} I make reference to the Mesoamerican cosmological notion of El Plano del mundo [The plan of the
in a stasis that is hardly anything I have ever encountered before. This is the space to which I am drawn to, pursue, and remain as long as possible. It is a space where neither hopes nor dreams dwell and any kind of movement backward or forward is nearly impossible. The only consistent change in this stasis are the flash of memories forcefully making their way to the forefront of one’s mind, beyond the depths of forced isolation where one keeps them, from revealing traumas, moments of vulnerability where one hasn’t fully recovered from. This is where I choose to be when all else fails and I want to let go of everything…everyone and sever all ties to any remnant(s) of my present self. This space is where I can fully embrace the antithesis of self. I permit myself, no, rather willingly choose to abide by my own selfish desires where one can seek them out without care of judgment or consideration for others. No longer bound by any particular centering of body, mind and spirit; one becomes at once the epitome of what one selectively chooses to be.

…a petal of my xochitl in cuitl unfolds from its bud…South/Rabbit/Blue/Life…

I remember hearing once “one’s eyes seek out what one desires most”. With your absence I seek out a replacement. Searching for someone, through countless encounters: the haze-like whirl of whispers-enticing each body with the promise of fulfillment without emotional scars; bodies-held close almost preparing for the ritual of enacting sound,

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13 Anzaldúa uses the word nepantla to “…theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds, whom I’ve named nepantleras. I associate nepantla with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (Keating, 2009, p. 248). According to Keating (2009) the concept of Nepantla is described as, “a Náhuatl word meaning ‘in-between space” (p. 322). For Anzaldúa, nepantla represents temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of crisis. Nepantla occurs during the many transitional stages of life and describes both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns (p. 322).
revering flesh, and the exchange of fluids; hands-touching and feeling what may be; eyes-
sexhungry moving from physique-to-physique consuming and consumed by their own needs;
something to fill the void.

From face to face, from room to room, from bed to bed, the shape of the world I had chosen emerged—clearly but without definable meaning. For me then there followed a period of untrammeled anarchy as I felt my life stretching toward some kind of symbolic night, as the number of people I went with multiplied daily. With those many people—only in this moment when I was desired—the moments before we became strangers again after the intimacy—I felt an electric happiness, as if the relentless flow of life had stopped, poised on the very pinpoint of youth; and for these moments, youth was suspended unmoving. Now I begin to feel the world demanding even further anarchy. (Rechy, 1994, p. 120)

Once I was consciously considerate of individuals I came across and without thought or question considered them persons whose life experiences merited them the perspectives and respect one well deserved. But now I ask why? Should I not seek out sexual gratification without any care for whom or what those individuals are? Isn’t that what being part of my community is, in search of the next fuck? Whoever said I had to listen to their narratives, play the role of the “caretaker” and speak to or attempt to heal their traumas. No, to me they’re not papalotl, butterfly warriors, these men are merely driven by their own lust for the next available and willing body. Let them find their own paths, just as I have. And be just as damaged.

And why not utilize my accomplishments as a means of exploiting that very same youthfulness that I desire and seek out in clubs and bars. Filling my void with the demand of anarchy, rather than live up to the expectations which I was expected to fulfill. Whoever said I needed or should be other than what my own desires crave. If others in this world are damaged and pursuing their own gratifications to fill their voids, shouldn’t I?
At times I desire the same thing. To regress and become a phantom papalotl; fall to the fate of (self) inflicted violence, disease, and become the social dreg that society has deemed me to be.

It’s still as dark as obsidian and I’m unable to see or move anywhere. The price to pay for being in this state is the onslaught of memories from former traumas. As I’m in this nepantla state I also encounter remnants of thoughts and emotions that have also brought me here before. These memories come to me as quickly as they fade away. Of them the most vivid resurface.

…another petal unfolds… North/Flint/Black/Death

I wondered to myself, would they really miss me or should I even put my family though all of this? Remembering when I was going to commit the self-inflicted violence of suicide during my “coming out” process. How I was once going to leave my physical body as was depicted in a film I saw, ultimately ending in a tragic, lonesome end. I couldn’t slit my wrists or jump to my end. Instead I had planned to ingest pills, because I could easily have access to them thinking to myself, 15-20 pills would be enough swallowed with tequila, remember I had to keep it Mexicano. Having wondered to myself, who would find me? Who would be the one to tell my family what I had done, but what pained me more would be, who would tell my mother?

Reflecting at that moment, and how I would have become nothing more than a memory, another young man to add to the list of unknown names of young men who faced similarly violent and traumatic ends. The mere thought of these young men invoke a strange and mesmerizing sequence of events as I traverse this (un)familiar terrain.

…another petal… East/Reed/Red/Masculine
The relationship between my father and I emerge out of the depths. It could be because of the lapse of time since we’ve seen each other… six years. I blame myself at times thinking that if I had kept my father at a distance from who I was and sheltered him from my love(r)s then his at least feeble attempt would be noted in my life. But most of all, I’ve become ashamed in this deep pit where insecurities and doubts reside, I hold myself responsible for my brother not having a father in his life. If it hadn’t been for my brother who sided with me against my father’s internalized homophobia and unwillingness to learn to love me, again, then my father would at least still be around for my brother.

“Dad, I think I may be gay”. I don’t think I will ever forget the expression on his face when I told him. For a moment there was a silence, with what seemed like the longest pause ever I tried to fill the void anyway I could, convinced that to do so would make the impact of what I had told him less damaging. His response: “what did you mean you’re gay!?” I told him that it was something that I believed I was. He responded with, “I can’t believe what you’re telling me! Not even animals do that shit. How embarrassing would it be that whenever someone came over your house that your house would smell like shit and your sheets would smell like shit.” What could I say in response to this? There really wasn’t anything I could say. He filled in the uncomfortable void with a question, “Who else have you told?” I told him that I had told my mom and my brother. He asked what she had said. I told him that we spoke about it and we were getting through it. My father said that no one else needed to know and so I should not go around telling anyone else, especially my family.

An area of my heart, terrain un-navigated, that has calloused over time but a wound that still tears forces itself into my consciousness and I do everything in my power to hold it back, push it down into the depths where it needs to be. In order to move forward, I have
come to accept two very distinctive notions: that my father has passed on and that he only resides in my memories or that he has and still continues to be ashamed of me and what I represent, the manifestation of his fears: un pinche maricon, a fucking faggot for a son but for whatever reasons HIS son had to be what he is. I become a living representation, a symbol of his failed attempts of being a father, husband, or the very least maybe even question his own masculinity. To think that by vehicle, our distance only measures two to three minutes, but the pain resonated in these wounds separates us beyond miles incalculable.

…the last petal…West/house/white/feminine

A years’ past since you went away and so much has happened in your absence. The family’s torn from your prepared departure from this state of being as you’ve passed onto the next. I know I’ve prayed and pleaded with you for help with our family as brothers fight brothers’ and sisters’ suspicions and emotional wounds keep them isolated and alone. As our parents find their own ways of confronting your death it seems that it’s their children who must bear witness; as I saw you depart into the afterlife in front of my eyes, in my room and on my bed as mourners gathered around your body. Remember Nana, how you even allowed my father to come to pay his respects to you, even though I knew by your hesitancy that you still held a rage towards him for what he did to my mother, brother and I. You witnessed the divorce between my mother and father, held my mother together by your assuredness and presence of stability. How he would rather see us out on the streets. Your guidance and council to my mother aided her as you both watched how my father’s stubborn acts and self-interests demanded that my mother confront him and claim the home that we now have as a result of your strength and my mother’s will. My mother’s determination to have a place to
raise her children required her to defy the misogynistic beliefs and patriarchy in our home; rebellious acts that were nurtured and justified by you, Nana.

A year later I still reflected at times the moments when you lay there on your deathbed as mourners paid their respects to you for all that you’ve done and pray that you return safely to an unknown realm guided by our prayers, wishes and hopes for you. I remember you laying there on my bed Nana, and, oh, I never cried so much before; I never knew I could cry with such conviction, not even when I saw my abuelito, “Tata” pass and you mourned his passing with such fervor that anyone who saw you would have said that he was a kind and caring man. Although there is no denying that his ability to raise seven children on his sole income is a miracle in of itself, but I also remember during my youth a moment where he raised his hand to you and you instinctively covered your face (an instinct that I’m sure you honed over the years through the violent acts he’s committed towards you). Knowing that for you that day that he passed marked the day you felt alone and lost in this world as I do right now knowing of your death/rebirth into something somewhere beyond my reach.

You lay on my bed and in my room where I would often visit you before I went away to college. I remember my mother telling me that you felt as though your presence was a bother to me and you told my mom that you didn’t want to inconvenience me by staying in my room. I thought to myself that all that you’ve done for us, for me, staying in my room was the least I could offer you for all the sacrifices that you’ve made for me. Remembering you Nana is harder than I thought because you represent a time of hope and security. Your guidance and presence assured me of the connection I had with my family, not what we have now; emotional ties cut and brothers and sisters whose scars are in need of mending. Knowing that
with you gone they no longer have a mother themselves to return to for guidance, love and support. There was no question that your presence signified an authority that was never spoken of but assuredly acknowledged despite the patriarchal home where you raised seven children. A home where you provided comfort for your children as they made a grandmother of you with the fourteen grandchildren whom you had a special hand in raising, perhaps not directly as you had with my brother and I, but no one can deny your hand in raising them.

And now, more than year later after your departure, I’m in distress because of the dishonor I feel I’ve committed to my family back home as my freshman year comes to an end. Te acuerdas, Nana, el dia que fuistes con mi mama to drop me off at a university. You looked so proud that one of your grandchildren took the advice that you always reminded us, “cuando cuersas mijo, quiero que usas tu cabeza a trabajar y no tus manos.” This dishonor I feel I’ve brought to my family because of my cousin’s intent to bring forth the terror I had held onto for such a short time. Questioning my sexuality would be one of the hardest things I had to face while at school, before I was even ready to tell my family. I carry a shame with me now but I fear more that you would be ashamed of me too.

Te acuerdas, Nana, on el dia de los muertos, I went to my professoras house to perform the procession, an act that required the entire night, as we made una cruz out of cempoalxochitl con fotos, recuerdos y letras accompanied with prayers and memories of loved ones. I laid down three candles, with a cempoalxochitl, te acuerdas? As I lit the first candle I made to celebrate your life, I murmured words silently so that no one else could hear, so that you knew it was me who remembered you esa noche. I lit another candle for my abuelito out of respect, because you always reminded us growing up que los hijos le debaran respecto a los adultos. The final candle was to anyone and everyone whom I couldn’t
remember and for those spirits who needed consoling or rest; whose relations did not remember or didn’t believe in other realm(s) other than the ones they physically occupy. I lit the candle placed it gently on the right side, next to candle commemorating my abueltio, paused for a moment and remember that my three little candles where among the many whose little flames flickered and danced to their own desires.

After some time those who were in the room stepped out to regain the strength needed to continue the ceremonia throughout the night and I took advantage of the moment.

Remember, Nana, when I sobbed and sobbed to you, hoping that you would and could understand that I needed your strength even though you weren’t there to physically provide it for me. How I pleaded your forgiveness for causing any shame that you may have felt for what I had done. When I told you that all I wanted was for my family to know that I loved them and the last thing I wanted to do was hurt them because I was coming to terms with a secret I never knew I possessed. I cried and cried for you to forgive me. Que me perdonaras because I didn’t know what more I could do to help them understand. My mother once told me that oftentimes when my tios/tias would take my grandfather to a hospital for his regular checkups (for a disease that would later claim his life). To get to the hospital one had to drive through the gay community and this is where he would openly make a spectacle of his disgust. He lowered the window and would yell out words I’m sure resembled the ones I would hear later as I walked these same streets in search of self, in pursuit of community. FAGGOT! MARICON! JOTO!

Esa noche you became my santa because my pleas and conviction brought you to me esa noche because I had never felt your presence the way I had that night. A calm came over me and I knew it was you. Somehow you assured me that your love for me had never
changed. That you would always be with me and continue to watch over me as you had when I was young. I then asked you for one last thing as your presence was still felt by the comfort that I felt surrounded me. Que me ayudaras convencer a mi familia that I was still the same person despite the stereotypes and stigmas that have them believe are abnormal, someone unfamiliar. With this final request, I brushed the last of my tears away, and yearned for an indeterminate future.

At that moment of utter obscurity where one begins to feel the beginning stages of transformation into something unfamiliar, expressively and spiritually dangerous (to oneself and to others), a metamorphosis into a presence that isn’t true to self I see something I’ve never seen before. At first it seems as though I see what appears to be vaguely similar to stars sparkling in the heavens above in the pitch dark backdrop of the night. But what seem like tiny specks of light gradually grow larger in size and awe with each passing moment. Without direction or knowledge of where to go, I’m guided by my ýollotl, which guides me to what seems to be hundreds of papalotl, “mariposas”, butterflies, around me but I know the ones that are familiar. They're colors invoke emotions that I've known… and loved before.

**CONFRONTING PAPALOTL**

Eres como una mariposa, 
vueltas y te posas vas de boca en boca, 
fácil y ligera de quien te provoca.

Ay, mariposa de amor, mi mariposa de amor
Nunca jamas junto a ti

…ya vete de flor en flor, seduciendo a los pistilos
abres tus alitas, muslos de colores
donde se posan tus amores…

--Maná
Mariposa Traicionera
Colors upon colors flutter around me. As blinding as an eclipse but as soothing as the moments before a sunset. Glimmers of colors swirl around as if watching sequence reflecting sunlight. Although there are several that come towards me I’m overwhelmed with how many there are. So many come towards me, I have never been as entranced as I have in this very moment. They encircle me and they whisper words, thoughts, secrets, at times incoherent other times as audible as a voice speaking softly and slowly to me. From all of these strange new colors I see a sight that suddenly stirs me and shifts my focus on it. Staring as it comes from a distance and it slowly approaches while the other papalotl recognizing that this one is significant to me, they begin to disperse and no longer circle me but instead are at a distance, not far though. This one papalotl is oh so familiar. Its colors are bright a glorious blend of light blue and black and its little wings sway and dance in front of me. As it appears closer it brings flashes of memories, similar to the ones I described during my nepantla-like state of transcendence.

As it approaches closer to me its playfulness becomes the way it entrances me. As sirens lulled and captivated unsuspecting mariners to their untimely death, so too does this papalotl for me, almost as though it were surrounded by song and its proximity evoking memories. Feeling as though every time I’m reminded of you, I feel as though a sense of who I am is gone. I feel so estranged from myself; I don’t even know who I am at times. As you’ve gone back to what’s familiar to you, with family, friends, a new lover/partner, I go back to my familiar, to us how we used to be and the many moments we would share. Sometimes I

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14 In both Teotihuacán and later Aztec though, butterflies were considered both symbolic and closely identified with both fire and the soul of the dead warrior. Fire was considered as the transforming force and element allowing a “metamorphoses” of the chrysalis-like mortuary bundle into a “butterfly warrior”. See my chapter, “Theoretical Codes of Heartbreak and Transformation,” for further discussion on this topic.
can’t stand this solitude; I’m caught within the confinements of my own betraying emotions. Who will hug you when you need to be held? Who will kiss you with their eyes shut tight, knowing that when they open them, you’ll open your eyes and smile? No matter how much I want to hate you for leaving me, the way you held me, for holding me prisoner. No matter how much I drink, sporadically or in binges; smoke (because you hated it), and attempt to become self-destructive, ignoring my responsibilities to myself and others who have sacrificed for me; it won’t and can’t bring you back. I don’t want to be anymore. I have grown weary of what I’ve become because now that I feel empty, a hallow shell, cold and dark. I’m asked to be who I was when I had the love and support from friends, colleagues, family and...you.

As I become more and more fixated on the seduction of these papalotl around me I find myself going deeper and darker into my own despair. Only their colors offer any light. But suddenly new mariposas come towards me, their colors and dance-like grace different from the ones before.

These papalotl don’t have songs but that doesn’t take away from their brilliance. From the marvel that is them. These papalotl glimmer, sway, swoon, seduce, evoke and capture me. As they draw near they whisper, they seem to provide some sense of message. Not telepathic but through a connection, an invisible connection. These papalotl are those (queer) patron saints. How do I know that they are? Because of our familiarity with one another, because they surround me, the three guide me. This first papalotl, for me, in its spectrum of beauty, in its fluidity of shaping color es la Gloria.

The other, draws forth and reminds me through its brilliance although the colors may be soft and hue they resemble a fierceness that cannot be described. These papalotl for me
are Arturo and Gil. Another papalotl nears me and I can recognize the warmth and her longing to console me as she had countless times when I needed someone to listen, to hold, but whose presence offered so much more. This papalotl can be described as having black trimmed wings and shades of pink/red/magenta, fluidly intermixing with one another. It’s glow, softness and florescence in this darkness is clearly distinguishable from the others; this papalotl’s light is none other than my grandmother, I mouth the words “Na-na” to be certain and I see her flutter in this darkness revealing herself. Recovering from this brief encounter of my grandmothers’ spirit I see others approaching me. The other papalotl appear to be one-but like a glass that shatters upon a surface into several pieces varying in size- some large, others smaller, several papalotl begin circling me, they surround me whispering words, familiar, soft, encouraging, some disparaging, some disappointing. These papalotl for me are elders, antepasados, are those who I familiarize myself with. They are the ones that bring forth for me a sense of community. These papalotl are the mariposa warriors that could have been, que ya no estan, que han pasado. These papalotl help me, they guide me, they help me see past those papalotls that seduce and charm me. They guide me to resurface, to not succumb to my abyss, to not drown in my own sorrow, disbelief and disappointment to not be another one of them.

I draw from my depths but cautious not to allow it to consume me. As seductive and sado-masochistic as it is, in these depths, are where my memories of them lie. Whenever I wish to visit them I’m guided by my heart and trust that it will conjure their memories, apparitions that can never be exorcised but that serve as a reminder of a past that once was. Thinking que a veces la vida no vale nada [that sometimes life isn’t worth anything] and that these mariposas over time grow fainter as my memories of them become distant, however
knowing that I cannot exorcise them as long as I continue to care for and love those who
come into my life.

Some say I'll be better without you,
But they don't know you like I do,
Or at least the sides I thought I knew.
I can't bear this time,
it drags on as I lose my mind.
Reminded by things I find,
Like notes and clothes you've left behind.
Wake me up, wake me up when all is done,
I won't rise until this battle's won,
My dignity's become undone…(Adele, 2011a, track 6)

**PAPALOTL TRACES**

…even the heart rebels—finally against its own anarchy. And that’s the most powerful
rebellion.

--John Rechy
City of Night

Last night I dreamt of you. Well, not of you specifically but of your emotional,
physical state. It all occurred in a setting where I was in the backyard of someone’s home and
there were people there but not anyone familiar. Though this place was alien to me, there was
an ease that befell me. I didn’t know what it was and/or the reason for it. All that I could
sense was that there was a calm that I felt. What seemed like mere seconds felt like hours
passing and suddenly, as quickly as I turned I saw and was greeted by a familiar smile as she
came up to me and gave me a hug. It was one of our mutual friends, papalotl. Her image
conveyed our happiest moments when our life together was far simpler than it ended. She
was (and still is) symbolic of your well-being because of how much you’ve confided to her
during our relationship and the strength of your unquestionable bond. She and I spoke,
quickly rushing through our pleasantries and I told her how wonderful it was to see her. She
reciprocated and I quickly became comfortable with our encounter (knowing that you were
present during our last meeting). After having done so she asked me one of the most
conflicting questions I’ve been challenged with. She asked, “Why do you still continue to hold onto him?” She was talking about you, papalotl. Caught off guard and unable to respond she continued, “Don’t you know that you’re hurting him because you hold on?” I was stunned and felt myself tearing up as I looked at her. I didn’t know what to say to her other than to tell her what seemed instinctive to me. I responded with, “Because I still love him.” I continued more reassured of myself and without hesitation I confidently continued, “I can’t let him go. Why should I?!”

She paused and gave me a soft and sullen look. She responded, “You need to because you’re not letting him love. You’re not letting him be the twenty-two year old”, I quickly corrected her and said, “twenty-four year old”. She paused and finished saying, “…the twenty-four year old that he deserves to be.” Again a hurtful pain caught me off guard. She looked at me and I answered, quivering but assured in my response “It’s not easy and I don’t want to, it’s not fair.” There was a pause, a solemn look on her face as she came up and gave me one last hug and as quickly as my dream came to me it was suddenly gone.

Last night I dreamt
that somebody loved me.
No hope, no harm,
just another false alarm.

Last night I felt
real arms around me
No hope, no harm
Just another false alarm. (The Smiths, 1987, track 6)

A LETTER, AN OFREND A, A MEANS OF HEALING…

Papalotl,

Sometimes I look at the reflection of myself and I don’t recognize who I am. I see bits and pieces of who I was and thoughts carry me back to those times. Although this time it’s different. I recognize my face but there are days when I hate what I see. I see disappointment,
failure, sorrow, grief—all these emotions and sentiments that are now worn as scars, for what I fear others will see.

It seems I no longer have the confidence, naïveté, lack of life experience to cling to anymore. No, now instead I carry this wound that reaches beyond the heart and has left an imprint on my very being. Although I can’t hold this against you I know I can hold onto it, as difficult as it may be, of a time when I knew that someone (for however brief of a moment it was) loved me. This keeps me going during days that seem never ending and the nights where it’s so cold without your warm embrace.

You know at times I feel as though I’m wearing a mask. I wear my mask around those I care for, around those who look to genuinely support my endeavors and projects I undertake. I don’t want to disappoint them or show a lack of appreciation for their time and energy in conveying to me how much I’m better off without you. How one day I’ll meet someone that’s better for me. Someone who is willing to appreciate me and the work I do. Words meant to heal those emotional/spiritual wounds that have been healed, re-opened, healed and now left open; a scar that has become infected and begun to spread to other parts of me.

Thoughts of you always come to me, usually during the late night hours when all are asleep. This is when I’m the most shaken with anger, frustration, pain, anxiety and doubt. I listen to songs that evoke feelings of longing and despair for you. Through these songs I find a broken fragment of myself because of the pain that is emitted from the emotional resonance of the voices from these singers.

I often times find myself thinking of you during the day though, I wonder how you are, who you’re with and what you’re doing at that exact moment. I question my reasons for
doing so and no matter the council I receive, advice that describes that its “natural” to feel the way that I do. Even though I consciously know that I tried all that I could, I can’t help but feel that there was so much more that I could do. I keep telling myself that I exhausted all possibilities with you; even willing to change my own plans and desires for you wasn’t what you wanted. You craved something more, something else, perhaps something new, but it was certain that it wasn’t me. How does one start anew when they invested so much and left with less than what they initially had? Leaving with less because in the end it wasn’t what material objects I had left with but rather having to leave with the heavy burden of memories, reminders of you, and knowing that NOW there has (and maybe always) been someone else.

You know at times I feel I’ve regressed into myself. Back to a point in which I used to be afraid of myself, afraid of the world. I rarely make conversation. I hardly smile, let alone laugh and I wonder to myself why this is? From my earliest memories I remember these times to be my most difficult because I was alone, seeking answers in my books (coincidently similar to how I do now in the hopes of completing my thesis).

I revert back to you, in an attempt to revisit the site of trauma again in an effort to bring myself from the chaos of being dismembered and place myself back together through this letter. Knowing that it may never reach you but in the hopes that as I write this, these words facilitates the process of my healing; reaching beyond my consciousness and seeping into my subconscious, reverberating into my dreams and echo through so that my spirit can grow.

In my mind’s eye I picture you looking the way you did on those countless moments when I would simply go up to you and kiss you, sometimes on your forehead, on your nose, your cheeks or quickly steal a kiss from you. I write this and imagine that I’m speaking to
you (although knowing that you may not be able to respond physically because it seems as though we keep our distance to keep from hurting one another) but nevertheless, I write this in the attempt that my words are somehow communicated to you through my subconscious. Or maybe if I’m lucky in my dreams, you hear these words and remember this letter: a confession that you are still with me. You always have been. And even though I have done everything I can to refuse and reject that presence, what I considered a threat or danger, I can now embrace and consider it a symbol; a guiding light. You are one of my guiding forces. I will remember you as I make my ofrendas, acknowledging your presence; pray for (to) you for some clarity in my life whenever I may be in need of it.

I no longer want to run from you, my papalotl, but acknowledge that at one point you did love me and that you cared for my wholeness, despite my insecurities, doubts and regrets. I’m sorry but I can no longer love you with the same passion that once was but not only do I have to go on, I must. I owe it to all my relations, my antepasados, my (queer) patron saints but because I owe this to myself as well as you. It’s one of the most important truth(s) I’ve neglected: acknowledging the impact that you have had on me, how special you are and continue to be to me. For this I make my final ofrenda: conclude a chapter in my life, a chapter in this thesis and a candle on my altar; so that I am able to celebrate who we were together; the many obstacles and aims we’ve accomplished and for the luz y alegria we brought to each other.

I’ll always keep you in my thoughts, pray for your safety (and that of your loved ones) and hope that happiness finds you wherever you may be in life.

Con todo mi amor y alma,

Gibran
And once again these words I have to say,
‘I'm a fool to want you.’
Pity me I need you.
I know it’s wrong it must be wrong
but right or wrong I can't get along
without you. (Holiday, 1956, track a1)
CHAPTER 3

THE FEELING HEART THROUGH THE WRITTEN ACT

Through the act of writing you call, like the ancient chamana, the scattered pieces of your soul back to your body. You commence the arduous task of rebuilding yourself, composing a story that more accurately expresses your new identity. You seek out allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice. By compartiendo historias, ideas, las nepantleras forge bonds across race, gender and other lines, thus creating a new tribalism… Internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world.

--Anzaldúa
This Bridge We Call Home

Writing is a difficult and uncomfortable act. Oftentimes the act of writing feels like a blunt, unfamiliar tool that is challenging to wield especially when the topic though familiar is painful to communicate. However, when one begins to write about what is personal, what gives one meaning, confidence begins to find itself in the act of writing. It was with my experiences and emotions that I trusted my voice, my narrative(s) could be communicated through the will to write. Even though writing was an uncomfortable form of communicating, it became an instrument that I later relied upon and honed to express a depth of self that I had not encountered before. I felt that when I wrote, and had free reign to write on what mattered most to me, this was far different than writing otherwise. Writing is what gave me a reflective voice to begin and undergo a process of healing from crucial and vulnerable moments in my life. It was through writing that I was able to communicate the emotions I felt, moments of loss and pain that I could describe as moments of transformation and consciousness-raising.
The act of writing and the writing process itself is and remains an act of not only communicating thoughts, images, ideas and theory but a means of evoking a sensibility through the use and exploration of language and the written word, to contextualize and give voice to specific moments, memories and personal experiences and using these as a means of (self) transformation. Anzaldúa writes extensively on the act and creative process of writing by speaking to the importance of and need to (re)locate the act of writing as both crucial and necessary for one to mend the wounds that have been inflicted through past traumas while also remedying the inflicted pains that have been done to others. Anzaldúa refers to this process as *conocimiento*, which involves, according to her description in an interview with Irene Lara (2005), a series of processes or “stages,” each of which has a distinct use and purpose that can be identified as El Arrebato, Nepantla, Coatlicue State, Coyolxauhqui Consciousness, call for transformation, putting Coyolxauhqui together, and “the blow up…a clash of realities” (Anzaldúa as quoted in Lara, 2005, pp. 41-55). Conocimiento, according to Anzaldúa, is “…an overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It is an epistemology that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner—mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences” (Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 177) or it can be understood as a “theory of composition” that parallels the creative process of the composition of art; the way various disciplines, such as anthropology, literature or physics is constructed and maintained; or how identity is consistently being interrogated and (re) constructed. Anzaldúa reminds us that the crafting of identity is influenced by and integrates processes of conocimiento as 

[when you watch yourself and oversee your mind at work you find that behind your acts and your temporary sense of self (identities) is a state of awareness that, if you allow it, keeps you from getting completely caught up in that particular identity or emotional state. This awareness sees through it. (To not see is to be in
a state of desconocimiento, of not knowing, either by willful intention, by setting out to remain ignorant, or desconocimiento by default, by expediency). (Hernández-Avila & Anzaldúa, 2000, pp. 177-178)

Conocimiento also can be a tool that allows for consciousness-raising where an emphasis is placed upon self-awareness and self-reflectivity. This tool allows and encourages individuals to “…empathize and sympathize with others” (Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 178).

Lastly, conocimiento considers how wounds inflicted by pain or trauma contribute to self-awareness, writes Anzaldúa (2002): “Wounds cause you to shift consciousness—they either open you to the greater reality normally blocked by your habitual point of view or else shut you down, pushing you out of your body and into desconocimiento” (pp. 571-572).

**EL ARREBATO/SHOCK!**

According to Anzaldúa (2002) el arrebato represents a stage on the path to self-knowledge or conocimiento involving an abrupt change or event in one’s life. As she describes,

Every arrebato—a violent attack, fight with a loved one, illness, death in the family, betrayal, systematic racism and marginalization—rips you from your familiar ‘home,’ …Cada arrebatada (snatching) turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality, resulting in a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness, leaving behind dreams, hopes, and goals. You are no longer who you used to be. (pp. 546-547)

Anzaldúa (2002) refers to this phase as an initiating process that grapples with notions of loss, pain or trauma,

[w]ith the loss of the familiar and the unknown ahead, you struggle to regain your balance, reintegrate yourself (put Coyolxauhqui together), and repair the damage. You must, like the shaman, find a way to call your spirit home. Every paroxysm has the potential of initiating you to something new, giving you a chance to reconstruct yourself, forcing you to rework your description of self, world, and your place in it (reality)…You honor what has ended, say goodbye to the old way of being, commit yourself to look for the ‘something new,’ and picture yourself embracing this new life. But before that can happen you plunge into the ambiguity
of the transition phase, undergo another rite of passage, and negotiate another identity crises. (p. 547)

When I began to write, I would often transform the space that I would write in (see Chapter 2). When I would go to the space where I could write, I would light candles, burn sage or copal, and play music that projected the emotions I felt. I paid particular attention to making this space mine—intimate and personal—an act of making my writing space sacred, accompanied with music and alcohol that allowed me to feel deeply. It was in this depth of emotion that I encountered memories, feelings, and specific senses—where I felt I could almost smell, touch, and taste—moments of longing between the lover that had left and my remembrance of being in love. Writing allowed me to facilitate the process of having a conversation with myself, a means of self-reflection where I would write about my “truths” as I recounted the difficulties of the pain associated with the loss of one whom I believed to be the love of my life. This love, was conjured up and made present through the act of writing and it was through writing that I found clarity in spite of the loss. For me it was the only way I was able to have my lover close once again, whenever I needed him, I evoked our most intimate moments as I tried time and again to understand what it was that made me lose him. For me this transformed the act of writing itself. It no longer became an exercise, a process of description. It became a transformative act where I was able to embrace damaged aspects of myself as I yearned for clarity and guidance and for something far bigger than myself. This writing, I believed, was going to make it possible to trace the exact moment, the origin, of loss through my encounter with *el arrebato*.

**NEPANTLA/LIMINALITY**

Anzaldúa describes the notion of “nepantla” as part of the process of conocimiento indicating “temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential
transformation” during which fixity of identity and status is threatened: “This loosening of previously restrictive labels and beliefs, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and opportunities for change” (Keating, 2005, pp. 1-2). Anzaldúa (1999) describes nepantla as a means of becoming or changing through the movement from introspective consciousness to self-awareness assisted by something like vision, divinatory dreaming, or an extraordinary sense of perception: “Nepantla is the twilight landscape between the self and the world, between the imagery of the imagination and the harsh light of reality” (p. 252). Individuals who experience these nepantla states are what Anzaldúa references as “nepantleras” or individuals who act as mediators “to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist” (Keating, 2005, pp. 321-322). Nepantla requires “isolation and seclusion” but also serves as a medium that can lead to new forms of community, as Keating (2005) articulates, “…seen most prominently in the work of las nepantleras: those who travel within and among multiple worlds, developing transformative alliances” (p. 7).

As soon as I began to focus on writing as something more than jotting ideas on paper, I began to associate writing itself as something sacred, something that I could share with an unknown reader, something that only my reader and I would understand, only then did the act of writing, unbeknown to me, began to heal me. When I wrote, I became very aware of a conscious effort to strive for the greatest clarity about the effect pain had on me. It became a personal goal to understand because it was through writing that I was able to trace periods of shame, bitterness, anger—emotions that would consume me throughout the day—and upon which I was able to reflect when I was in the confines of my room, away from everyone and everything, left only with my memories. Alcohol and music would help me facilitate this
process. This state of isolation was the only way that I was able to nurture self while recognizing and exploring the extent and depth of the emotional wounds I felt burdened with. I knew, as did those around me, how hurt I was from my loss and it was cause for serious concern because of the injurious habits I was undertaking. To my loved ones—my brother and mother—the isolation, drinking and the music they heard along with the dimly lit room with nothing but candles and burning sage became signs for concern. But, I couldn’t let go of this ritualized act of evocation because the more I facilitated it, the more I would come to understand myself in relation to who I was and the person I was becoming through the writing I would do each and every night. I was trying to find the difference between living in pain and having lived in pain. Finding that there was a blurred sense of meaning for these experiences I nonetheless knew there was a distinction. Each night was unique and different, the memories and traumas different. At times I would focus on the failed relationship, oftentimes I would quote lyrics from songs, other times I would write a poem, letter, or just simply share thoughts as I listened to artists who also felt this depth of loss, artists such as Etta James, Billie Holiday, Adele, Amy Winehouse—all women who felt as I had in their vocal and lyrical range describing their own memories of men who had come and gone in our lives. As I listened to these women and reflected on the pain and loss I found I could shift my attention from having lost my lover to having lost relationships with others I had not confronted or had negated. Each solitary night would give me the time to reflect on despair even though at times these moments of isolation and self-confinement were too much for me to handle but any attempt to reason or think logically was rejected. Instead I turned to self-destruction, I turned to the bitter and raw emotions that charged my senses and I would lose
myself because confronting the reality of having loved and been abandoned was too much to bear.

**COATLICUE STATE/RESISTANCE TO INNER TURMOIL**

First introduced in *Borderlands/ La frontera*, Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of the Coatlicue State is crucial to the process of conocimiento because it involves a troubled emotional, psychological, or psychic state “triggered by intense inner struggle which can entail the juxtaposition and the transmutation of contrary forces as well as paralysis and depression” (Keating, 2009, p. 320). Anzaldúa (1987) explains:

In order to escape the threat of shame or fear, one takes on a compulsive, repetitious activity as though to busy oneself, to distract oneself, to keep awareness at bay. One fixates on drinking, smoking, popping pills, acquiring friend after friend [lover after lover] who betrays; repeating, repeating, to prevent oneself from ‘seeing.’ (p. 67)

Anzaldúa (1987) expresses that one is surrounded not only by intense feelings of shame, betrayal, and rage but these sentiments are accompanied by painful and traumatic experiences, which one denies and represses. Importantly, addictive behavior and/or addiction play an important role in the Coatlicue state:

An addiction (a repetitious act) is a ritual to help one through a trying time; its repetition safeguards the passage, it becomes one’s talisman, one’s touchstone. If it sticks around after having outlived its usefulness, we become ‘stuck’ in it and it takes possession of us. But we need to be arrested. Some past experience or condition has created this need. This stopping is a survival mechanism, but one which must vanish when it’s no longer needed if growth is to occur. (p. 68)

Anzaldúa explains how Coatlicue states allow for one to make meaning of these experiences if one chooses, suggesting that as a broader theoretical framework in the process of conocimiento, the Coatlicue state is not only necessary but also an experience from which one can to learn, make meaning, and use to heal the self. Anzaldúa (1987) elaborates:
Those activities or Coatlicue states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences-if we can make meaning out of them-can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The Coatlicue state can be a way station or it can be a way of life. (p. 68)

My Coatlicue state nights were usually spent in my bedroom, a space where memories remained of my lover and the year we spent living together, but now this space felt like a cell. I had imprisoned myself in this room with an emotional sentencing of desolation and the chaos of putting words to feelings and experiences that seemed endless. There were days when even being in my room was too much for me to handle and I felt that I needed to surround myself with those who embraced and loved life. Here is where I believed I would find inspiration to continue not only my writing but inspiration for igniting that glow, that inner light that defined me and who I am as an individual. I was in search of myself, that same person who others recognized as an activist. I would go out to find life and liveliness inside bars and clubs in the gay community, but going there only reminded me of the isolation and self-confinement to which I had relegated myself. I looked for what I thought I needed, a replacement of the person that had left me to fill the void of the emptiness. I spent more and more time in search of a person who became more and more elusive. As I wrote about this pursuit, I began to understand that I was pursuing a common misconception, one that is inscribed and emblematic of gay culture that somehow was ingrained in me. Perhaps by confronting the misconception that had me believing that I would be alright and find what I needed through club culture and drinking. I became aware that I was subjecting my personal challenges to the ways of a subculture’s practice of pleasure and consumption that inadequately satisfied the love and clarity I craved for.
In the essay “Daughter of Coatlicue: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa” by Irene Lara (2005), Anzaldúa describes the notion of “Coyolxauhqui Consciousness”\textsuperscript{15} as emergent awareness from some dark place, subconscious and/or unconscious, suggesting that painful and traumatic experiences bring forth a knowing of self as one finds meaning from pain:

\begin{quote}
This is where Coyolxauhqui comes in. Ella es la luna and she lights the darkness, verdad? Okay so you’re in this dark night of the soul and you get these intuitions, these conocimientos—whatever your being works out unconsciously, it comes to some realizations. I call this process ‘Coyolxauhqui consciousness.’ It’s not a consciousness of the awake world, of the sun, of the light. It’s a consciousness of the darkness, the underworld, the depression. This kind of consciousness is not even noticed by people. (p. 45)
\end{quote}

For me, longing for love and clarity became a priority over everything else. The only place I found stability was in the daily routines of my life—attending class, completing assignments, and fulfilling my responsibilities because I knew people counted on me. Of these responsibilities, the need to complete my academic program and graduate was first among them. Writing and being honest with myself about my lover and other losses had me spiraling into a state of depression and binge drinking. I thought about the close relationship I had with my grandmother and her loss. Reliving those moments where I witnessed her passing had such a profound impact on me. There it was. The connection that transpired between us from the moment she passed into the present. During those nights where I would stay in my room, conduct ritual ceremony, or even when I would go out to clubs and bars to find a vague resemblance of a love I had lost I always felt my grandmother there, with me, overlooking my safe return home. To this day, I feel as though she’s still around—it’s the

\textsuperscript{15} This concept should not be confused with Anzaldúa’s notion of the “Coyolxauhqui Imperative,” which involves a process of self-healing expressed as “an inner compulsion or desire to move from fragmentation to complex wholeness” (Keating, 2009, p. 320).
same energy, same nurturing—and I am indebted to her. This is why my grandmother has become what I consider my (queer) santa. Because of her protection and guidance I have been able to explore self through writing.

The experience I underwent with the loss of my grandmother forced me to consider a specific moment in my life where I felt she had saved me. As recalled in Chapter 2, I was a twenty-one year old undergraduate seriously considering suicide after I had been “outed” and as a result having lost relationships with friends and family members. These experiences of loss and trauma placed me in a state of physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual damage. I had contemplated and rationalized that the loss of my family was too much to bear. Shame and fear became common themes during this period of my life. The idea of my mother and brother being burdened with this “secret” of having a gay son/brother threw me into in a constant state of panic. I sought answers in the resources available to me (literature, professors, counselors and students) but found little resolve.

I thought about how best to commit suicide without gruesome violence. At the time I had recently viewed the film, “La Reina De La Noche,” a film portraying the life of the singer/actor Lucha Reyes and it helped me decide how I would go about my suicide. The film’s final scenes portrayed the young Reyes as a tragic figure who grabs a bottle of pills and a bottle of tequila and leaves the room. The film’s final scenes show Reyes slowly closing the door to the restroom. I would attempt to do the same. It only became a question of when. As I contemplated this, I was invited to commemorate Dia de los Muertos at a friend’s home. I accepted the invitation to participate in this ceremony. The procession gathered at the home of Dr. Inés Hernández-Avila, and although she may not have known this at the time, her invitation saved my life. It was during this short passage of time between November 1
(All Saints Day) and November 2, Día de los Muertos that I entered a crossroads—between the living and the dead and found life in the presence of those long passed. It was here, at this very space, where ceremony was conducted—where sage, copal, and the outlining and filling of a cross made out of cempazuchitl flowers, surrounded by photos, and small mementos—that my wounds began to open and heal.

Moreover, during this period two figures representing Latino male masculinity through their enactment of homophobia, sexism, and patriarchy emerged: my grandfather and father. In hindsight, I believe these two figures had such a profound impact on me because of how they confronted and came into conflict with the two most important female figures in my life: my grandmother and mother. Moments of conflict and confrontation became moments of consciousness as I processed past events in my life since childhood during which I came to know my grandfather as a man—well into his retirement—who spent most of his time tending to household chores or repairing anything around the house. I recall moments when my grandfather would pass the time in his shed working on various projects, cleaning or taking care of his prized possession, his vehicle, or sometimes just nap outside the garage. I also recall when my grandfather would drive me to elementary school and when I tried to get out of going to school. My grandfather would act as my advocate to a strong-willed grandmother who would see through my ruse of getting out of attending school. My grandparents became the authoritative, moral figures in my life. Although, my grandfather at the age of 22, expressed his love for my grandmother by kidnapping her, “se la robo,” when she was fourteen years of age. Such was the foundation of the family; my grandmother would give birth to seven children and bare witness to 14 grandchildren, which she had a hand in raising.
I provide this bit of personal history to contextualize the relationship between my grandparents and to offer insight to the personal history of my family because it has made me who I am in relation to my family. I also provide this insight because I know the experiences I shared in my methodology could be understood as a portrayal of my grandfather as a selfish, un-caring figure who often displayed anger, physical, verbal, emotional and psychological abuse toward others. This is not an attempt to dismiss the effects of these violences and traumas, rather it is an attempt to hold him accountable for his acts while also understanding that for all his faults and short-comings he was the man my grandmother loved and continued to grieve for after his death. Perhaps the example my grandmother inadvertantly displayed to me—the ongoing, unrelenting, unwavering act(s) of devotion, love and admiration for my grandfather—would be what sustained and all my (self) abusive ways. I would continue to hold love for a man, despite his selfish act of leaving without any concern for the damage he would inflict. My unwavering act(s) of devotion, holding onto memories and moments we shared convinced me that if I could trace the problem, assuming it was an action on my part, that I could remedy the situation and have my love(r) return to me. My grandmother made sure that her grandchildren and children remembered his best qualities and how he economically sustained a family of eight on the income garnered as a trabajador del condado or cannery worker.

I must confess that as I write about masculinity in relation to the men in my family, I feel ambivalent towards them and realize I have made every effort to avoid the topic. Why? Because it demands that I confront the nearest example of a “macho” that was available to me - my own father - and how I internalized patriarchy, sexism and homophobia. Concepts that would later assume names in the works of feminists of color in undergraduate courses in
Women’s and Chicana/o studies. However, before these tools were made available to me, I had only the examples of strength and resolution the women in my family offered. Bearing witness to the abuse of female kin by the men in my family helped me to develop as a critical thinker.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, bearing witness to the abusive ways men would act towards the women in my life initiated my own ability to develop as a critical thinker. In my youth, it was women who nurtured and cared for my well being. My mother would provide the emotional and financial support for my brother and I. My grandmother would often act as our caretaker, watching over us, making sure my brother and I would get to-and-from school, that we were fed and alleviated some of the responsibility of childrearing from my mother. The roles that I would witness by men were acts of apathy (letting the day-to-day chores and responsibilities be relegated on my mother and grandmother); violence (physical, verbal, sexual threats made to my mother as my father reassured her that without him she would not be able to survive. My grandmothers instinctual act of self-defense, coupled with stories later recounted to me by my mother of the abuse sustained by my grandmother); and patriarchy (the invasive ways my father would inflict damage on my mother, brother and I—claiming his own self-assured, self-imposed role as “the man of the house” or *lo que manda* (he was in charge). I witnessed my mother’s sacrifices as she worked daily, my father sporadically and when he desired, and began to develop an awareness of the dynamics in my family that would later be given names, such as patriarchy and sexism, in Women’s studies and Chicana/o studies courses.

I cannot stress enough how writing has been so much more than just an act of putting pen to paper. It brought me so much more than I had anticipated. It was writing about loss
that initiated and compelled me to transition from just writing, describing fragments of memories, to writing from the seat of the soul—the heart, to recount and relive these moments.

**THE MINDFUL HEART**

Writing becomes something more that just a physical act of placing pen to paper when one writes from the heart/corazón. This form of writing becomes something sacred, an act where one intellectualizes from the heart and communicates with a reflective consciousness. Intellectualizing from the heart demands that one be open, vulnerable and honest with the experiences and emotions that one has undergone. Communicating through the written word with corazón requires a reflective consciousness which one becomes mindful of. It enables articulation from a broader understanding of how experience shapes the self and its transformation, a transformation that can at times be long and arduous. Writing with corazón is challenging because it requires more attention and work than does structuring sentences or putting words together to communicate messages. When one writes with corazón one embraces and reflects on those specific moments of intense emotion and experience to make sense of what these moments mean to the self. When I write with corazón I conjure the past to experience it in the present.

This kind of writing invites others to do the same. When I write, I offer my own moments of pain and trauma—emotions that I’ve consciously decided to discuss. To write with corazón is a bold and dangerous act because it demands that one be critical and reflective while also simultaneously remaining vulnerable as one writes about what matters most and/or has dramatically changed in one’s life. Writing with corazón is difficult because it means constantly negotiating with self and trying to make sense of what the body feels as it
processes the experiences that are filled with emotion. Sometimes this results in making sense of what the body longs to vocalize. I often compare this act of writing to the blues genre, as I heard it once described, “it’s one thing to sing the blues. It’s another to live it.” For me, I gained an understanding of pain and loss from this particular musical genre because initially as I wrote about pain and loss I felt as if I was alone in my experience, but I found a community of artists who also shared similar emotions, experiences, and/or losses. The lyrical composition and vocal/lyrical range of such artists as Etta James, Billy Holiday, Adele, Amy Winehouse and Chavela Vargas had a profound impact on me and the writing process itself. These artists invited me to share their pain, allowed me to reflect on my own emotional/physical losses of loves who were gone. It was the composition and performance of songs such as, Etta James (1993, track 10) “Fool that I Am”, Billy Holidays (1956, track a1)“I’m A Fool To Want You”, Adele’s (2011b) cover, “I Can’t Make You Love Me if You Don’t,” Amy Winehouse’s (2006, track 5) “Back to Black” and Chavela Vargas’s (2008, track 3) “Que te Vaya Bien” that guided my emotional journey from one of solace in pain and loss to a differential consciousness. I found community in these women, as I later found community with others who shared similar journeys of loss, when I began to discuss the hardships associated with heartache and the coping strategies of alcohol, sex, drug abuse. It was the effects of my loss and depression that I initiated these acts. It is harder to face this reality than it is to relive it through memory and confessing these losses to oneself through writing. Writing with corazón about loss and pain challenges one to face a reality while also simultaneously reliving moments guided by one’s memory over and over, as if a kind of confession. When one writes with corazón it becomes an act of masochism, having to (re)live painful experiences while also evoking a power and depth that has no bounds. This is exactly
why writing with corazón about pain and loss is both demanding and challenging. There is a depth of sorrow that cannot be measured and a dark terrain that needs to be navigated by a willingness to understand loss as only a stage in one’s life; by embracing the change that comes when one is able to recognize that confronting loss and being vulnerable allows for one to heal; and through the realization that one must remain alert to new possibilities in one’s life.

When I write, I reach into a deep part of myself that I had never known before and only my writing can trace its journey of self-reflection and loss. To give an example, when I wrote with corazón for the duration of eight months, I felt compelled and drawn to the urgent need to see my ex-lover and reaffirming love and devotion to him. The urgency of this need took me miles away from home only to find myself before his doorstep in Northern California. We visited but he would once again disappoint me. It wasn’t the reality of his new situation that made a lasting impression on me; it was his determination to deny the possibility of reconciliation. Instead he suggested we piece together the fragments of our existing relationship as one of friendship. It was this new found reality that plunged me deeper into my abyss. I became a part of a self that felt cheated, alone and without any resolution about what to do with my life. My writing reflected this, enhanced by large quantities of alcohol and fear. Nonetheless, I wrote and wrote and reflected on what was now a stark reality—that it would be impossible for us to be together again, that there could be no future for me with him and that my love would never be enough. It was through this same process of writing with corazón that I found a glimmer of hope for myself. This exact moment became the way, a crossing that I encountered where I experienced a moment of critical self-reflection that led me to transform my Coatlicue state into a form of
conocimiento. I embraced and began to shift my experience of pain and loss to one of hope and transformation where I began to nurture self instead of chasing after a bleak future with a young man who didn’t want to share in my future. I needed to move on, move forward, recognizing that there was more to me than I gave myself credit for. This shift, this exact moment, was recorded and became a letter that initiated both a clash of realities and call for transformation.

**CLASH OF REALITIES/CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION**

The process known as “the blow-up…a clash of realities” is a stage that challenges one to juxtapose their “realities” with the “realities that they are confronted with. It is a process that Anzaldúa (2002) describes as introducing new insights that:

> threaten your sense of what’s ‘real’ when it’s up against what’s ‘real’ to the other. But it’s precisely this threat that triggers transformation. You think you’ve made progress, gained a new awareness, found a new version of reality, created a workable story, fulfilled an obligation, and followed your own conscience. But when you cast to the world what you’ve created and put your ideals into action, the contradictions explode in your face. Your story fails the reality test. But is the failure due to flaws in your story—based on the tenuous nature of relationship between you and the whole—or is it due to all-too-human and therefore imperfect members of the community? (pp. 566-567)

As one navigates and traverses these new insights, Anzaldúa (2002) refers to those doing the work as “nepantleras” as those who confront loss, anger guilt, fear and separation, she explains:

> In gatherings where people feel powerless la nepantlera offers rituals to say goodbye to old ways of relating; prayers to thank life for making us face loss, anger, guilt, fear, and separation; rezos to acknowledge our individual wounds; and commitments to not give up on others just because they hurt us. (p. 568)

Anzaldúa’s concept of a “Call for Transformation” reflects the experience and describes the need to address and transform self. Anzaldúa writes,
Here you are in the dark and something pulls you out, algo te llama: you have to change, you have to take care of your health, you have to find a new lover, you have to find a new job, lo que sea. You have to act, you have to move, and it moves you out of there. I call this fourth stage the call for transformation, the call to cross over to another space, to convert. (Lara, 2005, p. 47)

I merge what Anzaldúa has considered the fourth stage, “Call for Transformation” and the sixth stage, “the blow-up...a clash of realities.” The following journal entry describes how both of these stages were simultaneous in my own journey of conocimiento, the “call for transformation” became a moment of critical self-reflection and clarity.

**CLASH OF REALITY AND CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION – JOURNAL ENTRY, AUGUST 2011**

I’m currently at the crossroads of faith and fear here in S.F. Believing in that age-old concept that love will conquer all. Will it? Does it? Will my love come back to me as romance dramas often suggest or elaborate? Does love conquer all and everything we have leaving no room for others to replace one another? Instead of becoming damaged and refraining from any intimate contact with people I will come across in my life, I will remain intact, listen to my heart and refuse to become the product of a damaged heart: bitter, hurt, wanting to push people away because of past memories I’ve had with others. I feel I will waste away. Right now I sit here, a familiar sight with my wine and music knowing full well that you left me to go out on a date with him. As you laugh together, hold each other. I sit here again in my own personal torment. Why?! Enough, isn’t this enough? I came promising a future with you, for me. Thinking that if I told you all that I held in my heart, that it would change everything. It hasn’t and I know that all this rage/anger/grief is transforming me into

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16 Here I make reference to the essay, “Healing Sueños for Academia,” by Irene Lara (2002), which I read and reflected upon as I made my journey to San Francisco. Even though the results of my trip did not satisfy my wants, it met my needs instead.
something that I’m not familiar with. I thought my love was stronger than the petty way it’s been disregarded. I Love you, without doubt or hesitation, but I think now after facing reality I need to let you go, love. I don’t know what more I can bare and how much more heartache I can endure. Boy, I was (and secretly still am!) willing to give you everything I possibly could and yet you throw it back in my face. I came here hoping and praying for things to change but as I leave here, I leave part of myself with you. I will leave you the rejected, the miserable, the desolate part of Gibran. I no longer want him and I’ll be glad to be rid of him. He no longer is welcome when I return to San Diego. Do you hear me?! When I return you will keep the parts of me that even I reject as a means of leaving a phantom papalotl. May he guide and watch over you but also serve as a reminder of what you could have had. I fear I’ve reached a depth to this abyss that people far better than I never returned from. I’ve seen a glimpse of the depth of this abyss and I can’t venture any deeper. I won’t be going that far because the sacrifices are too great and I can’t make them at this moment. There’s so much to do still and too many lives to touch—and save.

**PUTTING COYOLXAUHQUI TOGETHER**

I use the **conocimiento** concept of *putting Coyolxauhqui together* as a critical moment that I began to contextualize my experiences in a broader socio-cultural level. Anzaldúa describes the process of “putting Coyolxauhqui together” as,

> You have a different dream, skills, facultades so you start scripting the new you, this new identity. I call this stage ‘putting Coyolxauhqui together’ porque ‘stas en pedazos, verdad? The old way doesn’t work anymore, your ideas don’t work anymore so you have to arrange esos pedazos in a new order. You’re not only putting the old self back together again, but in the recomposition, you’re creating a new self. You have a new story. (Lara, 2005, p. 47)

This “new story” allows for and demands that one recognize all faculties of self in order to move forward in this process of conocimiento. This conocimiento also facilitates an
awareness that one’s activism is informed by their spiritual leanings, facilitating a dialectic between “bodymindspirit.” Anzaldúa explains, “To ignore spirit reinscribes a false split between political activism and spirituality which can limit social change. Indeed, validating, nurture, and learning how to use all our facultades—our bodymindspirit—will help us be revolutionary” (Lara, 2005, p. 47). One’s capacity to heal is only a process for Anzaldúa as she recognizes that there is much work that is needed to bring consciousness and healing and share them with others, with community:

Coyolxauhqui and putting herself, ourself, together is about healing the wounds, the work for striving for wholeness instead of being fragmented in little pieces. It’s also the work of reparation. Not just healing, but having the wounds acknowledged publicly, having the other parties say, ‘We did this wrong, we acknowledge it, forgive us.’ It’s about bringing that acknowledgment not just into consciousness but also into public words. (Lara, 2005, p. 49)

Writing with corazón requires sacrifice, but with this sacrifice comes change, a transformation where one exchanges those fragments of memories and emotions for that necessary part that’s missing that can help restore and help us to put back the pieces that are damaged and in need of repair. When I write with the intent of exploring pain and despair I do so with openness, to use these emotions to connect with my reader because when I write of the personal I expect for my writings to connect with someone who looks for a reflection of themselves. This is what writing with corazón, intellectualizing the heart, evoking with feeling and recognizing that this writing is and can be both a personal journey and an academic contribution. This style of writing dares both reader and writer to have something more in common than an intellectual foundation grounded in theory. This style of writing merges the intellectual and emotional to the extent that one physically shares and feels. Writing with corazón invokes a spirituality compelled by a deep-rooted belief to learn to love self despite many obstacles. It is in this spiritual conviction that I ground this style of writing
because its aim is to balance the self. It is a belief that through tracing our personal journeys there’s a point, a crossing, where one transitions from a state of damage and vulnerability to one of understanding and learning to (re)live as one begins to (re) love oneself.

Writing with corazón gives voice to one’s most intimate expressions of physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological longings and challenges one to confront them. We grapple with those intimacies. Acknowledging that to do so brings forth emotions and desires of self-denial, guilt, pity, doubt…all forces that deter one from confrontation. But there is power in confrontation; an unresolved intimacy only has power/agency over one if it is not resolved. But when one is willing to change, to transform these unresolved intimacies into forms of positive self-expression than those very same desires that held one back from claiming agency begin to weaken. Harboring these intimacies may condition one to feel safe, to convince ourselves somehow that it is natural to have undergone certain experiences, but when one doesn’t give expression to them, the act of confrontation becomes more and more threatening. We condition ourselves to live with the self (abuse) as we continue our personal journeys in life. We need to invite change, we must embrace those crossroads that demand transformation, and not doing so will not keep one safe. Lastly, writing with corazón facilitates the possibility of community building as one invites others to share and process their own emotional capacities. The various possibilities and outlooks of what it means to find conciencia through this approach can be a means of crafting theoretical approaches to understanding loss. In doing so we come to understand ourselves as we begin to trust and understand the respective communities we identify with. Much of the work often lies first and foremost in healing ourselves and in turn we begin to heal our communities.
Conciencia recognizes that one is not solely alone to endure the hardships we face, but recognize that we are part of a collective. It is often in honoring our communal ties that one is able to find strength and courage as one gains wisdom from our experiences. This in turn allows for the underlying aim at expressing conciencia, when one expresses self, it’s with an (un)conscious choice that it is an act at recognizing community. In recognizing comunidad, one also honors our queer antepasados, the relationships formed with others, and recognition that despite the hardships encountered; our work becomes testimonio knowing that our work may not only inform but also touch others who share similar difficulties and recognize that those individuals may find a reflection of themselves in the work we do. Our work evokes the difficulties and blurs the lines between the personal and public, recognizing that our love-making is just as dangerous, just as important as our political/social/cultural critiques as we not only bear witness but actively resist every day; our very existence affirms this. Our conciencia binds us, even though our physical proximity keeps us as a comunidad distant. Conciencia is a constant process and dialogue amongst all faculties of self, but it’s within this dialogue where one begins to excavate the self. This conciencia, would suggest that because it is formed not only from a knowledge base, acquired through academic experience but also from the spaces where ones—political, social, spiritual, cultural—leanings inform the basis that predicates ones basis of conocimiento. This conocimiento provides new knowledges based on our stories, experiences, and arts to heal acknowledging that our narratives of continued resistance lead one to a journey of self-affirmation.
CHAPTER 4

THEORETICAL CODES OF HEARTBREAK AND TRANSFORMATION

This chapter addresses the use and coding of an indigenous-inspired sign system for a discourse on descent into the abyss and resolution. The use of indigenous semiotics in Chicana/o cultural thought is not entirely innovative since Mesoamerican philosophical concepts and cosmology, especially those of the Aztecs, have been used to craft Chicana/o semiotics and knowledge production for more than half a century. Náhua (Aztec) philosophical concepts were first brought to critical light in the work, *La filosofía náhuatl* (first published in Spanish in 1956), by the noted Mexican anthropologist and historian, Miguel León-Portilla (1963) and made available to an English-speaking audience as *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahua Mind*. Soon after Laurette Séjourné’s (1976) *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico*, another key source for my work, offered a fresh interpretation of Toltec deity Quetzalcoatl’s sojourn to the east as primarily one of spiritual significance. Since then the work of Alfredo López Austin (1988), especially *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuaas Volume 1* has further enriched our understanding of the metaphysical world of the inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico before the conquest. Work such as theirs has been vital to Chicana/o semiotic scholarship since the beginning of and during the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s as can be seen in the early work of the poet Alurista (2012) and his foundational notion of Aztlan as a Chicano homeland. More than a decade later, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) would arguably revive renewed interest in indigenous

My own work contributes to this literature through a Chicano queer reconfiguration of the spiritual quest as descent into the abyss and return conceptualized in Chapter 2 as a technology for sacred ritual and access to a metaphorical underworld. There is a phenomenological aspect to Chapter Two as it meticulously tracks descent into, discovery of, and emergence from the abyss through the perspective of the speaking “I.” The subject’s narrativization of descending disintegration also takes the form of a cartography of despair utilizing Aztec ideographic units of symbolic meaning. The outcome of descent into the abyss for the submerged subject is not evident until the deployment of a technology of resurrection, which is sustained by the subject’s hopes and expectations for reunion with the subject’s object of desire. This experience is also given expression in Chapter Two by what Foucault (1978) designates as “discursive practices” that allow for new ways of writing that contest literature, the canon, and the status quo.

With regards to the specific use of a Chicana/o indigenous semiotics several of Anzaldúa’s theoretical constructs helped to give direction to the discourse of the thesis and made it possible to articulate processes of change, transformation, and recuperation of the subject. For example, her work inspires the crafting of a poetic language with which to reference descent into the abyss through her work on the Coatlicue state, la facultad (a sixth sense), narrativization of altered states, and recourse to Náhuatl (language of the Aztecs) to
identify and name the experiential, and indigenous notions of the spiritual and sacred. Throughout this process the written word and the writing act play a vital part in the discovery of self as indicated in Chapter 3. I believe poetic language and its sensibility makes it possible for the subject to communicate experiences not likely to be expressed with the language of common communication. Not unlike Kristeva (1982) who devises and deploys the personal to unmask the profoundly secret, the subject makes use of an(other) language far removed from ordinary language to evoke a sensibility that touches on unrelenting despair and descent into abjection or the very underworld once navigated by ancient Mesoamerican technicians whose vocation it was to travel to it in search of another’s lost tonali (life force). Also helpful were Anzaldúa’s notions of autohistoria y autohistoria-teoría as (re) writing self in the context of (re) writing culture. Autohistoria focuses on one’s personal and collective life story informed by reflective self-awareness, whereas autohistoria-teoría invites the theoretical implications of such an approach (Keating, 2005, p. 6). These notions are profoundly linked with a search for personal and cultural meaning, or what Anzaldúa describes as “putting Coyolxauhqui together”. In this work as in hers these personal experiences become a lens with which to re-read and rewrite the cultural narratives of the subject’s spiritual, sexual and cultural identities.

**The Thinking Heart**

The extraordinary ethnographic study of the Tzotzil-Tzeltel community of Highland Chiapas conducted in the mid-1940s and mid-1950s and depicted in *Perils of the Soul: The World View of a Tzotzil Indian* by Calixta Guiteras Holmes (1961) conveys the perceptions of informants from San Pedro Chenalhó, but primarily those of the town’s Maya healer, Manuel Arias Sohóm. This study was of great value to my project given its attention to
shamanic indigenous knowledge and procedures. According to author, the Pedranos of Chenalhó perceive the heart, corazón, teyolia, (according to López Austin, 1988, p. 363) to be an integral part of one’s being as well as the seat of wisdom, memory, knowledge, and perception (Guiteras Holmes, 1961). This view of the heart contrasts starkly with Western notions of the heart especially if above all it is conceived as a mere anatomical organ. Most surprising and unbeknownst to me was how the notion of the Maya teyolia mirrored my own experience of “heart-felt” as the thinking heart of Aztec culture. In the thesis, the heart/teyolia serves to convey a metaphorical expression of symbolic significance primarily associated with damaged aspects of self. Moreover, yollotli, the Náhuatl “thinking heart” notion in combination with the process of recollection was used to explore the impact of loss and pain. With this procedure the subject remembers and recollects to attain the wisdom and knowledge that invites new insight into the fluidity of ethnic, sexual, gendered, and socio-cultural self-identity.

The thinking heart notion serves as a theoretical “tool” for comprehending the self in relation to the various spaces it occupies, its differences and contradictions, in the making of a differential consciousness as the practice of “a new kind of ethical activity” (Sandoval, 2000) or what Moraga (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) sees as the implementation of “a theory in the flesh” by unorthodox practitioners. The use of the “thinking heart” as a practical tool was the first of a number of steps in the discourse of despair, pain and the placing of one’s experience into a discursive performance. As the queer theorist Omar Gonzalez writes, “…the written word is one conduit through which we… work through our traumas [and] name them” (Del Castillo & Guido, n.d., p. 14).
Through the inscription of a queer Chicano narrative, the subject relived in strict solitude spiritual, intellectual, and emotional experiences that provided insight about the self in a socio/political/cultural context. Profound reflection and the *tlilli, tlapalli* or the writing of wisdom “…through metaphor and symbol, by means of poetry and truth, [and] communication with the Divine…” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 91) forged the inscription process by giving substance to the “theory in the flesh” of the subject’s queer Chicano emergent self and new ethical resolution. The discursive practice of inscription in this case began with the subject’s recollection and confession resulting in the narrativization of memories tempered by the “black and the red ink” (writing and wisdom) and its repetition: “That’s what writing is…an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of my experience, whatever it may be” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 95).

This practice of crafting self out of abstract, non-linear moments involved a process of making meaning from moments of despair through the act of writing, giving way to vulnerability and pain to manifest strength and resolution, and finally transformation of the self through a differential consciousness. Anzaldúa (1987) refers to a similar experience when she writes, “When I write it feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept” (p. 95). I believe this process is much more complex and dangerous (both emotionally and psychologically) than a “coping strategy” would suggest, which is how Anzaldúa (1990) referred to it nearly a decade earlier. The outcome of the thinking heart process takes the self to unfamiliar regions with no assurance of return. In the creation of my own face and my own heart, I positioned my memories and emotions as if stepping stones to a profound depth wherever that quest led to. The path of the “black and the red” is not an easy one when confessing through memory. It was about
writing in darkness, in pain, paining to find clarity and peace in the presence of emotional and spiritual loss as if falling into a void where one succumbs to various states of vulnerability through confrontation with raw emotions (Hooks, 1997, p. xxiii) and subsequent elucidation.

The self accepts these acts of self-actualization as affording comprehension of the affectively experiential by deeply feeling and perceiving them as transformative. In the essay “On Self-Recovery” in the book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Bell Hooks (1989) refers to the act of self-actualization by borrowing from the work of Paulo Freire in her discussion of the individual’s transition from “object” to “subject” as the individual conceptualizes his/her own awareness of oppressions and consciousness-raising. Consequently, she suggests, the use of language and the written word is a perpetual site of struggle, but it can also be a process through which one is able to recover self, “to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew…” (p. 28) because our words are not without meaning. The use of confession and memory can provide one with the tools necessary to heighten self-awareness and inward-looking reflection in the naming of experience and conceptualization of identity as fluid and relational to lived acts (p. 110).

In this regard the “thinking heart” can generate a new way of writing that incorporates the wisdom of lived experiences, memories, academic learning, confidence, growth as a scholar, or any medium that allows for creative, artistic, or literary production. The thinking heart facilitated the capacity to give expression to the mixed emotions experienced during the writing process of the thesis. But putting words to one’s experiences holds a certain power that goes beyond what can be anticipated since the “fiction of our lives – how we conceive
our histories by heart – can sometimes provide a truth far greater than any telling of a tale frozen to the facts” (Moraga, 2011, p. 4).

**SACRIFICIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DESCENT INTO THE AYBSS**

Descent into the horror of the abject is undeniably a perverse act but, Kristeva (1982) warns, “[o]ne must keep open the wound where he or she who enters into the analytic adventure is located – a wound that the professional establishment, along with the cynicism of the times and of institutions, will soon manage to close up” (p. 27). Anzaldúa (1987) describes the danger of descent into such a domain - the abyss of the Coatlicue state - as potentially threatening to emotional and psychological instability. Similarly, Kristeva (1982) recognizes self-sacrifice in the act of descent into the abject and draws on Christian metaphors to describe the status of “the unstabilized subject who comes out of *that* (my emphasis) – like a crucified person opening up the stigmata of its desiring body to a speech that structures only on the condition that it let go – any signifying or human phenomenon…” (p. 27). For Kristeva, as for me, descending into abjection is an act of defiance of modern ethics and its silence where matters of the heart and “poetic catharsis” are concerned. I believe sacrifice is also involved prior to entrance into the abyss such that the recollection and evocation of the pain and despair of experiential and discursive practices of the thinking heart process is in itself an act of sacrifice. These moments and memories have to be explicitly available to the reader, as intimate and personal as they are, and presented as a type of “sacrificial offering” that allows for self-reflection and understanding. It was through this modality of sacrifice and sharing personal accounts, memories and reflections that were so brutally honest and revealing of the self that made this process so powerful. To conjure these
crucial wounding moments and re-live them as many times as was necessary to restore life felt like and was without a doubt an act of auto-sacrifice.

**THE FLOWERING HEART IMPERATIVE**

My concept of the “flowering heart imperative,” was inspired by the Aztec deity known as Xochipilli, Lord of Flowers. According to *Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Lore* (Conner, Sparks, Sparks, & Anzaldúa, 1997), Xochipilli was known by several native cultures and went by various names. He was the god of flowers and sensual pleasures and was the patron of entertainers – dancers, singers, actors, jugglers, gymnasts, and game-players. The sociologist David F. Greenberg invites queer knowledge production by describing Xochipilli “…as the patron of male homosexuality and male prostitution” (Conner et al., 1997, p. 351) (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Xochipilli, Teotihuacan vase painted in fresco. Source: Séjourné, L. (1976). *Burning water: Thought and religion in ancient Mexico*. Berkeley, CA: Shambhala.](image-url)
Laurette Séjourné’s (1976) examination of the codices associates Xochipilli with the human soul and leads her to identify certain patterns having to do with the symbol for flower which help to reinforce this association, she writes:

The texts always use the flower in an entirely spiritual sense…this flower can be no other than the soul. As the bird, the butterfly, and the flower are the symbols for one particular divinity, it is clear that the Lord of Flowers, Xochipilli, must be the personification of the soul. [I]t is he who bears the standard of the ‘blossoming heart’ at the foot of the stairs of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan... (p. 144)

Thus, Séjourné clearly associates Xochipilli with the presence of flowers, sacrifice, and the soul. Xochipilli was also the patron deity of those who occupied the houses of the lords in the palaces of the headmen. Intense sexual abstinence was imposed during his feast along with arduous fasting and auto-sacrifice often involving the piercing of ears and/or tongues with maguey thorns. Moreover, Séjourné argues that if Xochipilli were a deity of games and diversions then these acts required far more than mere entertainment, which she suggests, would be more appropriate for a patron of souls. Finally, she argues that Xochipilli was very likely the patron of souls because of his relationship with a “…spiritual light blossoming from darkest night” (p. 147-148) (see Figure 3).

Xochipilli and his symbolic significance can be useful to the conceptualization of a cartography to the underworld to retrieve lost souls. Séjourné’s (1976) description of the blossoming heart provided me with the possibility of formulating a framework inclusive of notions of the thinking heart and the flowering heart imperatives. The use of the flower and its association with the soul became key to my understanding of spiritual and emotional growth resulting from the recollection of and reflection about loss and despair. To relive these moments according to Náhua philosophical notions of sacrifice by offering all aspects of self (emotional, cognitive, spiritual) to this process in an effort to find meaning from pain
became a way of understanding how Mesoamerican philosophy allowed for a way of knowing self in relation to the world and one’s lived experiences. This framework could and would be used to center homoeroticism and desire while also integrating ethnic and cultural ties to indigenous roots.

As León-Portilla (1963) and Hill (1992) have argued, song was a privileged and powerful form of artistic expression. The concept *flor y canto* (flower and song) has its origins in Náhua culture and thought. Flowers were the symbol for truth, song for poetry, and together “flower and song” is symbolic of “profound truth” expressed in Náhuatl as “in xochitl in cuícatl” which is also symbolic of prayer and poetry. According to León-Portilla, “true poetry implies a special knowledge, fruit of authentic personal experience, or results in an intuition” (Castro, 2001, pp. 97-98). Hill (1992) also discusses the importance of music and song, associated with collective, shamanic rituals or an individual spiritual quest, they served as an artistic form for the initiation and evocation of a spiritual journey: “Because the
voice of a singer is especially powerful, songs can affect spiritual beings and landscapes” (p. 120). Similarly, my songs and music became a powerful form of expression and allowed for an invocation of a space and landscape of memory, a terrain to be traversed as described in Chapter Two of the thesis. Music and song became a vehicle for arrival to a personal, reflective place where memories were invoked and explored, a journey where the aim became how to arrive at a place of complex wholeness from fragmentation. To further elaborate on the use of song, León-Portilla (1963) explains that to understand flower and song is to know the “hidden meanings” (p. 182) of things, the metaphor leads one to recognize beauty as the only reality. I combine the notion of flower and song with that of the flowering heart imperative by evoking memories through song. It was through this process that I would become conscious of my own limitations and give meaning to aspects of my own life deriving from pain and despair.

In her essay, “The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan” Hill (1992) suggests that a complex system of spirituality is centered on metaphors of flowers. This flower world is described as a spiritual realm where flowers represent specific biological and spiritual aspects of human beings. For Hill, the flower had many associations, which according to Aztec religion, was to cause the “…flower of the body [the heart] to bloom in a death which yielded a new light in the world” (p. 130). There is a light, which came upon one’s “death”, possibly suggesting that if one were to cause the heart to bloom on the battlefield then one would be offered renewed hope attested to by their blossoming hearts. Traversing one’s journey where one may come out of their own moments of pain and understanding, suggests wisdom can be derived from these experiences, from their own seat of memory, a new “knowledge” emerges.
In her discussion of Alfredo López Austin’s work on Aztec cosmology, Hill (1992) goes into greater detail regarding the metaphor of the blooming flower as ‘bursting into flame’ reconstructed as a lexical item meaning “blossom, bloom” and the eternal “soul-light” (p. 131) associated with the flower-flame imagery among the Aztecs. Hill notes that López Austin stresses how hearts are commonly represented in Aztec art as blooming or as being in flames, suggesting that individuals who were especially, “…distinguished for their brilliance in the fields of divination, art, or imagination…” were said to have the same “divine fire” (p. 130) that burned in the hearts of Mesoamerican deities. For the yolotli to burst into flame of bloom was to enact the various four compartments of wisdom, memory, knowledge and perception described by the notion of the “thinking heart”. In doing so, one would “distinguish their brilliance through divination, enacting and evoking through artistic expression and imagination” (p. 130) bringing forth a depth of self.

Since the Aztecs associate the flower with male strength and spirituality, I drew upon the concept of the blossoming heart linking beauty, fecundity, strength and spirituality (Hill, 1992, p. 123) to derive a male imperative with which to complement and build upon Anzaldúa’s notion of the Coyolxauhqui imperative.17 The latter refers a “self-healing process” involving a transition from fragmentation to wholeness (Keating, 2009, p. 292). Anzaldúa suggests suffering can be a motivating force that inspires a creative impulse, calling forth one’s best energies and most creative solutions when one faces adversity.

17 The myth of Coyolxauhqui is recorded in the Florentine Codex, which was compiled by the Spanish Franciscan missionary, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. According to Náhua informants recorded by Sahagún, the Aztecs believed that Coyolxauhqui’s mother; Coatlicue (“The Lady of the Serpent Skirt”) became impregnated by a ball of feathers that fell from the sky. Disgraced by her mother’s pregnancy, Coyolxauhqui incites her four hundred brothers to join her army and slay their mother. Before dying, Coatlicue gives birth to a son, Huitzilopochtli (“Hummingbird of the South”) who avenges his mother’s death by decapitating his sister with a siuhcoatl, a flaming serpent, throwing her body from the mountain Coatepetl (“Serpent Mountain”), and thrusting her head into the sky, where it is transformed into the moon (Scolieri, 2004, p. 92-93).
According to Anzaldúa, the creative impulse and desire to transform adversity and difficulties into works of art becomes an “alchemical process”. Anzaldúa often associated this process of self-healing with the writing process itself (Keating, 2009, p. 320).

The flowering heart imperative was important for my journey into the abyss and the pursuit of harmony and equilibrium of self. In a way I was pursuing my own internal “flowery road” by encountering polemical aspects of self, which I explored as a methodology. What is more the flowering heart imperative builds upon the Coyolxauhqui imperative by contextualizing specific events, experiences, and/or moments in time discussed below. In my vision the notion of struggle as a continuous journey is crucial in the search for equilibrium and balance of the self. The idea of struggle is important and is compatible with Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui imperative, which confronts the challenge of chaos and transforms it into wholeness, whereas the flowering heart imperative embraces change as a journey in and of itself guided by the use of ritual ceremony, and the written word. Finally, the exposure of the subject’s intimate and heartfelt moments to the reader allows for a unique interaction, one that invites compassion, empathy and an understanding from the reader’s point of view to challenge their own notions of sexuality, desire and identity as it pertains to loss.

**The Earth’s Plane**

The four quadrants (see Figure 4) of the Aztec representation of the earth’s plane are useful as symbolic metaphors for my flowering heart imperative. According to the work of Alfredo López Austin (1988) and León-Portilla (1963), each part of the earth’s plane with its fifth cardinal directions including center (or up-down) is associated with a cosmic force. The direction East, represents the Region of Light, the color red, and is symbolized by the phallic reed for fertility and life; the North, Region of the Dead, is a cold and deserted area
symbolized by flint and the color black; the West represents the Region of Woman, the color white, and the symbol for house as in home of the sun; and, finally, the South indicates the blue Region of Uncertainty (López Austin, 1988) represented by the rabbit, whose next leap, according to the Náhuas, no one can anticipate (León-Portilla, 1963). According to this reading of the universe a seemingly endless struggle unfolds among the four cosmic forces that distinguish the earth’s plane. I used this underlying notion of quadripartite cum center tension and struggle to map change and resolution in the methodology chapter of the thesis. The progression and specific directions (east, north, west, south or center) taken by the self in its quest of recollection and repair signal the state and situation of the subject/seeker as he transitions from moment-to-moment, memory-to-memory in an effort to reach the center.
region known as the Region of Harmony and Equilibrium represented by the double helix which facilitates movement between the level of the earth and the underworld as well as the celestial realm. Arrival at the Region of Harmony and Equilibrium, for the purposes of this project, is possible only after change, transformation, and resolution in the face of loss and despair. As the subject/seeker traverses each region, he re-lives and re-experiences the hardships of loss and pain represented by descending into the underworld which shamans tell us is a painful and dangerous experience (López Austin, 1988). In this way the moments and memories of the seeker’s journey into the abyss are markers of personal growth and transformation and help him come to terms with how these experiences informed self and enriched self-identity, loss, and pain.

As was stated earlier in this chapter, the love-loss between a former lover became the catalyst that initiated the process of personal reflection, transition from fragmentation to wholeness, and the desire to begin a healing process or directional movement through the earth’s plane. However, in this process of personal reflection, what was not anticipated were aspects of self that were conjured. According to my conceptualization, each quadrant is associated with a life experience described in the methodology chapter as specific moments of struggle, recognition of the pain and narrativization of despair, an attempt at reconciliation, which proves unsuccessful, and, finally, resolution. Below is a subjective account of the subject/seeker’s journey through the regions of the earth, the significance of which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of the thesis:

- **North, Region of the Dead:** Several years before, a cousin betrays the subject’s confidence by exposing his homosexuality to family members, some of who reject him, his father among them. The subject contemplates suicide as a resolution for the pain and shame that results from the experience.
• **South, Region of Uncertainty:** The subject accepts his homosexuality, becomes an advocate of gay rights, and finds a male companion he loves dearly. Unfortunately, this person leaves the subject for another man. Abandoned by his lover, the subject tries to cope with this loss by exploring aspects of sexual promiscuity. It is uncertain what will become of the subject who undergoes bouts of depression, engages in excessive drinking, and becomes isolated. His family and friends are concerned.

• **Masculinity-East:** The subject examines his estranged relationship with his father as well as constructed notions of masculinity and patriarchy practiced by his Mexican grandfather. This results in the figurative death of the father figure. The subject’s affirmation of a gay identity despite his father’s disapproval reinforces his resolution to remove his father’s presence from his life.

• **Feminine-West:** The subject/seeker’s pain and despair over his failed relationship with his ex-lover brings up the death of his maternal grandmother and the love between them. She saw him mature into a young man, cared for him, and reminds him that she watches over him and will not let him dwell in the abyss. The subject/seeker accepts his grandmother as a spiritual guide and source of love. The maternal grandmother becomes recognized as a personal saint.

• **The Center, Region of Harmony and Equilibrium:** The subject/seeker transitions from the flowering heart imperative and begins the process of “putting Coyolxauhqui together,” and of igniting the fire of the flowering heart imperative. Here the subject/seeker enters a luminal or nepantla state and describes how he experiences the presence of Aztec papalotl (butterflies) and their Mesoamerican symbolism. He experiences an intensity of emotions in having to confront the papalotl of his former love(r). However, new papalotl begin to appear, these are significant because of their personal and literary importance for the seeker; they are his maternal grandmother, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Gil Cuadros, and Arturo Islas. They physically manifest themselves to the subject/seeker as spiritual reminders of the resilience and responsibility to self, queer identity, and the antepasados (ancestors) who have perished by their own hand due to sorrow and self-destructive acts. The subject/seeker then departs from the flowering heart imperative. A dream prepares the seeker for a re-encounter with his ex-lover and the realization that this individual will not ever be returning to the subject. Transition from unrelenting, unwavering loyalty to remnants of memories and emotions of a past love(r) lays the groundwork for the acceptance of loss and prepares both the subject/seeker and reader to reach the closure of the final section of the methodology via a letter.

The letter communicates what the writer wishes to convey to his former love(r). The writer communicates intimacy, tension, and the uncertainty of whether the messages in this letter will ever reach the love(r) who refuses to return to the supplicant. The use of the letter is the final departure of a possessed search for requited love. In several parts of the letter the writer expresses and describes the need to move on with his own life by recognizing the agency and ability to make sense of affective experiences. The letter also honors past moments and memories by allowing them to remain in the past instead of having to relive them in the present and impact future
outcomes. The enactment of this process represents an attempt to move on as a physically, emotionally, spiritually, and cognitively complete individual.

**PAPALOTL, MARIPosas, BUTTERFLIES**

Evans and Webster (2000) describe the use and symbolic representations of Náhua ritual for warriors who died in battle. Ceremonies for these dead consisted of symbolism depicting the transformation of warriors by and through fire. This metamorphosis was symbolically enacted through the giving of one’s life on the battlefield and was associated with their rebirth as papalotl or “butterfly warrior.” In both Teotihuacano and Aztec thought, butterflies were closely identified with fire and the soul of the dead warrior. It was believed fire was the transformative element of the metamorphosis from the chrysalis-like mortuary bundle of the Aztec corpse into the butterfly warrior that would then ascend to and dwell in the third level of Aztec heaven (Sahagun as cited in Evans & Webster, 2000, p. 734).

Undergoing rebirth and transformation was key for the papalotl of my journey and methodology. Derived from the Aztec notion of butterfly warrior, I use the concept of papalotl or mariposas (in Spanish) as a metaphor to refer to those who have overcome tremendous conflict and despair. In doing so, I acknowledge the lived experiences of queer Chicano men. I also embraced the term mariposa, which traditionally has been used to stigmatize gay men in Mexican culture, in order to acknowledge the strength and courage of the queer (LGBT) Latino community. We embody the characteristics of courageous “warriors,” taking risks for what we believe in (equality, self-respect, character, and integrity) knowing that we will face hardships and that some of us will fall in our “battle” for self.18 The experience of these moments, memories and life stages can have, as I describe in

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my methodology, the potential of helping the subject/seeker emerge from the flowering heart imperative anew.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The introductory chapter provides a brief overview of the project situating the thesis as a cultural studies approach to queer Chicano desire by constructing it as a discursive practice in living theory so characteristic of Anzaldúa’s work. It seeks to encode a dynamic of love and loss by participating in the cultural production and inscription of a spiritual sign-system or semiotics for the discourse of same-sex desire and Chicano identity. Inspired by the work of Anzaldúa and Aztec iconography and philosophy, the thesis explores ways of writing about the queer Chicano subject in the face of despair through such a semiotics.

Chapter Two looks at practices and techniques for the crafting of the subject and the speaking “I” exposed to the horror of the abyss. The writing subject gives voice to a Chicano queer language of despair and the power of abjection on the self when it is divorced from its object of desire. The aim is to contribute to literature by experimenting with a methodology for interrogating the speaking “I” and its descent into the ordeal of despair by charting a cartography of the trek Kristeva’s abject subject makes to a Coatlicue state, which is anticipated by the “unstable territories” into which it drifts. This departure can be represented as perverse (enhanced by sex and alcohol), sacred (guided by the spiritual and protected by the ancestors), and transformative (signifying the textual reintegration of the self). This is to say, the work maps the subject’s fall into the abyss as well as its return and transformation through greater knowledge of the self. The abject subject may also be portrayed as perverse in his refusal to obey the law, common sense, or reason as if all is permissible and death no longer the threat it once was. At the same time the Chicano abject self is made sacred by the
subject’s recourse to ancient Mesoamerican rites of passage into the abyss not unlike shamanic practitioners of past technologies of healing who once trafficked the underworld in their efforts to reconfigure the unbalanced subject. Partnered with the act of writing as a tool for the recollection of the subject’s despair, the speaking “I” re-emerges transformed as the “knowledgeable subject.” There is a phenomenological aspect to Chapter Two as it tracks descent into, discovery of, and emergence from the abyss through the perspective of the speaking “I.” The subject’s narrativization of descending disintegration also takes the form of cartography of despair utilizing Aztec ideographic units of symbolic meaning. The thesis contributes to this literature through a Chicano queer reconfiguration of the spiritual quest as descent into the abyss and return conceptualized in Chapter 2 as a technology for sacred ritual and access of a metaphorical underworld.

In Chapter three the author approaches the act of writing as a means of transformative agency in the crafting of identity even though it is representative of a difficult and uncomfortable act. Addressing the notion of writing with heart or corazón, which ultimately calls forth a transformation of consciousness or conciencia. The writer contributes and suggests that writing with corazón facilitates a self-reflective process where varied experiences, in this specific example painful memories and moments, are validated. Writing with corazón involves a process of intellectualizing the heart, evoking lived experience with honesty and feeling, recognizing that this writing is and can be both a personal journey and an academic contribution. This style of writing merges the intellectual and emotional to the extent that one physically shares and feels. Writing with corazón invokes a spirituality compelled by a deep-rooted belief to learn to love self despite many obstacles. It is in this spiritual conviction that the writer grounds this style of writing because its aim is to balance
the self by tracing one’s personal journeys and transitions from a state of damage and vulnerability to one of understanding and learning to (re)live as one begins to (re) love oneself. Writing with corazón gives voice to one’s most intimate expressions of physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological longings and challenges one to confront them. Grappling with those intimacies, yet finding that there is power in confrontation; an unresolved intimacy only has power/agency over one if it is not resolved. The writer suggests when one is willing to change, to transform these unresolved intimacies into forms of positive self-expression than those very same desires that held one back from claiming agency begin to weaken. By communicating and writing with corazón, one invites change, embracing those crossroads that demand transformation. Lastly, writing with corazón facilitates the possibility of community building as one invites others to share and process their own emotional capacities. The various possibilities and outlooks of what it means to find conciencia through this approach can be a means of crafting new theoretical approaches to understanding the affects of loss. Much of the work often lies first and foremost in healing ourselves and then our communities. Writing with corazón, facilitated a conciencia that recognizes that one is not alone to endure hardships, but can commune with others who share similar difficulties. Conciencia recognizes, honor and celebrates our communal ties where one is able to find strength and courage as one gains wisdom from our experiences. In recognizing comunidad, the writer sought to honor his own queer antepasados and relationships with others, as well as contribute to queer Chicano scholarship.

Lastly, Chapter four offers a theoretical conceptualization and grounding for the thesis by explaining the use of autohistoria and spiritual native concepts as a theoretical framework informed by the work of noted Mesoamerican scholars especially the work of
Miguel León-Portilla, Alfredo López Austin, and Laurette Séjourné. Their work and that of others helps to provide insight into the significance and representation of Náhuatl symbols such as flowers with the spiritual association of the soul and heart. The organization of this chapter discusses the relevance and significance of the heart—according to Mesoamerican philosophy—followed by the discussion of what is described as “The Earth’s plane” and it’s symbolic and metaphorical representation as a conceptual roadmap to my work. Elements such as the heart, flowers, butterflies are all elements of the Mesoamerican deity Xochipilli, and are indicative of a return to indigenous theory building by Chicana/o scholars.

Using this subject-positionality of personal narration utilized a theoretical foundation based on the notion of *autohistoria y autohistoria-teoría* – (re) writing self, (re) writing culture—as suggested by Anzaldúa. Building upon this theoretical framework, utilizing the notion of the heart, serves a metaphorical expression and symbolic meaning. I have associated the damaged aspects of self, recordar (remembrance) and yollotli, the Náhuatl concept of the “thinking heart” as important elements necessary to explore the impact of loss and pain suggesting the “thinking heart” can be a new way of writing that incorporates wisdom from lived experiences (memories), the knowledge from academic/literary texts and the ability to gain confidence and growth as a writer and scholar, or any medium that allows for creative/artistic/literary production. The thinking heart facilitated the possibility and capacity to give expression to the chaos of emotions that were experienced during the writing process of the thesis. The writer combines the notion of flower and song with that of the flowering heart imperative by evoking memories through song. Both were needed and necessary for the subject to enter what is described as the “flowering heart imperative”. The concept of the blossoming heart to derive it’s imperative and mirror Anzaldúa’s notion of the
Coyolxauhqui imperative described as a “self-healing process”, and compulsion to transition from fragmentation to wholeness. The flowering heart imperative was important for the subject to traverse the abyss and the pursuit of harmony and equilibrium of self. However, the writer builds upon Anzaldúa’s work by suggesting that the flowering heart imperative builds upon the Coyolxauhqui imperative by contextualizing specific events, experiences, and/or moments in time and emphasizing the notion of struggle as a continuing journey is crucial in the search for pursuing equilibrium and balance of the self. The idea of struggle is important and merges appropriately with Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui imperative. Anzaldúa’s imperative underscores the challenge of chaos into wholeness, whereas, the flowering heart imperative embraces change as a journey in of itself, guided the utilization of ritual and ceremony and the written word understanding that the experiences that were communicated informed self and the affects of loss and pain.

The thesis has presented new ways of incorporating various disciplines, and literary sources in order to contextualize and understand the affects of loss, the desire to invite personal (physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual) transformation. However, further research would enrich and challenge the discipline and body of literature. This intellectual exercise demonstrates how writing about the affects of loss and pain can be a place for critical analysis and theoretical foundations.
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**WORKS CONSULTED**


