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Theatre Journal, Volume 52, Number 1, March 2000, pp. 23-49 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/tj.2000.0001

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Mythical Performativity: Relocating Aztlán in Chicana Feminist Cultural Productions

Alicia Arrizón

The term “Aztlán” redefines space. Its discursive configurations, ranging from ancient mythology to land annexation, are engaged repeatedly in Chicano cultural studies and Chicana feminist practices. From the “manifesto” of the nationalist Chicano movement to the radical feminist perspectives in Cherríe Moraga’s queer configurations of space and bodies,1 the genealogy of Aztlán affects cultural identity, shaping the ongoing modifications—and sometimes, commodifications—of the collectivity. According to myth, Aztlán is the ancestral homeland in the north that the Aztecs left in 1168 when they journeyed southward to found the promised land, Tenochtitlán (Mexico City), in 1325.

Many Chicanas and Chicanos, in locating the US Southwest as the geographical site of this pre-Hispanic homeland, claim that they are descendents of Ollin Tonatiuh (the Nahuatl name for the Fifth Sun). As Armando B. Rendón explains, the Fifth Sun “is the very foundation of life, of spirituality, not in the restricted sense of an organized religion but in the nature of a common bond among all soul creatures.”2 Aztlán thus represents the spiritual power of unity among a people who see in their common pre-Hispanic heritage and indigenous past a source of cultural affirmation in the present. For Chicano nationalists, Aztlán’s spiritual reality helps combat racism and exploitation, while its physical reality justifies contemporary efforts to reclaim this lost land. Gloria Anzaldúa conceptualizes Aztlán in more complex terms as an in-between place, coinciding with the physical and metaphysical space of the US-Mexico border. The border is the place where the First and Third Worlds meet in a head-on confrontation: it is “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”³

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1 Moraga includes a section entitled “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” in her book The Last Generation (Boston: South End Press, 1993). I discuss her ideas in the final section of this paper.
2 According to Rendón, the epic of the Four Suns begins with the Sun of Night or Earth, depicted as a Tiger. This period is by itself sterile. Next came the Sun of Air, or God of Wind, a pure spirit whose indwellers became monkeys; then the Sun of Rain or Fire, in which only birds survive; and finally, the Sun of Water, friendly only to fish. For more details, see Armando B. Rendón, Chicano Manifesto (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 9.
3 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987), 3.
This study begins with a brief analysis of Aztlán’s historical conception as the Chicano homeland. In the second section of my study, I look at the possibilities of visual and performance art, discussing the way in which mestizaje is intertwined with Aztlán’s geopolitical origin and the “native” body. This shifting conceptual framework moves Aztlán’s spatiality and mythical subjectivity beyond Chicano nationalism into a more liberated realm in which the Chicana-mestiza body functions as the central structure. Generally speaking, I discuss the work of Chicana artists and scholars dealing with the idea of mestizaje and the intercultural body. In the last part, I examine Cherrie Moraga’s configuration of queer Aztlán, including analytical commentaries of her play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (1999). Theoretically, as my title suggests, I aim to relocate the myth of Aztlán. My main objective is to mark the transitions through which Chicana feminism has resituated Aztlán within revealing geographies, bodies, and knowledges. By using the theoretical notion of performativity, I explore Aztlán as an allegorical and mythological figure of speech and at the same time expose the ways in which Aztlán secures the formation of identity in the gap between the real and the representational. I examine the material practices of Chicana performance and their relation to a cultural feminism inevitably inscribed in the desire for critical agency. My analysis of specific examples of Chicana visual and performance art opens possibilities for understanding mestizaje as a form of transculturation. As understood by many cultural critics the term “transculturation” applies to cultures modified, altered, or influenced through their contact with another culture.5 For the purpose of this study, the term’s definition enacts the complexity of power relations embodied in Aztlán itself.

**Aztlán: The Chicano Territory and National Anthem**

From the rise of the Mexican American consciousness in the 1930s, to the self-affirmation of the Chicano experience in the 1960s, to the ongoing processes of Mexican immigration, the cultural identity of Mexicans in the United States is as diverse as the Latino population itself.6 Chicano, a term honed in oppositional critical thought during the upheavals of the civil rights movement, asserts la mexicanidad as a positive quality of national origin, counteracting ethnic stereotyping and discrimination.

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4 I will be discussing the version of the play completed in 1999. This version of *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* was submitted to *Out of the Fringe*, an anthology of new Latino plays edited by Caridad Svich and María Teresa Marrero and scheduled to be published by Theatre Communications in the spring of 2000.


6 Since the 1960s, people of Latin American descent have become an increasingly important part of the country’s population. By the early twenty-first century, they may become the largest group in the United States. The country’s largest cities currently have substantial populations of individuals of Latin American descent. Miami could be considered a Latin American city within the boundaries of the United States, given the large size of its Cuban and Caribbean populations. It is a financial and tourist center for much of Latin America. Los Angeles has a Mexican population that is second in size only to Mexico City. New York has not only a large Puerto Rican population, but also a rapidly growing Dominican immigrant group. The Latino population in Chicago is mostly Mexican but also
Chicano nationalist leaders tapped the Mexico-Azteca cultural connection when they adopted *El Plan de Aztlán* during the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference (held in Denver, Colorado, 1969). Organized by Rodolfo “Corky” González, the conference brought together community and student activists throughout the Southwest and inspired a new awareness of collectivity and self-determination in the Chicano movement. *El Plan* gave voice to this new understanding and was adopted, at the urging of poet Alberto Alurista, as the fundamental theme of the conference:

> With our heart in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán.7

In theory, the nationalist discourse of *El Plan* not only gives voice to a spiritual cause and struggle, it also reaffirms the cultural identity of a distressed and dispossessed community. As a conceptual political space, Aztlán represents the sovereignty of human action and national fellowship. Its inventive assemblage marks the separation between the dominant and the marginal, and it represents continuous processes in the making of cultures, nations, and societies. The birth of the Chicano nation Aztlán is a continuation of the indigenous past, affirming that the conquest of space does not necessarily lead to the extinction of a people’s cultural identity, memory, and vernacular traditions.

*El Plan* named brotherhood as the unifying force and the necessary engine of group deliverance: “[B]rotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggle against the foreign ‘gabacho’ who exploits our riches and destroys our culture.”8 At the same time, however, the emphasis on the interventionist role of the “gabacho” (Anglo-Saxon) led Chicano political militants to focus on the failed promises of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.9

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal “gringo” invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.10

includes Puerto Ricans and Central American groups. During the past decade, Central Americans in the United States have increased at a faster rate than any other Latino group. In certain areas within many US cities, it is not necessary to speak any English at all. This phenomenon has stimulated not only bilingual education but also its mirror opposite—the English-only movement.

8 Ibid., 4.
10 *Documents of the Chicano Struggle*, 4.
For young Chicano militants, reclaiming a lost heritage was not to be limited to a spiritual and cultural recovery. The goal of regaining the territory usurped by the United States in its nineteenth-century hunger to expand and to implement the ideals of manifest destiny became paramount. Since these lost lands occupied the same space once known as Aztlán, land annexation could be understood as an act of affirmation, identifying and laying claim to the native homeland of all people of Mexican ancestry.\textsuperscript{11} The “Organizational Goals” section of El Plan states:

\begin{quote}
Lands rightfully ours will be fought for and defended. Land and realty ownership will be acquired by the community for the people’s welfare. Economic ties of responsibility must be secured by nationalism and the Chicano defense units.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

In practice, the goal of recovering land proved idealistic and romantic. Nevertheless, the historical intertwining of Aztlán and land annexation is an important element in contemporary communities of peoples of Mexican descent living in the United States. The ongoing movement of people north to Aztlán has been a key factor shaping the heterogeneity of this population.\textsuperscript{13}

Moreover, in the face of a persistent US politics of domination, the commitment to a cultural identity that includes a physical basis in the land provides a weapon against resurgent nativism and xenophobia. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the ongoing public debate over immigration has occurred in an increasingly hostile ideological environment. This is especially clear in recent efforts to suppress public services to immigrants and to better regulate the US-Mexico border. In addition, new forms of political domination and the deepening of institutionalized racism are evident in the popularity of English-only measures and the banning of affirmative action policies. Finally, despite a long national history of demographic transformation shaped by immigration, there is a rising tide of fear among many white Americans in response to the perceived “Latinization” of the United States.\textsuperscript{14} Some Chicanos and Chicanas see Aztlán, in both its mythical and geographical aspects, as a way to combat successfully such cycles of racism, xenophobia, and exploitation.

\textbf{Performing Aztlán: Mestizaje and the Native Body}

Aztlán performs the border space. Its dramatic state is an ever-evolving product of the collision, separation, and re-engagement occurring among nations, languages, cultures, and histories. I focus here on the importance of utterances as forms of

\textsuperscript{11} Reies Lopez Tijerina was one of the first Chicano activists to provoke a reassessment of the treaty. During the early 1960s, Tijerina traveled throughout New Mexico organizing La Alianza Federa de Mercedes Libres. This organization became the catalyst for claiming that legitimate treaty rights had been violated and that compensation was owed.

\textsuperscript{12} Documents of the Chicano Struggle, 5.

\textsuperscript{13} Some confusion exists today over the use of the term “Chicano” among those generations that grew up after the Chicano nationalist movement. Few of these young people have been taught about this social and historical event as part of their American history classes, so they are unaware of how much they have benefited from the movement. In my Chicano cultural studies course, I have found that some students resist calling themselves Chicanos for fear of ostracism due to misleading or vague notions concerning the meaning of social “militancy” in the cause of civil rights.

\textsuperscript{14} Chicanos in California hope for an improved atmosphere in the wake of the 1998 election of Gray Davis and Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, the first Latino to hold this high-ranking governmental position.
exhibition underneath the representation of space. Rafael Pérez-Torres suggests that the border, which “represents a construction tied to histories of power and dispossession,” determines the evolution of ideological configurations. Thus, “the construction of personal and cultural identity entailed in any multicultural project comes to the fore in Chicana/o cultural production.”15 Pérez-Torres defines Aztlán as an “empty signifier,” by which he means that Aztlán reflects “that which is ever absent: nation, unity, liberation.”16 In my view, these “absences” are dynamic—they make themselves present in the in-betweenness of border space and provide strategies for individual and collective identity. Thus, Aztlán is marked performatively by processes of transformation in which time and space intersect to produce tropes of spiritual decolonization. These tropes are consonant with ideologies that intersect and often contradict each other. While Aztlán’s ambivalent subjectivity draws attention to the specific value of a politics of cultural production, it also represents relations of domination in the discursive divisions between the First World and Third World, the North and the South, Mexico and the United States, the dominant and the subordinate.

Like Pérez-Torres, Laura Elisa Pérez defines Aztlán’s discursive spatiality in terms of power relations. She, however, sees the dialectical forces of “order” and “disorder” (reason and deviation) as counteracting the systematic politics of domination that threaten the validity of Aztlán. She discusses mainly Chicana cultural productions, emphasizing the visual arts, and examines ways in which Chicana feminists have further altered the “logical” order of patriarchy and homogeneity. From this perspective, continuously recovering Aztlán is an act with no borders because, as Pérez explains, “[W]e occupy a nation that does and doesn’t exist.”17 This illogical yearning reflects the traumatic contradictions of Chicano/a subjectivity, caught among historic, linguistic, and mythic origins. As the site of creative and political intervention, Aztlán both signals the heterogeneity of the subject and authorizes an alternative way of knowing that may offer a fantastic epistemological system. Aztlán dramatizes and enacts the complexity of power as a mode of differentiation, a hierarchical structure, and a system of defense.

The concept of Aztlán and the legacy of mestizaje are also intertwined. The idea of the mestizo performing body is key to the political imagery of Aztlán: Chicano subjectivity becomes the product of the transcultural processes consciously marked by the acceptance of blended Spanish and indigenous precolonial roots. The idea of transculturation as a form of mestizaje is best exemplified in the art movement that emerged in conjunction with the Chicano movement. In Amado M. Peña’s Mestizo (1974), a tripartite head represents the cultural mixture embodied in the Mexican identity as the product of the union of the Spanish and pre-colonial cultures (see fig.1). The tripartite face situates the Chicano male body in the middle, between the Mexican and US sides. The overlap of the faces defines mestizaje as the intersubjective and collective experience of intercultural negotiation. The dialectic embodied by the tripartite head dramatizes the relations between colonizers and the colonized,

16 Ibid., 37.
emphasizing not detachment, but rather an understanding of the plural subjectivity of mestizaje.

The notion of mestizaje has also been taken as a paradigmatic site of departure for social criticism and artistic imagination. Judith F. Baca addresses these grammars and revisits the tri-headed figure, but in her art the feminization of the subject is key. In La
Mestizaje (1991), Baca places the Chicana mestiza between the Indian/Mayan configuration and the figure of the Spaniard (see fig. 2). Both Peña and Baca seek to authorize the cultural hybridities that have emerged as the result of historical transformations. While both artists reinscribe the three distinct cultural legacies (Chicano, indigenous, and European) at once, Baca goes a step further. La Mestizaje transgresses the authorial power of the genders, unseating the masculinist, dominant grammars of El Plan’s marked body. As Baca explains, she deliberately chose to alter this monolithic space and draw attention to the spiritual power of the mestiza body:

This legacy has made us the children of the future as we are positioned in a world that is increasingly becoming like us: of mixed origin and international. I have begun to see the necessity of all three in my own nature. Each figure has an important relationship to my own survival as a Chicana in this time. While the figure in my drawing drops off the trap of facades, what is left is the apparition of their place in her life. The Indian has a wisdom that comes not from highly rationalized and deduced information but from the intuitive and a relationship with nature. The Spaniard appears not as a fierce, heartless European, but as the embodiment of the European rational and cool intellect. The Chicana, honed by adversity, is emerging as the dominant character in this image, as possessor of all three natures, and charged with a power of knowledge. She is no longer fierce but certainly formidable in a quiet way, armed with her ancestral mentors at her shoulders.  

Thus, Baca portrays mestizaje as embodying spiritual demands that displace the “national” body and strive instead for an international and global sense of diversity and community. What she suggests is that we must now place the Chicana body in its national and international contexts. This movement from the local to the global is a central part of Baca’s art. Her portable mural, World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear (1987), clearly demonstrates this transitory mood. A remarkable piece, World Wall centers on issues dealing with global interdependence, peace, and the end of racism and of gender and sex discrimination. Baca has said that she intended the work to “push the state of the arts in muralism so that the mural creates its own architecture. It makes its own space and can be assembled by any people anywhere.” This system of production is highly effective, and helps move Baca’s work across different locations. It marks the performative potentiality of painting.

In another of Baca’s portable murals, the Uprising of the Mujeres (1979), the indigenous side of La Mestizaje performatively echoes Gloria Anzaldúa’s new mestiza consciousness (see fig. 3). As Anzaldúa makes clear in Borderlands/La Frontera, through la conciencia de la mestiza (the new mestiza consciousness), new coalitional global forces combine and relate in the formation of US Third World feminisms and in the discursive configuration “women of color.” The need to mark a “third” space in US


19 Baca’s World Wall earned her an international reputation as a Chicana muralist. The mural is made of seven 10 x 30-foot panels painted by her and arranged in a 100-foot semicircle. After she had completed four panels, the piece premiered in Finland in June 1990. It then traveled to the Soviet Union. The mural included seven additional panels that were to be painted by artists from the countries in which it would be displayed.

feminist movements is indicative not only of the neocolonial state of postmodernity, but also of the power relations that intervene in and transform the First World. For Chéla Sandoval, *la conciencia de la mestiza* “identifies all technologies of power as consensual illusions” that mediate the imperatives of the social body. 21 Sandoval’s approach to the *mestiza* body and Chicana feminism is closely tied to the transnational register of US Third World politics. For Sandoval, Anzaldúa, and Baca, the transnational positioning of the subject emerges determinant but not absolute, the result of hybrid epistemologies, diasporic interventions, and border spaces. Thus, the body and embodiment of the *mestiza*, situated in the “beyond” of a revisionary time, holds the promise of the future for the Chicana.

For Homi K. Bhabha the “beyond” is the “space of the intervention in the here and now.” 22 According to him, the beyond “touches” the past, recapitulating the present and imagining the future of human agency. The beyond marks space and time. The act of going beyond figures the process of subjecthood performatively, disrupting the grammars of nationhood and extending its domain to a broader sense of locality, the transnational. Through its racialized and gendered identity, the *mestiza* body tran-

scends space and time, enacting the site of difference where the discursive practices of performativity might be imagined. Neither Anglo-American nor indigenous, the *mestiza* body troubles the borders of feminist practices, nationalism, and colonial discourses. These performative practices, Norma Alarcón explains, “enable both individual and group Chicana positions previously ‘empty’ of meanings to emerge as one who has to ‘make sense’ of it all from the bottom through the recodification of the native woman.”

Alarcón’s examination of the native woman not only attempts to trace the genealogy and legitimacy of the term “Chicana” within the nationalist movement, but also places the formation of identity and subjectivity as contested paradigms of multiple signifying practices. Alarcón demarcates, as well, the transnational setting of a new economy that provokes the dramatic state of identity. In her view, the subject’s migratory conditions “are continuously transformed into mestizas, Mexicans, émigrés

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to Anglo-America, Chicanas, Latinas, Hispanics—There are as many names as there are namers."24 Alarcón defines the native woman as the product of an international economy influenced by the intervention of the US-Mexican border. She speaks of “new women subjects” who, in their roles as workers (domestics, cannery workers, field workers), “find themselves bombarded and subjected to multiple cross-cultural and contradictory ideologies.”25 As I note in Latina Performance, the particular cross-border subjectivity Alarcón alludes to provides an opportunity to examine the US-Mexican border as a cultural and political site through which new kinds of identities are forged.26

The body of the native woman does not necessarily assert the presence of an authentic self because it challenges cultural “purity.” The “native” body’s presence in Chicana (and Latina) cultural productions and critical theory becomes a metaphor for the processes of the political unconscious. Theoretically speaking, the “political unconscious,” particularly as noted by Fredric Jameson, proposes in every “text” (visual, written, or performed) a level of political fantasy which marks the actual and the potential social relations of “bodies” within a specific political economy.27 In this context, this knowledge of the “native” body returns to its genealogy, cultural identity, and historical origination, resisting the type of authenticity that performs universal standardization, thus creating a productive way to eradicate and silence racial oppression. Trinh T. Minha-ha presents this argument in Woman Native Other very clearly. In considering authenticity, she rejects the absolutisms of the “real” self, characterized by the epistemology of Western metaphysics. To explain the endless interchange that conveys the typographic conventions of the self, “or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities,” Minha-ha speaks of authenticity poetically, in relation to its indeterminacy and indefinite processes of subjectivity.28 Rather than an absolute and authentic self, she believes in its logical displacement and fragmentation. Minha-ha believes in authenticity when an “‘undisputed origin’ is prey to an obsessive fear: that of losing a connection.”29

By separating the “real” from its representation, Minha-ha claims that the performance of origin follows a clear trail in search of the “genuine” layer of the self. In her symbolic logic, the ambivalence of origin remains caught between the “infinite layers” of human diversity and the postcolonial imagination. Thus, the eternal attempt to unify the impossibilities of subjecthood becomes the incentive for shifting oneself out, for blending with space, for becoming space. By rejecting appearance, the “native

24 Ibid., 69
25 Ibid.
26 I include a chapter titled “Cross-Border Subjectivity and the Dramatic Text” in my book Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 99–131. This chapter enacts the interface implicit in border identity, whereby geopolitics and cultural survival become paramount in the plays written by Latina dramatists. Although the chapter focuses on the play Latina by Milcha Sánchez-Scott, it also makes extended references to Coser y cantar by Dolores Prida and to Simply María or the American Dream by Josefina López.
29 Ibid.
woman” becomes nothing other than representation because her origin is both mythical and real. The myth requires both legend and a coherent belief in a given reality. For Alarcón, Anzaldúa, Baca, and many other Chicana artists and theorists, the discursive configurations of the native woman alter the space of the authentic body in the process of confronting the simultaneity of marginality and privilege. This confrontation attests to imbalances created by the dislocation of a centered hegemony, influencing the convergence of new cultural topographies in the process of “borderization” and the interruption of the dominant.

These motifs are also exemplified in Laura Aguilar’s self-portrait, *Three Eagles Flying* (1990), in which she expresses rage and confusion (see fig. 4). Aguilar places her body in between the Mexican and US flags, neither here nor there. She is trapped by constructs of the cultural borderization of space. Covered with the Mexican flag, her face embodies the strength of the eagle, which represents a layer of the ethnic self. The US flag covers the lower part of Aguilar’s body, subjecting it to force hybridization implicit in the representations of the divided self. In reading the lower part of the body, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano places Aguilar’s majestic figure in connection with her queer sexuality. She has pointed out that while the US flag confines Aguilar’s body below the waist, it also represents “a critique of the exclusionary constructions of lesbianism as white.”30 Both her sexuality and her ethnic background intervene in a performance in which the concepts of homogeneity and space are in a profound process of dislocation. In “Portrait from the Latina Lesbian Series,” Aguilar suggests that she is more comfortable with the word “Laura” than with the word “lesbian.”31 The act of self-representation, however, displaces both the United States and Mexico, and discloses her queer body as evidence of a more complex sense of identity. Displacement and detachment inspire Aguilar to capture in her art (with her body) the estranging sense of space relocation that is the condition of the cross-border subject. Yarbro-Bejarano suggests that the ways she “performs” her body are closely connected to the estrangement the artist expresses: “where do I/we fit in—seems to be nowhere.”32 In this displacement, the Mexico-US border becomes a site of confusion but each is always dependent on the other, forcing upon the subject a location that is as divided as it is mystifying. The subject’s performing identity becomes the result of sensibilities that resonate with an intervening space in constant transformation.

Aguilar is obviously playing with the linguistic constructs of her surname as equivalent to “águila” (eagle)—which in the Mexican culture symbolizes freedom and power. At the same time, her body seems to be subjugated by constraints beyond her own determination (the rope goes around her neck and binds her hands). The US flag, and the imperialism it signifies, marks another layer of the construction of the self: Aguilar’s body is part of an occupied and complex space. Thus the lack of an authentic layer of the self forces the artist to posit herself in a performance of cross-cultural representations, separated from the absolute authority of both nations, but marked by the constitutive power of the body itself as it produces knowledge and disobedience.

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32 Yarbro-Bejarano, “Laying It Bare,” 286.
Aguilar’s body and the many layers of the self negotiate the powers of hybridity in particular and dramatic ways. The subject’s material presence is precisely the site in which the conventions of embodiment may be located. It is where the relation of sameness and difference does not obey any regulations. From this position, the performing body erases borders, allowing both nations to become significantly adjacent. Similarly, Luis Alfaro, a Los Angeles-based poet, playwright, and performance artist expresses this dialectic clearly in his performative pose on the cover of the 15 November 1998 issue of Los Angeles Times Magazine (see fig. 5). Both portraits—Aguilar’s half-naked body and Alfaro’s sardonic pose—involves a body mediated by two (and perhaps more) different worlds. Both artists’ performing identities delineate an unstable space, one that by definition is merged and mixed. The strategic use of the Mexican flag on one side and the US flag on the other dramatizes and enacts the performative hybrids of neocolonial processes as an act of the transcultural body. Such performances demarcate simultaneously the subject position of transgressive bodies, an unstable location, degrees of commodification, and contestation.

These notions of authenticity, when situated in conjunction with these explorations of native bodies and geopolitical spaces, resonate with the mythical performativity of Aztlán. In performance art, the staging of the native woman is especially remarkable in the productions of the sisters Elvira and Hortensia Colorado, the founders of Coatlicue Theatre Company. These dynamic performers draw on the narratives of

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The Colorado sisters were born in Blue Island, Illinois, in a large Mexican community. Their mother, María Sabina, migrated to the United States during the Mexican Revolution after her husband died. In Blue Island she met the sisters’ father, Regino. Grande Chiquita, as they called their grandmother Rafaela, became the center of the girls’ lives. She was the storyteller, bringing them the stories that they later incorporated in their theatricality. Consult “Elvira and Hortensia Colorado,” in Contemporary Plays by Women of Color: An Anthology, ed. Kathy A. Perkins and Roberta Uno (New York: Routledge, 1996), 79.
the precolonial legacy, weaving stories of the indigenous goddesses along with their own personal and familial tales. In addition to alluding directly to the Aztec goddess of the earth Coatlicue in their artistic name, the two women frequently incorporate the Nahautl language into their work. This tactic helps affirm their survival as urban mestizas in contemporary New York City. The Coatlicue Theatre Company’s performance repertoire, which includes Open Wounds on Tlalteuctli, Huipil, Coyolxauhqui: Women Without Borders, La Llorona, Walks of Indian Women—Aztlan to Anahauk, and Tlatilco: The Place Where Things are Hidden, blends ancient myths with current social and political issues, including racism and sexual oppression. The affirmation of
pre-Hispanic symbols in their work counteracts a dramatic space embedded in interculturalism itself. The legacy of the native woman is implicated in discursive configurations of the neocolonial, precolonial, and postcolonial subjects. In the following poem the women use language itself to perform the various representational options of the intercultural body. By combining dominant English, Nahautl signifiers, and Spanish grammars, the Coatlicue group configures the intercultural location of the “new” native woman (see fig. 6):

I Cihuacoatl, Snake Woman, Mujer Serpienta, of the coiled serpents and severed hearts.
I Cihuacoatl, the shape forms in my mouth as I emerge from the earth and shed the skin and scales of my dead ancestors. Don’t come too close, I’m dangerous. They covered me with a white sheet—chalk white—and they bound my hands behind my back and I spurted blood from my severed head, my eyes, my mouth.

This is my space. I take these hands, these eyes and this voice and I rip off the mask of racism and ignorance. I lick my open wounds and with my blood and spirit I create a new universe where there are no borders.35

35 This poem is included below “Performance Photo,” a piece in Encuentro: Invasion of the Americas and the Making of the Mestizo, 16.
Here, the Coatlicue duo creates the “new” native woman as a rebellious act of cultural translation. Such an act renews the place of origin, innovating and interrupting the present time in which their bodies are performing. They disclose the wounds of their permanent exile, hoping to transcend the abstraction of their colonial and neocolonial subjectivity. By envisioning “a new universe” without borders, the Coatlicue women bear witness to the vitality of space and bodies within and beyond the historical past. The aesthetic motivation and ideological impulses behind their photography expose the theatricality of the mestiza body, at least the way they make sense of it.

The sisters’ decision to use the name Coatlicue testifies to the fervor of the cult of the gods as an inheritance from the precolonial period. Coatlicue, like the Virgin Mary in Christianity, is said to have conceived a child without carnal contact. According to an Aztec legend, a divine messenger in the form of a bird dropped a feather into Coatlicue’s lap, and thus Huitzilopochtli, the warrior of the south, was born. Another deity born of Coatlicue was Cihuacoatl, the serpent goddess. Cihuacoatl then split into Tonantzin, a goddess similar to the Christian Virgin Mother, when she is referred to as “Our Lady.” Later, Tonantzin became embodied as the chaste, protective mother of the mestizo nation, La Virgen de Guadalupe (see fig. 7).

For the Coatlicue duo, Cihuacoatl’s rebellious attitude represents more than the origin of the “new” native woman. Cihuacoatl and Tlazolteotl (another deity who sprang from Coatlicue) were disempowered and given evil attributes during the transformation of Coatlicue’s good spirit, Tonantzin, into the chaste “dark” mother. After the conquest, Tonantzin/Guadalupe was established as the “good” mother, while Coatlicue and her female deities Cihuacoatl and Tlazolteotl were rendered into defiant beasts. They are the transgressors of marianismo (the cult of the Virgin Mary and her subject position as the mother of God), imposed by an entrenched Christianity. Thus, as an opposing force, Cihuacoatl’s legacy helps to explain the whore-virgin dichotomy that has shaped gender relations and sexuality in post-Spanish colonial sites.

Coatlicue Theatre Company performs Cihuacoatl’s rebellious origin as a way both to vindicate and problematize the context of colonial history. In their present situation as neocolonial subjects in the United States, performance artists such as Elvira and Hortensia Colorado and many Chicana/Latina artists look at the symbols of the indigenous as a form of resistance and cultural reaffirmation. Consequently, their situation must be marked from the situation of the dominant because they still feel caught in some way within systems of colonial subject-production. The result involves processes in which the body (and knowledge) symbolically seeks the attainment of decolonization. Thus by embodying the rebellious deity of the goddess Cihuacoatl, the Coatlicue women not only transgress tradition but direct attention to the particular formation of subjectivity constructed as counteractions of colonial history.

Similarly, in “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess,” author Sandra Cisneros connects her own rebellious attitude to the defiant spirit of Cihuacoatl:

36 In his Historia General, Father Bernardino de Sahagún discusses the goddesses of Mexican culture, identifying Cihuacoatl with Tonantzin. See Sahagún, Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España (General history of the things of New Spain), trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1982).
Figure 7. *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. A traditional image of one of the most significant religious icons in Mexican and Chicano culture.
Coatlicue, Tlazolteotl, Tonantzin, la Virgen de Guadalupe. They are each telescoped one into the other, into who I am. And this is where la Lupe [short for Guadalupe] intrigues me—not the Lupe of 1531 who appeared to Juan Diego, but the one of the 1990s who has shaped who we are as Chicanas/mexicanas today, the one inside each Chicana and mexicana. Perhaps it’s the Tlazolteotl-Lupe in me whose malcriada (brat) spirit inspires me to leap into the swimming pool naked or dance on a table with a skirt on my head. Maybe it’s my Coatlicue-Lupe attitude that makes it possible for my mother to tell me, No wonder men can’t stand you. Who knows? What I do know is this: I am obsessed with becoming a woman comfortable in her skin.37

The transgressive spirit Cisneros invokes in this embodiment of Cihuacoatl, like the Colorado sisters in their Coatlicue convocation, dislocates the purity and passivity of the Mother of God. This attitude reflects the affliction, rage, and pure desires of cultural decolonization and renovation. The transgression within transgression functions as a way to counteract an oppressive system that has perpetuated the passive role of women in Christian values and colonial sites. Such a critical configuration is one of the clearest examples in evidence of a revisionist interference in contemporary Chicana and Latina feminist cultural productions. While Cihuacoatl transgresses purity, her body, as metaphor for the structure of feminism, functions as a self-conscious act in itself.

In visual art, the transgressive iconography dedicated to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe presents a startling invocation of Coatlicue’s revolutionary deity. The art of Ester Hernandez and Yolanda M. Lopez is radically performative, complicating the “authentic” claim of Guadalupe to reproduce mimetic altered bodies (see figs. 8 and 9). The performative emerges in the manipulation of the surface of the iconographic image and in the surface of the altered body. In Hernandez’s La Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los Xicanos (The Virgin of Guadalupe Fighting for the Rights of Chicanos, 1975), the aggressiveness resides in the body in action, ready for combat. The “new” gesture, costume, and combative expression manipulate the passive eloquence of the traditional mestizaje icon. The essential body is transformed, exposing a fundamental desire to stage an image of the whole nature of the self. This fundamental desire also motivates Lopez in her Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe (1978). As a signifier of the transcultural body, Lopez’s act of self-representation accepts the power of divine knowledge (holding the serpent) and also embraces the “American” side of her subjectivity (the coloring and design of the US flag in the cape). Both artists’ work expresses the contradictions of the divided self, the fusion of opposites: virtue and evil.

This attitude of resistance is indicative of the political unconscious that transgresses traditional values and symbolizes the embodiment of mythical cognition. For Gloria Anzaldúa, it is these processes of knowing that produce the “Coatlicue state” in her Chicana psyche. The body of Coatlicue—and all its split subjectivities—represents the power that induces Anzaldúa’s Chicana self to heal the wounds, to allay the fears of not knowing what she must know. For her, Coatlicue “is the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb. Goddess of birth and death, Coatlicue gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic

Figure 8. *La Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los xicanos* (The Virgin of Guadalupe Fighting for the Rights of Chicanos, 1975) by Ester Hernandez. Etching, 9 x 12 inches. In this portrait of the Guadalupe, the combative expression manipulates the passivity of the traditional iconographic body. Reproduced by permission of Ester Hernandez.
Figure 9. Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe (1978) by Yolanda M. Lopez. Oil pastel on paper, 32 x 24 inches. Lopez’s act of self-representation is inherently divine. Reproduced by permission of Yolanda M. Lopez.
processes.”

For Choctaw/Chicana Marsha Gomez, Coatlicue is the Earth Mother who attempts to save the world. Her sculpture Madre del Mundo (1988; see fig. 10) was originally installed on US-occupied Shoshone land, across from the entrance to the missile test site in Mercury, Nevada (fifty miles outside of Las Vegas). The exhibition of the sculpture was part of a Mother’s Day peace action opposing the bombing and desecration of land. In response to the atrocities committed against the Shoshone Indian land, the Foundation for a Compassionate Society and Grandmothers for Peace commissioned Gomez to sculpt a piece that would symbolize the nurturing aspects at work opposing the atrocities of land abuse. In creating Madre del Mundo, the artist embodied the demand to “save the land, honor treaty rights, stop nuclear testing on our sacred earth.”

From the Chicano nationalist art and theatre movements of the 1960s to the emergence of feminist queer bodies and discourses, the racialized configuration of the mestiza is cast in remarkable ways in Chicana (and Latina) cultural productions. The body and embodiment of the mestiza as the specter of the native woman underlies different ideologies, sustains the visibility/invisibility of power relationships, and supports the power of colonial and postcolonial discourses. The contradictions embedded in colonialism have shaped the positioning of the subject caught in the desire for an origin, which is again implicated by the differences of race (racism) and resistance to dominant systems of cultural production.

By relocating their subject position as descendants of the Coatlicue legacy, Chicanas not only detach themselves from the Anglo-American reality of whiteness and “racial purity,” but also, by claiming mestizaje, invoke the unconquered spirit of Aztlan. As envisioned in Libertad by Ester Hernandez (1976), this unconquered spirituality represents space as the product of a democratic union where the female body is essentially the creator and instigator of freedom (see fig. 11). The multiplicity of female pre-Hispanic bodies embodied in the Statue of Liberty invokes transculturation and its potentially counterhegemonic function. The deceptive familiarity of the statue is in part disembodied, enacting and transforming the physical space into the complex transactions of the native exchange.

Queering Aztlan: Cihuacoatl’s Legacy in the Twenty-First Century

The Coatlicue legacy embodies historical origination, mythological configurations, and the potential for hybrid epistemologies, but it also dislocates any possibility of

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38 Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera, 46.
39 Marsha Gomez passed away in 1998. Her artistic media included clay, cast stone, marble, and bronze. Her figures of women depicted in worship represent her political commitment, which promoted a reverence for the earth. In addition to being an artist/sculptor, Gomez was an earth and human rights activist. She served as codirector of “Alma de Mujer,” Center for Social Change in Austin, Texas, a healing retreat center sponsored by the Foundation for a Compassionate Society. She was also a board member of the Indigenous Women’s Network, a pan-indigenous women’s association that promotes networking for the empowerment of women and for environmental safeguarding.
40 This demand was included in the picture of La Madre del Mundo, by la Madre Productions, 1988. This invocation is inherent in another of Coatlicue’s appearances, Chimalma (Shield Hand), a naked cave goddess of the Huitznahua, who was present in Aztlan when the Aztecs left in search of their promised land. See C. A. Burland and Werner Forman, Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror: The Gods and Cultures of Ancient Mexico (New York: Putnam & Sons, 1975), 166–67.
Figure 10. *Madre del Mundo* (Mother of the World, 1988) by Marsha Gomez. Life-size fiberglass sculpture. Some replicas were also reproduced in small 10-inch cast stone. Gomez’s sculpture symbolizes the nurturing condition of the motherhood against the atrocities of land abuse in the Americas. Reproduced by permission of the Estate of Marsha Gomez.
Figure 11. *Libertad* by Ester Hernandez (1976). Etching, 9 x 12 inches. The body of the statue of liberty is in part disembodied by the artist as a way to negotiate a more heterogeneous space, one that is the product of transculturation. Reproduced by permission of Ester Hernandez.
authenticating contemporary native identities, bodies, or spaces. I do not recognize the validity of terms such as “pure,” “authentic,” or “native” as important. I do, however, believe that the desire for recognition (whether in practice or in theory) represents an authentic engagement of transformation. This is especially true when communities are forced to return to the performance of identity. This has been the case of many ethnic groups during the civil rights movements in the 1960s. As an affirming reiteration of subjectivity, this process of recovery always resists a compulsory hierarchical order that manipulates the site of differentiation and altered spaces.

In *El Plan_, the idea of the collective self is implicit in *carnalismo*, in the unity of brotherhood. The idea of sisterhood is dismissed by the dialectics of patriarchy and a heterosexist hierarchy. This sociopolitical ordering is not limited to Chicanas and Chicanos; it is characteristic of the overall social system that affects both men and women, Chicanos and non-Chicanos, equally. Since the early 1970s, the anti-hegemonic discourse of feminism has played a crucial role in reshaping the idea of Aztlan and the specificity of gender and body politics. More recently, cultural critic and dramatist Cherríe Moraga has moved this process a step forward. In “Queer Aztlan: the Re-formation of Chicano Tribe,” she proposes a nationalism that would also decolonize the female body:

Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women’s sexuality are occupied within the Chicano nation. If women’s bodies and those of men and women who transgress their gender roles have been historically regarded as territories to be conquered, they are also territories to be liberated. Feminism has taught us this. The nationalism I seek is one that decolonizes the brown female body as it decolonizes the brown and female earth.41

Moraga’s radical perspective envisions Aztlan as a place where the male-centered, nationalistic specter of the mythical Chicano homeland is ideologically transformed into the land of the Chicana-*mestiza*. This transformation “genders” the territory as a female brown body, one that will become a place for all *raza*, heterosexuals and queers.

In proposing queer Aztlan, Moraga extends ideas that are present through all of her work, expanding the definition of *familia* in a manner that provides a sense of location for Chicana lesbians.42 The nationalism she proposes is a call for the unification of space and women. The queering of Aztlan not only dislocates the absolute definition of *carnalismo* and *familia chicana* from the biological unit to the idea of nationhood, but also places the *mestiza* body in search of futuristic innovation, full of mythical allusions and utopian attributes.

In her play, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Moraga marks this future representational setting in particular ways.43 The main protagonist of the play is Medea, a Chicana lesbian in her early forties. She is a midwife and a *curandera* (healer).

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43 Berkeley Repertory Theatre, where *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, received a staged reading on 10 April 1995, directed by Tony Kelly, originally commissioned this play. On 2 December 1995, the play was presented in a staged reading at the Mark Taper Forum’s New Works Festival in Los Angeles, and at the Brava Theater Center of San Francisco, the play received a staged reading on 10 June 1997, directed by Moraga. This present version is based on the Brava staged reading.
who has also been the lover of Luna, a Chicana in her mid-thirties. Other characters include Mama Sal, Medea’s aging grandmother in her eighties; Jasón, Medea’s husband; Chac-mool, Medea’s thirteen-year-old son; Savannah, Luna’s African American girlfriend; the Coro of Cihuateteo, a chorus of women who have died in childbirth; and The Border Guard who also plays the Prison Guard. Moraga describes the play’s setting as follows:

The play takes place in the near-future of a fictional past, only dreamed in the Chicana/o imagination. An ethnic civil war has “balkanized” the United States. Medea, her lover, Luna, and child, Chac-Mool have been exiled to what remains of Phoenix, Arizona. Located in the border region between Gringolandia (White Amerika) and Aztlán (Chicano country), Phoenix is now a city-in-ruin, the dumping site of every kind of poison and person unwanted by its neighbors. 44

The dramatic time in the play is unpredictable, moving in and out of the present and the past. In the present time Medea’s condition as an inmate in a prison psychiatric ward is central. The dramatic action borders the seven-year past leading to her incarceration. In this play Moraga brings once again to the stage the subject of lesbianism. By setting the time in the new millennium (near future), Moraga’s visionary theatricality intends not to separate or displace people but to problematize the reasons for divisions across ethnic/racial/sexual lines. Medea and Luna, who have been exiled from Aztlán, their place of origin, are forced to live in Tamoanchan (Phoenix, Arizona). This is the “unhomed” place where all queers and other unwanted people are relegated. In the words of Mama Sal, all queers became pilgrims, “Y los homos became peregrinos . . . como nomads, just like our Aztec ancestors a thousand years ago” (1.3). The women’s removal from their ancestral land constitutes part of the tragedy of Medea and her lover. At the beginning of their exile, Medea had hoped some day to be able to return to Aztlán, bringing her grown son with her. But instead she only laments her exile:

MEDEA: I loathe normal. At night, I would lay awake and wonder . . . how is it she could worship me so and not be banished. But then you were banished. And now that’s the road I walk, too.

LUNA: Medea, that was seven years ago.

MEDEA: I had always imagined we’d return to Aztlán, one day with my son grown. I thought they’d change their mind . . . say it was all a mistake.

LUNA: (After beat) Medea, did you talk to Jasón tonight?

MEDEA: Yes.

LUNA: What does he want?

MEDEA: Chac Mool.

LUNA: When?

MEDEA: Now. Tomorrow. Soon. He’s sending custody papers. (Beat) She’s barren.

LUNA: What?

MEDEA: The virgin bride. Está vacía.

LUNA: He’s still going to marry her?

(MEDEA nods.)

Medea, who has never divorced her husband, receives a letter from him expressing his interest in getting the physical and legal custody of their son. Apparently, Jasón also

44 Cherrie Moraga, The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea, unpublished manuscript. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.
wants to consummate the divorce from her because he plans to marry a young Apache woman. Jasón’s future plans really don’t bother her as much as the possibility of losing custody of her beloved Chac-Mool.

Significantly, in the protagonists’ interactions categories of sexual practices as the determinative nature of their lesbian desire are constructed. Medea embodies the role of the femme, born to be the “beloved.” Luna, as her opposite, embodies the butch who, according to Medea, possesses the touch needed to make women feel like goddesses:

Medea: It doesn’t matter now. I am the last one to make this journey. My tragedy will be an example to all the women like me, vain women who only know how to be the beloved. Such an example I shall be that no woman will dare to transgress those boundaries again. You, you and your kind have no choice. You were born to be a lover of women, to grow hands that can transform a woman, like those blocks of faceless stone you turn into diosas. I, my kind, is a dying breed of female. I am the last one to make this crossing, the border has closed behind me. There will be no more room for transgressions.

The presentation of their femme/butch relationship functions as a mode of introducing the dynamic sexual junction that defines their subject position as lesbians and as transgressors of space, namely, Aztlán. However, the intent of Medea’s legendary transfiguration offers inescapable evidence of the presence of Aztlán in a performativity of mythical bodies:

Cihuatateo East: This is how all nights begin and end.

[Medea emerges as the living Coatlicue. She wears the slip she has on beneath her dress. Her dark hair is disheveled and her eyes are shadowed from lack of sleep. Still Medea possesses a dark and brooding allure, akin to obsidian; a razor-sharp edge with a deep and lustrous sheen. One could lose oneself inside such a dark mirror.]

Cihuatateo East: A long time ago, before the Aztec war of the flowers, before war, Coatlicue, la mera madre diosa, was sweeping on top of the mountain, Coatepec, when she encounters two delicate plumitas.

[Medea begins sweeping as “Coatlicue”]

Medea, as Moraga’s play’s title suggests, is the “retold” story of La Llorona, the Weeping Woman. Her presence in Mexican and Chicano culture dates back to pre-Hispanic, pre-Columbian times and has persisted in the popular modern and postmodern imagination. La Llorona has been compared to La Malinche because they share the tragic loss of their children. Many cultural critics place La Llorona as an extension of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche. As “mediators,” Anzaldúa has suggested, “the true identity of all three has been subverted—Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, La Chingada [Malinche] to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and La Llorona to make us long-suffering people.” All these mythological and

45 La Malinche, Malintzin Tenepal, or Doña Marina (her Spanish name) was a young Tabascan woman given to Hernán Cortés by his tribe. She became his mistress, the mother of one of his children, and a translator. She also acted as the mediator between her people and the Spanish conquistadores. For many Chicanas and Chicanos, Malinche offers ethnic vindication. She is the mother of mestizaje.

46 Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 31.
historical figures glorify the power of the feminine body in Mexican culture, influencing the epistemology of feminism in contemporary Chicana literature, art, theatre, and performance. The narratives of these figures, from the historical Malinche and the mythological Coatlicue to the reverent Guadalupe, represent an unraveling aesthetics of transgression that contests the colonial legacy.

While in the play Medea represents Coatlicue, the one who gives and takes away life, Luna embodies the Moon-Goddess. Juxtaposed to Medea and Luna’s lesbian relationship, Moraga’s mythological universe intends to dramatize the Coyolxauhqui/Huitzilopochtli narrative. This Aztec myth was previously introduced by the dramatist in the section, “La fuerza femenina” (“The feminine power”), in her book The Last Generation. In this myth, Coyolxauhqui fights against the power her brother Huitzilopochtli will acquire as the predetermined God of War. When Coyolxauhqui learns that her mother Coatlicue will give birth to Huitzilopochtli, she plans to murder her. She fails and is killed brutally by Huitzilopochtli. According to Moraga, in the play Coatlicue represents the “pre-patriarchal” mother, and thus the resistance of the mad Coyolxauhqui becomes an assertion against “patriarchal motherhood.”

Thus lesbian desire as an analogy of Coyolxauhqui’s disobedience functions in the play as an attack on the larger frame of patriarchy. Medea does not represent a woman who regrets her role as the transgressor of the social order; she is not the Medea found in many patriarchal narratives. Instead, this Medea embodies motherhood while transgressing her role as a potential lover of men. The motherhood inquiry closely connects the dramatist’s personal experience with that of her protagonist. In the play, Medea laments—as Cihuacoatl lamented the passing of the Aztec Empire—the homophobic censorship inhabited in her beloved and estranged homeland, Aztlán.

This Medea embodies the power and resistance of the native woman who feels a profound connection with the “lost” territory, the one that has been recovered by the Chicano people in her play. Nevertheless, as a Chicana lesbian, Medea is evicted, a homeless exile, because Aztlán has become a place where queer identities are perceived as decadent and harmful to the sense of group collectivity. As in “queer Aztlán,” Moraga decries the male-centered, nationalistic vision of space that perpetuates a specific hierarchical order where race should matter more than feminist epistemologies and sexual identities. As a lesbian, Medea laments the dangers of homophobia in the Chicano community bound by the hegemonic limits of patriarchal and heterosexist reproductions. In this context, Moraga figures Aztlán’s mythical performativity as the result of binary opposed conditions: indigenous and foreign, heterosexual and queer, same and different, familiar and foreign. This binary opposition places Aztlán as the site of simultaneous limitations and productions. It is not only the space of difference but also the land of undifferentiation. Moraga’s utopic markings place the mestiza-queer body as symptomatic of prohibitive power and spatiality. At all levels, these prohibitions sustain a shifting conceptual framework and at the same time situate the subjectivity of the mestiza within an inherent resistance to utopic recuperation.

47 I would like to thank Cherríe Moraga for reading and commenting on this study. For more information on the Coyolxauhqui legend consult Moraga’s The Last Generation, 73–76.

48 In her play Unconquered Spirits (Woodstock: Dramatic Publishing, 1997), dramatist Josefina López invokes these complex transactions of the native body. This is the story of Xochimilco, a ten-year-old Mexican girl, who when misbehaving is told the story of La Llorona (the weeping woman) by her
I have examined the material practices of Chicana performance and their relation to a cultural feminism inevitably inscribed in transcultural encounters. From the claiming of the “native/mestizo body”—its dramatic and theoretical configurations—to Moraga’s queer positioning of the subject and space, the genealogy of Aztlan has tremendously transformed the evolution of Chicano/a art and performance culture. What is crucial to such a genealogy of space is the belief that we must not solely transgress our historical past, but imagine the future of both truths and myths because the construction of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial discourses relies on these plots of representation. For Chicana and other Latina artists, dramatists, and performance artists these discourses are inevitably marked in the necessity to recuperate the figures of cultural memory and the sites of political agency.

mother. As the legend goes, an Indian woman and a Spaniard fell in love and had two children. The man left her to marry a Spanish woman, and for revenge the Indian woman killed her children, cut them up, and threw them into the river. By presenting first the traditional version of the legend, López intends to transgress it and then to suggest an alternative explanation of the reasons why La Llorona’s spirit continues to search for her children. The first act is set in the sixteenth century and explores the origins of the legend. After La Llorona is raped, she sacrifices her children to the Aztec gods to give her people strength to fight the Spaniards. It is suggested that La Llorona is not a murderer, but a martyr who sacrifices her children to save her people from the colonizers. The second act is set in San Antonio, Texas in 1938. In this act, Xochimilco is a grown woman becoming a modern-day La Llorona. The play was first produced at California State University, Northridge, 28 April 1995. It was directed by Anamarie García, with set design by Cesar Holguín.