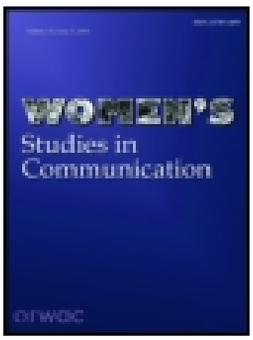

Women's Studies in Communication

ISSN: 0749-1409 (Print) 2152-999X (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uwsc20

Theories in the Flesh and Flights of the Imagination: Embracing the Soul and Spirit of Critical Performative Writing in Communication Research

Robert Gutierrez-Perez

To cite this article: Robert Gutierrez-Perez (2019): Theories in the Flesh and Flights of the Imagination: Embracing the Soul and Spirit of Critical Performative Writing in Communication Research, Women's Studies in Communication, DOI: 10.1080/07491409.2018.1551695

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2018.1551695

Published online: 22 Feb 2019.

WOMEN'S STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2018.1551695

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

Theories in the Flesh and Flights of the Imagination: Embracing the Soul and Spirit of Critical Performative Writing in Communication Research

Robert Gutierrez-Perez

Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, USA

ABSTRACT

This critical essay describes and demonstrates the uses and unique contributions of performative writing as a form of inquiry into the materialities and mobilities of sociocultural communicative phenomena. Embracing an Anzaldúan approach, the author utilizes Mesoamerican Aztec and Chicanx history, iconography, and mythos to argue for an ontological reimaging of where research should begin and end. As a methodological intervention, this article challenges traditional impulses regarding where knowledge generation occurs, which knowledges are valid, and who counts as a valuable knowledge producer. By shifting genres, breaking grammatical rules, and creatively constructing poetics and rhythm (*flor y canto*), this "flight of the imagination" focuses on what Chicana, Latina, and indigenous scholars have termed "fleshing the spirit" or "spiriting the flesh." By embracing the soul work and spirituality of writing, this piece offers an art-based approach to methodological inquiry that functions as a sharp critique of the White capitalist cisheteropatriarchal structure of higher education that maintains status quo understandings of knowledge. When rerouting our methodological impulses toward a critical and decolonial telos and embracing the soul and spirit of performative writing, I argue that our first move must be to make an ontological shift in how we see the world and our place in it—we must begin and end with "theories in the flesh."

KEYWORDS

Gloria Anzaldúa; Chicanx history; decolonial theory; Mesoamerican iconography; queer of color critique

It is dangerous work
diving in
reaching out
changed, changing, breaking down
pulling yourself back together, loss,
losing, each pain a lesson
each wounding a bridge
to another image
flesh bone sinew
Move
Engage the witness
Perform the ceremony to open up
sacred critical dialogues

CONTACT Robert Gutierrez-Perez rgutierrezperez@unr.edu Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, Mail Stop 0228, 1664 N. Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89557, USA.

don't re-center

Shift into shifting
into meaning-making
into a cauldron como una bruja
stretching into yoga
breathing energy into the third eye
chakra, purple glowing
swirling violet over a question
an indigo theory
a body performing
flesh

Stop failing to fail
change the cage the metaphor the definition
bars chains anchors
turn heavy south
another mundo
the under belly
down into flesh fingers in your navel
cradled in the deep the rage
afraid to glimpse shouting at the surface
darkness in your ears
unworthy
selfish
ugly

You think you deserve space
Look at you monstrous
crazy shapeshifter unknowable
Stay still and be what I need you to be
On your back I can be stable
letting you eat the crumbs
from my cake you can
lick the frosting from my fingers
pink sweet greedy
needy to remain
insane in this contract

Spirit
lift me from this nightmare
to another image

Someone call una curandera to bring my soul back
from the dead this susto this loss

I promise to bring messages
from loved ones, from the creative
imaginary cenote
place of deep waters,
conocimientos,
rippling across the surface
drip dropping to another image
to another image

to another image
imagine

In the opening poem, I have provided a barometer for this entire piece—a measuring of pressure to give you, the reader, a corresponding and cascading density of images, themes, characters, and narrative story line to help you engage as a witness to this essay. I did this because I need you to trust me. If I tell you too much at the beginning (as in any great adventure), then the writing becomes wooded and cold (Anzaldúa, *Reader*; Gutierrez-Perez, "A Letter"). Predictable. Frozen. You aren't allowed to feel uncomfortable. To feel unanchored, freewheeling, changed, changing, breaking down. Loss. On this flight of the imagination, please feel free to circle back to this opening poem to find your bearings if you do feel lost. In fact, I welcome this circular movement because I want us to perform a ceremony on the page that resists recentering performative writing around the needs, values, and belief systems currently dominating communication research (Calafell and Moreman; Chakravartty et al.). Decolonial performative writing is a mode of research methodology that gives "voice to those deemed *other*, interrogate[s] larger sociopolitical matrices of oppression, and speak[s] back to power" (Willink et al. 295). It feels dangerous to choose to do the labor of diving in and reaching out, showing you each pain, each lesson, each bridge to another image, but when I consider the relationship between critical and performance theories, I must take risks because I am literally trying to move the materiality of *your* flesh, bone, and sinew. Undertaking dangerous work (Madison, "Dangerous") and/or "wicked problems" in communication research (Willink et al.) means that performative writers must dive into their own flesh as a way of connecting theory to the sacred and material dimensions inherent within the process of writing about research.

These "theories in the flesh" are embodied, experiential, and intersectional theories of resistance and agency drawn from everyday life (Anzaldúa, *Light;* Calafell, "Rhetorics"; Moraga and Anzaldúa), yet performing on the page is inevitably restricted and restrained by the politics of textuality (Conquergood). Indeed, textuality engages in scriptocentrism as it largely remains embedded in colonial practices and histories that legitimate particular forms of knowledge production. My performing body, as I write this very page, also becomes placed in a "matrix of domination" (Hill Collins) where I am always already both privileged and oppressed within a modern-colonial gender system (Anzaldúa, *Reader*; Bañales; Lugones). In this piece, I confront the coloniality and materiality of textual conventions through poetry, mythmaking, and performative writing to move into a space in/between you and me where the flower and song of our co-created performance takes us on a flight of the imagination to other worlds. These worlds are places where we may enflesh the soul and spirit of writing about research with the everyday lives of those surviving on the peripheries of society and culture (Anzaldúa, *Light*; Facio and Lara).

As a queer man of color, I want to do scholarship that addresses both the mobilities of displacement and exile, as well as the material contours of erasure for my (queer of color) communities. As an urgent attempt to participate in an activist world through art and scholarship, performative writing is dangerous work because the spiritual and psychic dimensions of creative acts of resistance transform images. As I have written about elsewhere, "by opening borders, removing disciplinary walls, and standing on shifting

sands, the performative writer is free to let the culture dictate the language and the rules of its existence" (Willink et al. 303). Yet, as of now, scriptocentrism continues to uphold "patriarchal constructions that align women with the body, and men with mental faculties, help keep the mind-body, reason-emotion, objective-subjective, as well as masculine-feminine hierarchies stable" (Conquergood 82). For society to undergo a transformation, our relationships and creative projects need to undergo transformations as well. White supremacist, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal systems thrive in processes of prediction and control, so performative writing that works from an awareness that the spirit and soul are intimate parts of the writing and research process provides an alternative starting point for critical decolonial scholarship (Anzaldúa, *Light* 44; Facio and Lara; González).

Overwhelmed by this dangerous and embodied work (Gutierrez-Perez, "Bridging") and finding myself experiencing writer's block, I decided to participate in a gong bath with my husband and our two friends. According to the flyer at my yoga studio, a gong bath is an ancient form of healing that utilizes sound and crystals through planetary gongs tuned to the frequency of the sun.[1] Arriving ten minutes early, I nervously asked the workshop coordinator for a crystal to help with transitions. He wanted more details. "Well, I am moving, graduating, starting a new job … " He raised his hand to stop me. "So you want to quicken the transition period." I nodded, and he handed me a crystal with a name I still can't pronounce. He then told me to place it on my third eye (forehead) during the gong bath, explaining, "This is for quickening a spiritual transformation. If it gets to be too much, then take it off your forehead. Be careful. It's extraterrestrial." To find my way around writer's block, I elected to challenge the "rigid disciplinary and academic dictates of what 'counts' as a source of knowledge or information" (González 633), choosing instead to approach research as an "intimate, organic and interdependent" process (635). This flight of the imagination is and is *not* about a gong bath, and it is absolutely *not* about the Western co-optation and appropriation of non-Western cultures for the purposes of consumption and control. As a researcher and writer, I am always swirling over questions about scholarly tradition and creative resistance. In this essay, I am stretching out an everyday moment, calling it violet, purple glowing. Like *una bruja*, I am making meaning in a cauldron: shifting, performing, and writing with my body, with my own flesh.

Performative writing is an embodied method of social scientific inquiry into a culture, ideology, theory, image, or encounter. "In performance and performative writing we have the potential to connect theory, performance, and lived experience" (Calafell, *Monstrosity* 29). Performative writing is about materiality and mobility. For example, when he was alive, my White and Deaf grandfather loved to fish, and now, my still-living Mexican and Deaf grandmother loves to sign me the story of when we all went camping together when I was a young boy. With hands and face full of exclamation and excitement, her fingers move, and I can feel the flurry of their motion circulate and swirl the air around me. By submitting characters for examination and a scene for context, I utilize images to sketch out a biracial marriage within an ableist framework where I, as a young mestizo boy, am near the lake playing beside my grandfather fishing. Gloria Anzaldúa describes images as "animals, helping beings, who assist us on our underworld journey each night" (*Light* 28). As a performative writer, I wrestle and give

birth to this image on the page by "tuning in to the 'other' mind or 'other' self," which emerges as "the creative unconscious taps into el cenote, an inner, underground river of information" (28). Standing in the water as a young boy, my grandfather hooks a bite and a silver fish comes splish-splashing out of the river. Shocked! I run screaming to my grandmother. To them, this is a cute moment with their grandson. For me, it was the beginning of my continuing fear of open bodies of water.

Can you imagine? The thought of an entire world moving and functioning all around me without my knowledge—without the full range of my senses, and without my control—frightens me to death. Lying on my blue yoga mat, I lift the crystal up to the light falling directly on me from the skylight window in the ceiling (it is sunset). The unknown crystal has a smoky dull green opacity in the light. I place the triangular stone longwise on my "third eye" and begin settling into the cushion underneath my head. I place a quilt made for me by my grandmother underneath my feet, elevating them slightly. After a brief explanation of the instruments by the facilitator, the vibrations begin to wash over my body. Immediately, I feel a balancing, a resonance as my ears adjust and register the continuity of the vibrations. I practice leading my consciousness around my body. Left shoulder, arm, hip, leg, toes, then up and down the right leg, toes, quad, hip, shoulder, neck. With my eyes closed, my imagination travels through memories, taking me to another image, another image, another image, imagine.

According to Anzaldúa, the "imagination opens the road to both personal and societal change—transformation of self, consciousness, community, culture, society" (*Light* 44). She writes, "My imagination allows me to use my intuition, to figure things out in images. Imagination is my musa bruja. The images are a gateway to el cenote, the place where they take a body and life" (36). Culture touches and influences images and circulates them to be adopted, modified, or enriched before passing them onto another culture, and "the process is repeated until the original meanings of images are pushed into the unconscious" (Anzaldúa, *Reader* 180). Like a freshwater spring in the mountains, *el cenote*, the communal unconscious reservoir, bubbles up metaphors and images if one is willing to enter silence, go inward, and attend to feelings corresponding to earth, female, and water energies (Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*). Creative acts, such as writing and performance, utilize the spiritual and psychic component of the imagination through practices "of spiritual excavation, of (ad)venturing into the inner void, extrapolating meaning from it and sending it out into the world. To do this kind of work requires the total person—body, soul, mind, and spirit" (Anzaldúa, *Reader* 135). Suddenly, the gong darkens in depth and length, and I am no longer in control of my consciousness as images and colors flash across my eyes.

I focus on the space between my eyebrows and try to let the weight of the crystal anchor me to my body. My heart is racing and my mind is swirling through images and colors like an astronaut spiraling through space. I am reminded by critical performance scholar Dwight Conquergood that "with displacement, upheaval, unmooring, come the terror and potentiality of flux, improvisation, and creative recombinations" (89). How can we use the imagination to transform "customary frameworks and conceptual categories reinforced by language and consensual reality" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 45)? How can I utilize the performance paradigm to privilege the "particular, participatory,

dynamic, intimate, precarious, embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency, and ideology" (Conquergood 92)? Thunk! I am in *un otro mundo*. Underwater, I am breathing and feeling hot with a rage that I didn't know I could experience. Scared, I try to run, but my feet won't move because they are stuck in the sand. An image of the Grenada Underwater Sculpture Park registers in my mind, and I feel the lives of those hauntingly beautiful statues of people underwater. Am I one of these statues?! Am I in the underworld?!

In the Aztec ontomythological cosmos, the underworld is the "realm of Earth energies, animal spirits, and the dead who have not moved on to the next level of existence" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 25). In writing about the soul and spirit of communication research as material and mobile, I am attempting to displace notions that identity and culture are "given and essential" and resituate these as "constructed and relational" (Conquergood 88). Identity (re)formation is a "performance in process" rather than a "postulate, premise, or originary principle" (89), so I am constructing a borderlands ontology drawing from Conquergood's insights into identity, culture, and performance to change the frameworks and customs of where knowledge generation occurs, which knowledges are valid, and who counts as a valuable knowledge producer.

My construction expands on Anzaldúa's understanding of the realm of the soul as the realm of the imagination (*Light*). The power of the soul comes from its intimate connection with the dead (*Light*). Noting that the "the psyche's language is metaphorical," Anzaldúa describes these figures and landscapes as being "experienced as alive and independent of the dreamer. They speak with their own voices; move about at will. They possess an intelligence and an inner knowing" (*Light* 36). Flights of the imagination are intersectional in their performance, and the telos of writing, moving, circling, looping through metaphoric play is to enact an intersectional rhetoric, which is a "kind of rhetoric wherein one form of discourse is not privileged over another; rather, diverse forms intersect organically to create something challenging to rhetorical norms" (Enck-Wanzer 191). Attempting to describe, touch, and feel an image like in this flight of the imagination is an attempt to learn from another reality, another set of rules, another story of what is and can be (Anzaldúa, *Light*).

I look up within my imagination and see a pale light shining through the surface of the murky and smoky dull green water. I recognize this soft light as the moon: my guardian. I focus on my breathing. Inhale. 1 2 3 4. Exhale. 1 2 3 4. Rather than fight the image, I decide to stay and explore—a temporary immobility that is partially a conscious effort but mainly an unconscious and emotional one. From this approach,

> Each reality is only a description, a system of perception and language. When you learn to access other "realities," you undo one description or plane/level of reality and reconstruct another or others. You learn a new language and a new way of viewing the world, and you bring this "magical" knowledge and apply it to the everyday world. (Anzaldúa, *Light* 45)

I decide to shift from my first-person perspective to a third-person perspective. What do I look like? What sights can I see to help me describe this reality? I will my consciousness to look outside myself. In performance terms, Conquergood describes sight and surveillance as dependent on detachment and distance whereas "getting perspective on something entails withdrawal from intimacy" (87), so I move utilizing a willed perception that allows me to inhabit the image from a distance and look at myself stuck in

the sand. I see long dark hair and a pale brown complexion. I am wearing a headdress with multiple thick bands wrapped around my head, each lined on top and bottom with small decorative balls. With two large tassels attached on each side of my face and a large knot at the back of my head, I am a beautiful young woman, mouth agape, screaming at the surface of the lake. Later in Yin Yoga,[2] I connect this image to Chalchiuhtlicue ("She of the Jade Skirt"), goddess of lakes, streams, rivers, and other fresh waters in Aztec ontomythology. As I observe the female aspect of and wife to Tlaloc, god of rain, I recognize and am suddenly aware that this body of water is a lake. Anzaldúa writes that "awareness is not just in the mind, but also includes body knowledge. This awareness awakens some deep hidden memory or lost knowledge of times past, reminding me that I'm doing something I didn't know I knew" (*Light* 24). Once I am aware of her, I cannot shake her; I cannot escape her fingering at my navel, her call from the dark depths of water and earth urging my soul to remember.

In Aztec ontomythology, Chalchiuhtlicue ruled the world of the Fourth Sun, which was a watery sun. In some tellings of her myth, she destroyed the Fourth Sun with a massive flood that lasted for fifty-two years to purify the world (León-Portilla). In other versions, she was goaded on by the imbalance in the people of that world and by the misgivings and manipulations of Tlaloc, who enraged her with his infidelity. In her defense, she sent those worthy into the heavens while the rest were transformed into fish (Kroger and Granziera). The Metropolitan Museum of Art currently displays online a fifteenth- to early-sixteenth-century basalt and pigment stone-carved figure of this powerful goddess.[3] Chalchiuhtlicue was believed to have lived in the mountains, and she represented floods and the terrestrial aspects of water, such as fertility, sustenance, purity, source of life, and the instability/transience of life (Kroger and Granziera). Like many Aztec deities, Chalchiuhtlicue represents qualities of both life and death, specifically in regard to the maladies and blessings that lakes, streams, rivers, and springs bring to the people (Kroger and Granziera).

By remembering Chalchiuhtlicue, I reimagine critical and performance theory to create transformative images for those scholars looking to decolonize performance and writing. Further, I want to resist White, heterosexual, Western-dominant thinking that claims unfettered access to indigenous and queer knowledges as an unquestioned privilege of the researcher. In critical performative writing, those who do not reflexively locate their place in hierarchies of power or who attempt to transcend the pain of their own shame and guilt about privilege by taking over "other" ("exotic" or "ethnic") subjectivities are not doing the work of emancipation. One needs to feel the bars and chains of positionality. Privilege anchors you in this reality. Turns you heavy. South. Into the underbelly. Cradled in the deep. How can a performative writer utilize healing images to "bring back the pieces, heal las rajaduras" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 29)? How can I imagine the world in which I want to exist?

I understand Chalchiuhtlicue to be an ancestral image from an Aztec and Chicanx mythopoetic past that I deploy here as a metaphor of the personal and collective rage at a colonial/modern gender system that continues to oppress, marginalize, and violently suppress my (queer of color) communities. As Conquergood writes, "critical theory is committed to unveiling the political stakes that anchor cultural practices—research and scholarly practices no less than the everyday" (81). By moving into an image, a culture,

a research situation, the performative writer creatively engages with and intimately becomes involved in the activity, the historical situatedness of the image, and the unique individuals involved in the doing (Conquergood 93). Staring at the moon from within the eyes of the imagined image of Chalchiuhtlicue, I understand my rage in this instance to be that I, too, want to move beyond the surface and hear my queer of color voice welcomed into academia, popular culture, and history. Discussing the politics of narratives, history, queer temporality, and queer diaspora, Bernadette Calafell writes, "[I]n the performance or reembodiment of memory not only are present and past conditions affected, but in this telling the future is opened. Idealistically, these openings would allow for altered futures and possibilities, forays into materiality" ("Pro(re-)claiming" 53). As a queer Chicanx cisgender male, I want the world to remember She of the Jade Skirt because I want them to remember how her power flooded over their skyscrapers. An image of a powerful femininity that showcases other ways of being for Chicanas and Latinas beyond the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, or *La Llorona* (Calafell, *Latina/o*, "Pro(re-)claiming"; Moreman and Calafell). Chalchiuhtlicue is a metaphor for life (Anzaldúa, *Light*) or an "equipment for living" (Burke).

Suddenly, I am no longer passively observing through the eyes of the image; I am shouting with it. Performative writing foregrounds story, orality, and voice as instruments to interrupt, transgress, transform, and transcend oppressive practices (Willink et al.), so I am accepting the rage, the frustration, the need to spit the swallowed vitriol back up out of me because I don't want it. I don't need it. I am claiming this image as a counterstory to those racial and classed microaggressions hurled cruelly my way at academic meetings and academic events (Willink et al. 293–96). You can have them back. I will no longer stay still and be what you need me to be. I have embraced the image of Chalchiuhtlicue, and I don't want your pink sweet greedy cake. I will not lick the frosting from your fingers. I would be insane to remain in this dynamic, in this relationship. Spirit, lift me from this nightmare to another image. Someone call a *curandera* to bring my soul back.

In the Codex Borbonicus, created sometime before or after the conquest, Chalchiuhtlicue is once again depicted in her distinctive headdress and jade skirt with a river of water rushing out from below her, resembling a woman's water breaking before childbirth (5). In the river, two babies (one female and one male) are flowing out of Chalchiuhtlicue, which depicts her role as *materially* present in childbirth as an element vital to the watery nature of the human womb and the medical process of birthing (i.e., cleansing the newborn, perspiration during labor) (Kroger and Granziera). This image of Chalchiuhtlicue does not equate womanhood with motherhood, but she is a spiritual guardian that performed literally as the water in the ceremony and also as a symbol of something radically interconnected to the world and the divine. Chalchiuhtlicue is the patron goddess of childbirth.

Symbolized in the story of the destruction of the Fourth Sun, purification through water is the domain of Chalchiuhtlicue, and her name and element is/was invoked in the bathing ceremonies of Aztec newborns. According to Miguel León-Portilla, these rituals were spiritual performances deeply connected to the soul. At the bathing ceremony, the midwife would cut the child's umbilical cord. As she washed the child, she would speak the names of the gods, including a prayer directly to Chalchiuhtlicue (Kroger and

Granziera). Afterward, the child would receive a name based on the day he or she was born (León-Portilla; Mckeever Furst). Names given were connected to the complex Aztec calendar, which was in turn intimately connected to the movement of the cosmos; therefore, one's name was an expression of soul/fate (Mckeever Furst). Chalchiuhtlicue is a nonessentialized metaphor for a particular type of earth, feminine, and water energy that moves through our bodies in tandem with the cosmos (fate), the divine (spirit), and the dead (soul). It is another place to start. It is a *conocimiento* rippling across the surface drip-dropping to another image. Smelling a shadow, I turn to see silver flicks of light. It is a school of fish. The vibrations begin to fade. I feel my soul being called back from this *susto*. Back in that Denver yoga studio. I am reeling as we stumble dumbfoundedly to our car. We grab some fast food and discuss our experiences in the vibrations over soda and fries. I feel privileged and displaced as I chew and consume my late dinner.

To/from the borderlands

To embrace the traumas of breaking down, changing, and bridging as a way of life is to risk the safety of the soul and spirit. Anzaldúa describes these affective flights of the imagination through the creative act of writing as a kind of "shaman aesthetic" (*Reader* 121–25). How can I draw on the underground river of images of my ancestors without appropriating from the very real and living indigenous communities still speaking Nahuatl? How I can I provide a barometer for the reader to measure the degree of reflexivity necessary for this method of inquiry? Returning to the body foregrounds the flesh as a way of knowing and being (Conquergood 82), and by embracing the emotional, watery energy of Chalchiuhtlicue, I am engaging in a method of performative writing that is invested in theories of and in the flesh. The construction of a mind/body hierarchy is often uplifted in academic writing "so that mental abstractions and rational thought are taken as both epistemologically and morally superior to sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions" (Conquergood 82). The tendency of textuality to freeze culture, identity, and history makes the embodied, moving performance of letters and words, which at one point shook rapidly and dynamically during the text's creation, a long-forgotten memory. My hands, fluid over the keyboard altar, coolly run together sentences and paragraphs about places my spirit has traveled … but the text continues to be embedded in colonial practices and histories surrounding forms of knowledge production in which my performing body is now implicated.

Place and displacement, language and hybridity, and appropriation and mimicry are all key concepts in postcolonial theory that critical performance can reimage and reroute to move intellectual inquiry toward healing. Flights of the imagination taken through performative writing, such as the one staged in this essay, send the writer's spirit to "address the range of effects and material consequences within the dynamic of migration from one local site to another as well as migration from one's homeland, as the colonized margin, to the colonial center of the European or global North metropole" (Madison, *Critical* 58). To write this is not to equate material forms of diaspora and (neo)colonial oppression with spiritual forms but to mark my position as a

performative writer who views text as sacred, as poetic, as art engaging in a process that draws on the creative imaginary to utilize language in hybrid forms. I mark this as an ontological shift because "my soul makes itself through the creative act" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 95), and instead of existing as dead/inert/frozen, "the work has an identity; it is a 'who' or a 'what' and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers" (89). As Anzaldúa succinctly explains: "The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic" (88). It is an aesthetic or an orientation to the page that does not "split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life" (88). Shifting into an artistic orientation to the page, performative writing utilizes "the imagination to impose order on chaos; she gives psychic confession form and direction, provides language to distressed and confused people—a language that expresses previously inexpressible psychic states and enables the reader to undergo in an ordered and intelligible form real experiences that would otherwise be chaotic and inexpressible" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 39).

Principally, flights of the imagination are concerned with performance and hermeneutics: "What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when performed experience becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical inquiry, a mode of understanding?" (Conquergood 96). In performing such a practice, this essay offers a call to embrace, rather than avoid, a language of the spirit and soul that is committed to theories in the flesh. Oriented to the material relationships between writing, the body, images, and decolonizing intellectual inquiry, theories in the flesh originate from the following faculty: "practice as a form of theorizing and theorizing as a form of practice" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 181).

Given how violence is being enacted on particular bodies linked to particular histories and cultural identities at this particular moment, it is important to note that not all writers are taking the same risks with this method or as vulnerable when undertaking performative writing in communication research (Gutierrez-Perez and Andrade; Gutierrez-Perez, "Bridging"). The challenge for writers and researchers is to learn which old metaphors and images no longer serve our selves, our communities, or our collective vision of a world where we all matter (Anzaldúa, *Reader*; Calafell, "When"). Rather than calling for the water to rise, I am interested in images that stimulate transformations, transgressions, transcendence. "Certain images change the images that live within a person's psyche, altering the stories that live within rather than trying to 'fix' the person that 'houses' these images" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 35). However, to locate such soul-healing images, a performative writer must dive into the pain, the loss, and the wounds/traumas. There is always a tension within writing between attempts to capture fluidity, movement, and bodily sensation and the detached, disembodied, and immobilizing function of the text itself. This divide demands the courage to try (and risk failing) to produce texts that imperfectly maintain the mobility and materiality of a spiritual, soulful, and enfleshed communicative experience.

Notes

1. At the time of publication of this essay, the video "Sol Mobilis—The 32" Sun Gong" is available and can be used to sample the audio being described throughout this document.

Please feel free to play this audio during the reading of this essay as an extra sensory layer to this methodological intervention.

2. Yin Yoga is described by the Samadhi Center for Yoga in Denver, Colorado, as a "quiet yet profound and highly therapeutic style of yoga that is available to all students at all levels. The power of Yin is in its long-held relaxed floor postures. This kind of stretch stimulates the deep, connective 'Yin' tissues of the body, affecting not only the physical body, but also energetic aspects of the self. Yin yoga strengthens the flow of prana (life force) or chi, maintains the health of the meridian system of the body, and as an additional bonus contributes to the mindfulness necessary for a successful meditation practice" (Annie). My interest in yoga began through my theoretical explorations of Chicana feminisms. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa discuss a "yoga of the body" that AnaLouise Keating discusses during their interview as a "union of body with mind and spirit" (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 99).
3. See https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/307651.

Works cited

Annie. "Yin Yoga." *Insights from Samadhi*, Samadhi Center for Yoga, 25 Feb. 2012, www.samadhiyoga.net/class-descriptions/yin-yoga-with-katherine-coleman. Accessed 28 Sept. 2018.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Edited by AnaLouise Keating, Duke UP, 2009.

———. *Interviews/Entrevistas*. Edited by Ana Louise Keating, Routledge, 2000.

———. *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Edited by Ana Louise Keating, Duke UP, 2015.

Bañales, Xamuel. "Jotería: A Decolonizing Political Project." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2014, pp. 155–66.

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. Louisiana State UP, 1941.

Calafell, Bernadette Marie. *Monstrosity, Performance, and Race in Contemporary Culture*. Peter Lang, 2015.

———. "Pro(re-)claiming Loss: A Performance Pilgrimage in Search of Malintzin Tenépal." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2005, pp. 43–56.

———. "Rhetorics of Possibility: Challenging the Textual Bias of Rhetoric through the Theory of the Flesh." *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*, edited by Eileen E. Schell and K. J. Rawson, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010, pp. 104–17.

———. "When Will We All Matter? Exploring Race, Pedagogy, and Sustained Hope for the Academy." *The Sage Handbook of Communication and Instruction*, edited by Deanna L. Fassett and John T. Warren, Sage, 2010, pp. 343–60.

Calafell, Bernadette Marie, and Shane T. Moreman. "Envisioning an Academic Readership: Latina/o Performativities per the Form of Publication." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2009, pp. 123–30.

Chakravartty, Paula, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain. "#CommunicationSoWhite." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2018, pp. 254–66.

Codex Borbonicus. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, Paris, Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., http://www.famsi.org/research/loubat/Borbonicus/thumbs0.html

Conquergood, Dwight. *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*. Edited by E. Patrick Johnson. U of Michigan P, 2013.

Enck-Wanzer, Darrel. "Trashing the System: Social Movement, Intersectional Rhetoric, and Collective Agency in the Young Lords Organization's Garbage Offensive." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 92, no. 2, 2006, pp. 174–201.

Facio, Elisa, and Irene Lara, editors. *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*. U of Arizona P, 2014.

González, María Cristina. "The Four Seasons of Ethnography: A Creation-Centered Ontology for Ethnography." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2000, pp. 623–50.

Gutierrez-Perez, Robert. "Bridging Performances of Auto/Ethnography and Queer Bodies of Color to Advocacy and Civic Engagement." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2017, pp. 148–56.

———. "A Letter from My Students: Transformative Pedagogy, Borderlands Performance, and the Critical Junctures of Whiteness." *Liminalities: A Performance Studies Journal*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2016, pp. 1–19, www.liminalities.net/12-4/letter.pdf

Gutierrez-Perez, Robert, and Luis Andrade. "Queer of Color Worldmaking: <Marriage> in the Rhetorical Archive and the Embodied Repertoire." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 38, nos. 1–2, 2018, pp. 1–18.

Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 1991.

Kroger, Joseph, and Patrizia Granziera. *Aztec Goddesses and Christian Madonnas: Images of the Divine Feminine in Mexico*. Routledge, 2016.

León-Portilla, Miguel. *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*. Translated by Jack Emoory Davis, U of Oklahoma P, 1963.

Lugones, Maria. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, pp. 742–59.

Madison, D. Soyini. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. 2nd ed., Sage, 2012.

———. "Dangerous Ethnography." *Qualitative Inquiry and Social Justice: Toward a Politics of Hope*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Michael D. Giardiana, Left Coast Press, 2009, pp. 187–97.

Mckeever Furst, Jill Leslie. *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico*. Yale UP, 1995.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, editors. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. 2nd ed., Kitchen Table, 1983.

Moreman, Shane, and Bernadette Marie Calafell. "Buscando Para Nuestros Hijos: Utilizing La Llorona for Cultural Critique." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2008, pp. 309–26.

"Sol Mobilis—The 32" Sun Gong." *YouTube*, uploaded by Dharam Singh, 16 Mar. 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MggtjVCgG8

Water Deity (Chalchiuhtlicue). 1400–1500? The Met Fifth Avenue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/307651

Willink, Kate G., Robert Gutierrez-Perez, Salma Shukri, and Lacey Stein. "Navigating with the Stars: Critical Qualitative Methodological Constellations for Critical Intercultural Communication Research." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2014, pp. 289–316.