

IN IXTLI IN YOLLOTL/ A (WISE) FACE A (WISE) HEART: RECLAIMING
EMBODIED RHETORICAL TRADITIONS OF ANAHUAC AND TAWANTINSUYU

A Dissertation

by

GABRIELA RAQUEL RÍOS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: English

In Ixtli In Yollotl/A (Wise) Face A (Wise) Heart: Reclaiming Embodied Rhetorical

Traditions of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu

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ABSTRACT

In Ixtli In Yollotl/A (Wise) Face A (Wise) Heart: Reclaiming Embodied Rhetorical Traditions of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu.

(August 2012)

Gabriela Raquel Ríos B.A.; M.A., Texas A&M University

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Theories of writing are one of the fundamental ways by which Indigenous peoples have been labeled as “uncivilized.” In these discussions, writing becomes synonymous with history, literacy, and often times Truth. As such, scholars studying Nahua codices and Andean khipu sometimes juxtapose the two because together they present a break in an evolutionary theory of writing systems that links alphabetic script with the construction of “complex civilizations.” Contemporary scholars tend to offer an “inclusive” approach to the study of Latin American histories through challenging exclusive definitions of writing. These definitions are always informed and limited by language—the extent to which these “writing” systems represent language. However, recentering discussions of writing and language on what Gregory Cajete has called Native Science shifts the discussion to matters of ecology in a way that intersects with current scholarship in bicocultural diversity studies regarding the link between language, culture, and biodiversity. Because of the ways in which language configures rhetoric and writing studies, a shift in understanding how language emerges bears great impact on

how we understand not only the histories tied to codices and khipu but also how they function as epistemologies. In my dissertation, I build a model of relationality using Indigenous and decolonial methodologies alongside the Nahuatl concept of *in ixtli in yolli* (a wise face/a wise heart) and embodied rhetorics. The model I construct here offers a path for understanding “traditional” knowledges as fluid and mobile. I specifically look at the relationship between land, bodies, language, and Native Science functions on the reciprocal relationship between those three components in making meaning.

I then extend this argument to show how the complex web of relations that we might call biocultural diversity produces and is produced by “things” like images from codices and khipu that in turn help to (re)produce biocultural diversity. Thing theory, in emerging material culture studies, argues for the agency of cultural artifacts in the making of various realities. These “things” always-already bear a relationship to bodies and “nature.” Thing theory, then, can challenge us to see artifacts like khipu and Nahuatl images as language artifacts and help us connect Nahuatl images and khipu to language outside of a text-based model. Ultimately, I argue that Native Science asks us to see language as a *practice* connected to biocultural diversity.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all my relations, but especially to Qwo-Li Driskill.

Gvgeyu/timitztlazohitla, Qwo-Litzin.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: TEIXTLAMACHTIANI, THE ONE WHO PUTS KNOWLEDGE IN
THE FACES OF OTHERS: FORGING A PATH FOR TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGES

"Interwoven throughout these stories are the accounts of what happened [...] and the lines among these stories will blur. Sometimes, I cannot tell you which parts continue to happen and which parts have ceased (or if they have at all) because these stories have changed so many times [...] that we cannot keep track any more. But [...] these weavings, these changes, and this blurriness matter."

--Casia C.Cobos

“...let this language suture
your heart
each word whispers
a story
through your lips
weaves a basket
that carries
a mending
world”

--Qwo-Li Driskill

This dissertation follows the style of *Modern Language Association*.

This dissertation is about relationships and reclamation. It's about the relationships that I have with people, with knowledge, and with *things*.¹ It's also about the relationships between various actors that come together to create knowledge in Indigenous epistemologies and in what Gregory Cajete calls Native Science. Generally, Cajete's conception of Native Science is based on relationality and experience. He argues, "Native Science embraces the inherent creativity of Nature as the foundation for both knowledge and action with regard to 'seeking life'" (15). But gaining access to and *making* knowledge in this way is contingent upon building a relationship with Nature. Additionally, "The body, as the source of *thinking, sensing, acting, and being*, and as the basis of relationship is a central consideration of Native science" (emphasis mine, 25). It is also often times contingent upon the politics of access.

But, it is also about reclamation. For quite some time now, Indigenous peoples have sought to create a space from which we can make our voices heard and our bodies seen, both in the academy as well as outside of it. We have done so through creating and (re)creating stories/theories, shifting paradigms and loci of enunciation, and through offering new or different methodologies with which to conduct research on or about Indigenous peoples. It has not been easy. Take, for example, my own story from the field of Rhetoric and Composition. My story in the really begins with the construction of a thing called History, so I will start there. This thing called History is really a progress narrative, and it implicates several other things that we build disciplinary standards on in

¹ Here, I am referring to Thing Theory in Material Culture studies. Theories advanced by Alfred Gell and Tim Ingold.

the academy. It's a narrative that is constructed on a colonial project that seeks to civilize and to create an authentic citizen of the Nation State.

Those who have writing, it says, have true History. Only those languages that have been phonetically written can be a legitimate form of literacy. One that can travel linear time. One that can bring a people into the present. Once a language dies, so too does a people. This is what my Sociolinguistics professor taught me:

Scene: I am in a Blocker presenting on the telenovela Dame Chocolate in my Sociolinguistics class. The novela is about an Indigenous woman whose secret family recipe for chocolate brings her out of poverty, among other things.

Me: It is curious to me that there are no translations for the moments when an Indigenous language is used in this telenovela, and I cannot quite tell, but I think the actors are probably speaking a Mayan language that—

Professor (interrupting): Wait, it can't really be a Mayan *dialect* because that language does not exist anymore.

Me (trippin): Well, there are five branches of Maya that are official *languages* in Mexico alone.

Professor: Well, you see there are no more Mayan people, and when a people die out, the language also dies with them. This is part of why it is so important to document languages.

Me (full on pissed): Uhh... There are millions of Mayan people living today. My tattoo artist is Mayan, and he speaks Yucatec Maya.

Professor: That is simply inaccurate. It is unfortunate, but over-mixing and genocide has simply lead to the death of the people and the language. And, really, people shouldn't believe mythologies about themselves.

Rhetoric and Composition as a field is deeply implicated in this narrative, though it may not be so obvious at first glance. The history of rhetoric begins in Greece and Rome. In fact, rhetoric comes from the Greek *rhetorikos*, “oratorical,” and *rhetor*, “public speaker.” Rhetoric is a word that is undeniably still alive, I suppose. So, what is rhetoric? If we look to the “Tradition,” we see a number of men who have been debating this topic since before Christ. It turns out that the “founding fathers” of rhetoric—Plato, Cicero, Aristotle, and others—were not in agreement as to what rhetoric *really* is or what it can do. Additionally, as scholars like Martin Bernal have argued, the modern construction of rhetoric and philosophy using the Greeks and the Romans has imposed a particular kind of cultural site and project onto these thinkers that divorces them from

the Afroasiatic influences on that culture. In other words, the Greco-Roman tradition might have had a greater relationship to *indigeneity* than the current practices within our field might allow for. Walter Mignolo would similarly argue that colonialism has utilized the tools of empire to create a “Western” culture that enables the expansion of the nation-state, one that hegemonizes. Rhetoric and writing as a discipline promotes this cause insofar as the history of rhetoric is predicated upon civics and publics and civilizing or erasing the savage in order to promote so-called progress. This is the story that has been told to me from this field:

If you want to talk about an Indigenous rhetoric, a Chicana rhetoric, a Latina rhetoric, you must do so through the Greco-Roman tradition. They *gave us* rhetoric and true democracy. Writing—text—is how we *do* rhetoric. We can turn anything into a text in order that we might read it to find its rhetorical implications or its rhetorical value. If you want to do “nonwestern rhetoric” that means talking about how your people came into contact with our tradition. You can also talk about how your people struggle with or *use* our tradition. Like how do migrant families negotiate publics in the borderlands? You know, especially since they might be illegal? Or how do Latinas build their own ethos, pathos, and logos in their discourses—in other words, how do they build a Latina rhetoric?

While these studies are certainly important and need to be done, even in the name of a kind of decolonial project, I nevertheless believe that just as urgent, if not more, is the uncovering and recovering our own histories of practices for making meaning. Yes,

like you, we may struggle with how to interpret our histories. We also might have entirely different beliefs systems for how and what “history” is and comes to be.

For Chican@s, navigating History has often meant struggling to negotiate an identity configured on the popular tropes of “borders” and “bridges,” specifically, the U.S. and Mexican nation-state borders.² It has also meant having to struggle to reclaim not only the *things* that were stolen from our communities and put on display in museums, but also the traditions and ways of knowing that have been colonized by Western culture. For Chican@s in particular, access to our *things* has been complicated not only by the borders that exist between “Mestizos” and “Indigenas” in Mexico, but also by the borders that exist between Mexico and the U.S.³ In highlighting these specific borders as referents for theorizing Chican@ identity, we have, perhaps ironically, displaced other borders and border(ed) stories of migration and struggle with respect to Indigenous peoples of the Americas. As Chican@s have struggled to reclaim an Indigenous identity that is precluded by nation-state borders, we have often done so

² While many Chican@s today choose to substitute the ‘Ch’ here for an ‘X,’ I maintain using the ‘Ch’ because the sound denoted by ‘X’ is more commonly a ‘sh’ sound in most regional dialects of Nahuatl. Additionally, the dialect of Nahuatl that I have been taught (Huastecan Vera Cruz) distinguishes between the sounds denoted by ‘X’ and ‘Ch,’ and so as a practice of relationality, I honor the language practices of my friends and tutors who teach and practice Nahuatl with me.

³ Mestizo is a term referring to the people in Mexico who have chosen to form an identity that stands on its own and cannot be reduced to only Indigenous or only European or only Black. Indigenas are people who have chosen to resist Mestizaje and who maintain living in traditional Indigenous ways in Latin America. While some believe that Mestizos are “mixed-blood” people and Indigenas are not, this is untrue. Mestizos are the people in power in Mexico, though they are the minority population.

without regard for how our reclaiming practices affect other Indigenous peoples who live among the multiple borders affecting the Americas.

While I believe these borders still have much impact on our lived experiences—are still very much a part of our reality—I also believe that theorizing from relationality can offer a more critical perspective for understanding not only how Chican@s can begin to decolonize Mestizaje, but also how we can begin to reclaim our ways of knowing via decolonial methodologies. In practicing this methodology in this dissertation, I hope to expose how the separation between epistemology and ontology that exists in Western philosophy does not exist for Indigenous ways of knowing, specifically in Latin America.

This chapter forges a path for talking about relationality and its potential for both rhetoric and writing studies as well as its potential for an emerging field of study in what is being called biocultural diversity (BCD), a concept that links language, culture, and biodiversity as interrelated parts of one whole complex system. This relationality sees nature influencing language and discourse just as much as language influences nature and discourse. It also shifts a discussion of BCD and language from one that is based on linguistic analysis to one that is based on practice. The second chapter shows how relationality plays out in an example, using Rarámuri dance traditions to talk more about the emergence of language. In the chapters that follow, I talk more about the objects or products of language (language artifacts) whose rhetorical value have heretofore been limited by textual analysis and writing studies, and the ways in which we understand language moving from a spoken context into a sign or symbol-based context.

Reclaiming Embodied Rhetorical Traditions: Toward a Decolonial Methodology

A decolonial methodology, as it has been advanced by scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Qwo-Li Driskill, Angela Haas, Emma Perez and others, is one that both intervenes on colonial narratives and histories told in the academy and also one that advances alternative narratives to the hegemonizing “master narrative(s)” that have much power not only in the academy, but also in public spaces more generally. It is no secret that much of the foundation for the production of Western knowledge in academia is—quite literally—the bodies of indigenous peoples. It is often through an interrogation, and a particular (mis)representation of the Other, the Savage, the “Pure,” that Western knowledge comes into being and maintains hegemony. As Andrea Smith has argued, Chican@ studies has utilized essentializing discourses of Indigeneity to advance its cause, particularly through the concept of Mestizaje. Even as Chican@ scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have begun to carve out a space for ourselves, we have carried over these concepts of Mestizaje and “new tribalism” from Chican@ studies uncritically. More importantly, the ways in which Mestizaje functions as a philosophy have also carried over as Chican@s have struggled to articulate our own intellectual traditions to field that is dominated by Western intellectual traditions. For example, Damián Baca’s *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing* utilizes the concept of Mestizaje to uncritically examine so-called “new” literacies. Additionally, in characteristically Mestizo fashion, these “new” literacies create a *mezcla*

(mixture) of European writing and “Aztec,” imaging practices without critically engaging the anthropological sources that posit Mexica images as writing.⁴

Baca aims to advance an epistemology based on difference using Walter Mignolo’s work, which has argued that Western models of inclusiveness create a kind of cultural hegemony that erases difference. Even when difference is acknowledged, it is characterized from within the colonial difference—how the practices, histories, stories, etc of the Other are different from or similar to Western/European notions of those intellectual traditions (*Darker, Local Histories/Global Designs*). Therefore, Baca aims to argue “*from*” the place of Mestizaje in order to recenter the locus of enunciation within Chican@ communities. However, in doing so, he has nonetheless continued the problematic assumption that what “Mestiz@s” (primarily Chican@s) have done and are doing on the “borderlands” is the “new” or different kind of literacy associated with Indigenous epistemologies that stem from Latin America. And while he claims that he does not place Indigenous peoples who have recognized tribal affiliation in the U.S. within the Mestiz@ continuum, he nonetheless does place the remainder of the “intellectual province of Mesoamerica” within that continuum (2).⁵

There are, however, state and federally recognized Indigenous communities in Mexico who still bear a relationship to the “literacies” that Baca and others are trying to reclaim in the U.S. Many of these people are also struggling to reclaim much of what has

⁴ Although it has been common practice to call Indigenous peoples from the area now called Mexico City in Mexico “Aztec” in anthropology studies, these people have always called themselves the Mexica.

⁵ Mesoamerica extends from Mexico to Honduras, but since the U.S. has colonized parts of Mexico, Mesoamerica can be said to include parts of the U.S., including parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

been taken from them, and I believe that practicing relationality—working alongside these communities in some way—can offer a decolonial approach to how we make knowledge in the academy. Because having the ability to work with people in Mexico is bound up in the politics of access, I am well aware of how difficult that can be. However, even when we are not able to travel to Mexico or connect with other Indigenous people in Mexico, we can still offer a critical, decolonial lens to the study of Indigenous epistemologies, and we can additionally work to make sure that we do not problematically attempt to continue a colonizing/hegemonizing practice of placing *all* Indigenous traditions of Mesoamerica, which I will refer to as Anahuac from here on out, within a “Mestiz@” continuum.⁶⁷ Additionally, as Qwo-Li Driskill has argued, a decolonial approach to the history of rhetoric commits itself to the decolonial struggles that exist outside of the academy as well: “there are movements attempting to correct colonial history and heal the damages that invasion and genocide continues to cause” (184). In fact, while many Chican@s see reclaiming Indigenous knowledge bases and histories as a form of healing historical trauma, most of us do so by reading the very scholarship that is produced about us in the academy. It is also more often than not, the

⁶ The Mexica name for the areas placed under the term “Mesoamerica” is Anahuac, which means “by the waters” or “place by the water.” I am using the Mexica name for this area because Mexica still represent the majority of Indigenous peoples living in this area, and because most Indigenous peoples of this area speak the language of the Mexica—Nahuatl.

⁷ Anahuac is sometimes spelled with the accent over the second ‘a,’ (Anáhuac). However, there is some debate about whether or not to use accent marks in Nahuatl orthography (and whether or not there are accents at all). I have chosen not to use accents because the version of Nahuatl that I have learned does not use them, and because I have noticed that different speakers stress different parts of the same words without regard for context for region.

working class Chican@s who have grown up knowing about our Indigeneity, and who seek to reclaim it by learning about it through anthropological sources. A decolonial approach to scholarship can potentially work alongside those grassroots attempts at healing.

The kind of decolonial methodology I aim to trace and borrow from in this chapter stems from decolonial theories developed in the U.S., Latin America, and Canada, and more specifically from articulations of this theory as it has been used in the fields of anthropology, Indigenous studies, Chican@ studies, and rhetoric and writing.

One of my primary concerns in this dissertation as it is situated within rhetoric and writing studies, is with the ways in which writing has been a primary conduit for colonization. Writing as a concept is bound up in the colonial relationship between history/writing/language/ literacy and “civilization.” And, in order for Indigenous peoples to be able to validate our histories and intellectual traditions, we must be able to do so *within* the limits of colonial difference—that is to say, we must be able to either prove that we did have writing pre-colonization (and therefore, history, complex language structures, and civilization) or we must be able to articulate our traditions with respect to writing in some way, even if it is only to hold up writing at the center of the discussion and mark points of difference with respect to Indigenous practices. In the latter moments, what is often posited is a challenge to *Indigenous* epistemologies. So, while Mignolo and others have struggled to decenter Western thinking with respect to Latin America as part of a decolonial agenda, in rhetoric and writing, this has proven to be difficult because of the relationship between history and writing and rhetoric for

Indigenous peoples of Latin America and for Chican@s who now find themselves living in the U.S. either due to migration or border politics.

While many of us would like to challenge the notion of writing as it applies to Indigenous culture in Latin America, doing so has been difficult because often times the only way that we have access to understanding our histories is through “writing” since many of us have lost our Indigenous languages or our relationships to images or textile practices due to colonization. So, we are left with the intellectual colonial legacy of articulating our histories and Intellectual practices around the concept of writing. Nevertheless, a decolonial approach to the study of Indigenous ways of knowing can manifest not only the limits of *writing studies* but can also articulate some of the material conditions biding Indigenous Intellectual practices. It is important to note at this point that decolonial theory in Latin America has a much closer relationship with postcolonial studies/theory than it does in the U.S. and Canada. In the U.S. and Canada, scholars tend to situate a concept of decolonial theory in Indigenous traditions that critique anthropological research practices. Postcolonial theories are heavily based on literary studies and representation, and decolonial theory in Latin America often takes up issues of representation that are seemingly divorced from the material realities Indigenous people of Latin America and Chican@s face. When I use the term decolonial, I am referring to all of these concepts and their material implications/consequences for Indigenous peoples.

Andrea Smith has argued that discussions about Indigenous epistemology often derail important discussions about the material conditions of Indigenous folks who are

still battling the forced colonization of their homes. However, because there is no epistemological/ontological split in Native science, I want to be careful that in discussing epistemology, I recognize it as also a material condition for Indigenous folks. The destruction of our epistemologies is also the literal destruction of us as a people. It is because of the destruction of our ways of knowing that we as a people have become disenfranchised. It is also how we have become detribalized and de-“Indianized.” But, as the work in BCD studies shows, it is also what has led to the destruction of our land bases and thus, for some us, our ability to survive on the lands that have been “reserved” for us. On a global level, however, as BCD studies show, it has impacted *all* of us because Indigenous peoples homes house most of the planet’s biodiversity that we all need to survive as a species. In saying this, I do mean to advance a problematic idea that Indigenous peoples are the “Custodians of Our Future” as a recent book publication suggests, but I do mean to suggest that Indigenous episto-ontologies—Native Science—do materialize a very different relationship to Environmentalism than mainstream culture does. For most Indigenous peoples across the planet, this is the primary decolonial agenda: right/balanced relations with Mother Earth. This can only come, we argue, through reclamation of Indigenous knowledge ways. For the field of rhetoric and writing then, the problem begins with writing.

The concept of writing as a politicized act still bears much weight on Indigenous peoples in Latin America and the continued colonization of our lands via oil and mining companies because many of us do not know how to write and, additionally, many of us do not speak Spanish or English well, if at all. Therefore, the ways in which we resist

and continue to make meaning and history for ourselves is through performance—performances that I argue share a lineage or legacy with precolonial performances that are connected to language and land bases in embodied and visual ways. One of the fundamental precepts in writing studies as it intersects with history stems from the very definitions of writing created and utilized by scholars, all of which are limited and informed by definitions and theories of language. In other words writing must in some way represent or bear a relationship to spoken language in order to be considered “true” writing and especially in order for it to be able to capture and archive history (*Writing Without Words, Cord Keepers*). This trajectory of thought has created a rift in studying the “civilization” and “history” of Indigenous peoples of Latin America that occurs at the juncture between what we call Indigenous codices of Mesoamerica, or Anahuac and khipu (or “knotted cords”) of the Andes, or Tawantinsuyu.⁸ Scholars are able to somehow see the collected images in Nahua amoxtli and Mayan vuh as writing because we are able to somehow translate or understand amoxtli and vuh as “books.” However, khipu are much more difficult to translate as writing.

Additionally, even though some scholars, primarily Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo, have been able to make a general argument about images in amoxtli and vuh somehow relating to writing, it should be noted that the issue is still very much a topic of debate, though not as much as it is with khipu. This is primarily because some (postcolonial) amoxtli and vuh contain written Nahuatl that accompany the images and

⁸ Again, here I am choosing to use the name that the Runa (Andean Quechua peoples) have given to the area we call the Andes because most Indigenous peoples of this area identify as Runa and speak Runasimi (Quechua).

also because many people can still recognize the images and the stories that go along with them that are found in the codices, whereas Runa people do not necessarily claim to be able to understand what precolonial khipu “say.” Nevertheless, I do believe that amoxtli, vuh, and khipu do bear a relationship to language, and it is through *contemporary* language relationships with these technologies that I believe we can begin understand how they make meaning and how they may be archives of history and episteme, which in turn has everything to do with how they hold and produce rhetoric.

Rhetoric as a distinct category in rhetoric and writing studies has only recently begun the kind of work that has been done in writing studies with respect Indigeneity and the ways in which Indigenous knowledge may or may not be able to be articulated within a rhetorical framework. Scholars like Malea Powell, Reza Crane Bizarro, Joyce Rain Anderson, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Angela Haas, among others, have challenged rhetoric and writing studies in productive ways that have led to growing interest in decolonial methodologies and performance-based studies and critiques that challenge the field to broaden both the limits of definitions of rhetoric and the theoretical lenses attributed to the study of rhetoric. Nevertheless, the first issue put out by the *Conference on College Composition and Communication* (CCCC) having to do with Indigenous rhetorics includes only works that work within the confines of what we call “The Rhetorical Tradition,” a tradition mostly attributed to Greece and Rome. However, as Powell and others have argued, rhetoric studies especially posits a unique orientation to scholarship given that whereas most other disciplines have distinct definitions and boundaries, the very field of rhetoric itself has been on posited on inquiry. That is, even

if we attribute the entire history of rhetoric to Greece and Rome, we must acknowledge that history as one being founded on debate about what rhetoric actually *is* and what it can or cannot *do*. What's more, Martin Bernal's powerful book *The Black Athena* challenges even our understanding of Greece and Rome as being precedents of Western culture because of Aryan influence, given that the peoples of these areas would have been heavily influenced by Afroasiatic (or Indigenous) cultures.

That said, while I do believe that amoxтли, vuh, and khipu bear a relationship to the languages that help/ed to create them, I do not believe that this relationship is bound by semiotics or linguistics. So, for the purposes of this dissertation project, I want to posit—however tentatively—that these technologies are *not* writing.⁹ Starting from this premise allows for shifting the discussion about Nahua codices and khipu to something more productive and less analytical. Specifically, I believe that these technologies and the relationships they bear with language can offer fruitful insight into the continued study and debate of what rhetoric is and what it can or cannot do for, particularly for Indigenous peoples of Anahuac or Tawantinsuyu, but also for other marginalized communities.

Biocultural Diversity Studies Helps Forge a Path to Traditional Knowledges

As it may be clear by this point, doing work in Chican@ and Indigenous studies is necessarily inter/intra/trans and multidisciplinary because of the ways in which

⁹ I do not necessarily want to argue outright that codices are not writing, but as I will discuss in chapter four, because I *do* want to assert that codices are not books, I am in some ways forced to make this claim.

Indigenous peoples have been “Othered” by the academy. Indigeneity is posited as a concept of antiquity, relegated to disciplines like history, anthropology, archeology, and sometimes to cultural studies-type disciplines, but rarely are our intellectual traditions given much concern outside of disciplines like anthropology. Additionally, because much of our history and cultural “artifacts” have been stolen and researched by anthropologists, it is necessary for Chican@s and other Indigenous peoples to go to these sources to begin to reclaim some of what has been taken from us.

But, a multidisciplinary approach is also necessary because the disciplinary distinctions posited forth by Western academic practices simply do not exist in Indigenous ways of knowing. As Cajete has argued, Indigenous ways of knowing are contingent upon a series of relationships: “Knowledge cannot be owned or discovered but is merely a set of relationships that may be given a visible form,” and “There should be no need for [Indigenous peoples] to constantly validate, justify, or change our work in order to fit foreign research paradigms” (127). Ultimately, what we might be able to constitute as an Indigenous form of rhetoric in Cemanahuac (Latin America) will necessarily come from Native science because our ways of knowing are also our ways of Being in the world and stem from our particular cosmologies.

I want to be clear, however, that part of a decolonial Indigenous research paradigm also means honoring and respecting the knowledge and paths to knowledge advanced by other communities (Wilson; Powell, “Down by the River”). While a Western and decolonial paradigms require a critique, an Indigenous paradigm requires more of a building upon and a fostering of a relationship with other people’s work across

difference. So while, I will be critiquing or challenging some of what has been said about Indigenous intellectual traditions of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu, I will still try to build a relationship with the work being posited by Western scholars as well.

Interestingly, interdisciplinary work being done in the emerging field of BCD studies is challenging traditional Western linguistics as a discipline to complicate some of the very foundational tenets of the field because scholars in linguistics, ecology, and linguistic anthropology have been able to map a physical overlap between linguistic diversity and biodiversity. According to scholars like Luisa Maffi and David Harmon, this mapping calls into question the arbitrary nature of sign systems that is so readily accepted within linguistics.

But, I believe it also calls into question some of the ways in which *amoxтли* and *kipu* are discussed because these discussions are predicated upon theories of writing and its relationship to language. However, even though scholars have indicated that using a lexico-grammatical approach to the study of spoken language and its relationship to biodiversity is limiting, there is still a heavy emphasis on semiotics and structure with respect to how language is perceived in BCD studies.

Nevertheless, I do believe that what scholars are attempting to better understand—this link between language, land, and knowledge—helps to form a path between Western science and ways of knowing and Cajete’s Native science, which “both in its contemporary and historic sense, is contextual and relational knowledge: it attempts to model traditional ways of teaching, knowing and understanding these relationships based on the existing make up of the natural world” (98). It is through

Native science and Indigenous epistememes that I believe we might be able to more fully understand how it is that Indigenous languages are linked to biodiversity, and by extension, how Nahua codices and khipu can hold and enact rhetorics.

A Decolonial, Indigenous Model of Biocultural Diversity

The “inextricable” link between language and culture eventually breaks down at the local level in Western mapping techniques that Eric Smith and even Diana Taylor argue are influenced by science and the superiority that science is given over other disciplines and systems of thought (*On Biocultural Diversity; Archive and Repertoire*). While scholars utilize these maps in sometimes problematic ways, I believe, as Taylor believes, that what is needed in a decolonial effort at “indigenizing” research done “on” Indigenous peoples. As such, I privilege the cosmovision of Rarámuri, Runa, Mexica, and other indigenous peoples in understanding the link(s) between language, culture, and biodiversity.¹⁰ In doing so, I do not wish to dispel the knowledge of other researchers or disrespect their intentions in any way, but I do hope to move us closer to that paradigm shift that so many researchers and Indigenous peoples alike have argued for.¹¹

This research utilizes Tuhiwai-Smith’s decolonial tactics for research, such as listening to and respecting indigenous traditions, attempting an “on the ground”

¹⁰ Rarámuri are also known as the “Tarahumara,” the Runa are called “Quechua,” and the Mexica are typically known as the “Aztec” in mainstream popular and academic discourses. Indigenous peoples have often voiced their desire to be called by the names they have chosen for themselves, and this is why I have chosen to use these names as opposed to the more popular, more recognizable names.

¹¹ See also *Paradigm Wars*, La Duke’s *All Our Relations*, and Melissa K. Nelson’s *Original Instructions* for other discussions of indigenous perspectives on nature.

perspective, paying attention to the body, and recovering Indigenous epistemic traditions. Additionally, however, “a decolonial approach to scholarship cannot take place if it ignores the connections between the struggles of Native people here and the struggles of people being colonized elsewhere” (Driskill 183). Therefore, this model utilizes and connects scholarship from Indigenous and other marginalized peoples as well as scholarship pertaining to Indigenous and other marginalized peoples in order to try and theorize biocultural diversity and the history of rhetoric and writing “Otherwise.¹²”

While in early waves of colonialism, Indigenous peoples were exploited primarily for their land and “gold” in a very literal fashion, in contemporary colonial agendas people have also sought to exploit Indigenous knowledge, usually called “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” (TEK). This happens primarily alongside efforts to understand and combat rising environmental concerns because Indigenous people’s land bases essentially house the world’s biodiversity. Scientists and other scholars as well as environmental activists alike have since begun to try and document TEK (*On Biocultural Diversity, Original Instructions*). Indigenous peoples would agree that our traditional knowledge, which is tied to our spiritual beliefs, which is in turn tied to our experiences living on our land bases, do have something valid and valuable to contribute to the current Environmental debate/dilemma. But, the primary concern in this regard stems from the autonomy to be able to continue those ways and not have them become commodified or homogenized by a global capitalist system. In fact, Victoria Tauli-

¹² Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs*

Corpuz argues, “Protecting biodiversity means not just protecting biological resources but also protecting cultural diversity and respecting our rights to our territories,” because too often Indigenous peoples are pressured to “sell” not only rights of access to their lands to mining and other corporations, but also the knowledge they have about how to use certain types of plants that grow on their lands, and even their genetic material (18).

What strikes me as also indicative of a colonial mentality toward Indigeneity in terms of BCD studies specifically is how the knowledge Indigenous peoples are willing to share with researchers doesn't seem to be counted worthy in the theorizing of how language, land, culture, and knowledge may be linked. Currently, scholars have used complex systems theory to argue that biodiversity is comprised of a complex system including the logosphere (read: language), the ethnosphere (read: culture), and the logosphere (read: language). These components of biocultural diversity are interdependent and interconnected. An Indigenous model of biocultural diversity, however, would look different, and would challenge the logos, or text-based, understanding of language. Although BCD scholars argue for looking outside a lexico-grammatical approach to understanding languages, they nevertheless end up theorizing language in text-based frameworks like grammar. As a result, efforts to “save” Indigenous languages are concerned primarily with documenting and standardizing their forms in dictionaries or other written archives. However, as David Abram argues, “We learn our native language not mentally, but bodily,” and:

The gesture is spontaneous and immediate. It is not an arbitrary sign that we mentally attach to a particular content or significance; rather, the

bodily gesture *is* the bodying-forth of that emotion into the world, it *is* that feeling of delight or of anguish in its tangible, visible aspect. (25)

While Abrams still relies on a dichotomy between the mind and the body, I want to highlight his understanding of gesture as it relates to an embodied relationship to language. The “sign” put forth in the emergence of language is connected to the body, and it is not arbitrary, but has everything to do with the material things at our immediate disposal. As Cajete similarly argues, “In a sense language ‘choreographs’ and/or facilitates the continual orientation of Native thought and perception toward active participation, active imagination, and active engagement with all that makes up natural reality” (27). It is this embodied relationship to language which then connects us to our land bases, and which also leads to the creation of “things”—artifacts, images, stories, etc—that reflect this relationship. It would seem that if scholars wish to better understand the link between language, culture, and environmental knowledge, we would need to look simultaneously at practices that are linked to the words we wish document. It also means that part of “saving” languages and biodiversity means more than simply archiving information in written form—it also means allowing Indigenous peoples to continue speaking their languages and practicing the traditions connected to them. It may also mean promoting the open use of these languages—making sure to keep the language alive is part and parcel with allowing it to live and be used and spoken. In short, an Indigenous model of biocultural diversity sees language as a *practice*-based sphere.

In Ixtli In Yollotl and “The Rhetorical Tradition”

In keeping with Chicana rhetorical tradition, this methodology is in part of theory of my flesh, a testimonio (testimony/story) born out of the struggles I have lived as first generation college graduate Mexicana who had this naive idea that she could get her Ph.D. and use it to buy her parents a home and give back to her community.¹³ It is a methodology born out of the ways in which my body has been written on and through, and it is born out of the ways in which my own embodied knowledge and history contributes to my thinking. As the title of this dissertation suggests, this work is about reclamation. It is about reclaiming a history and a present, and by extension a *presence* and a being-present.¹⁴ For most of us Indigenous folks, our practices did not necessitate text or textual analysis. In precolonial times, as Mexica Nahuatl speakers, we did not build *ethos*, we built in ixtli in yollotl. And, no, in ixtli in yollotl is not the translation for *ethos*. We still build in ixtli in yollotl in our daily practices. We still understand the world through all our relations—from father sky to mother earth, to the deer, to those of us who walk with wheels, to those who dance with our breath, to the two-spirit, queer plants and people who have much to teach us and who have good medicine to heal us. And, we all personally think we have some substantive ideas to bring to the table with regard to what rhetoric is, what it can be, and what it can potentially do. We actually

¹³ See Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Morraga's *This Bridge Called My Back*

¹⁴ In “Sign, Structure, and Play,” Derrida marks the important distinction between presence and being-present. Presence is “after the fact,” while being-present captures the immediacy of lived experience. In Western philosophy, being-present is harder to theorize because of a premise that sees ontology and epistemology as separate.

think we should think of this concept in the plural—as rhetoricS, and we have inkling that we are probably not the only ones who think this way.

So, here is one of our contributions to this debate/discussion. This is also a practice for me. This is me practicing myself into history and into this very moment you are reading through rhetorics of survivance:¹⁵

There was once a famous Nahua thinker. His name was Nezahualcoyotl. He is often attributed for being the “first” Nahua philosopher because of his written work in the *Cantares Mexicanos*. However, Nezhualcoyotl documented what Mexicas and other Nahuatl speakers had been practicing for years before the Spanish conquered Anahuac. The concept of *ixtli in yollotl* is something he learned while part of the Calmecac, which was a collective of people who gathered together to learn and pass on inherited wisdom.

Ixtli in yollotl is something that teachers or sages help the people to build. It translates literally as “a face a heart.” *Ixtli in yollotl* is what Angel Maria Garibay calls a *difrasismo*. In his book *La Llave Del Nahuatl*, he claims that *difrasismos* refers to the process by which two words are used together to signify a single meaning. An English language example might be the phrase “bread and butter,” which when used together in a single phrase, signify “money” or “livelihood.” *Difrasismos* are overwhelmingly common in Nahuatl language, and in the songs/poems that constitute

¹⁵ Rhetorics of survivance is a concept that Malea Powell has built alongside Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survivance, which is a neologism constructed to capture the act of resisting and surviving at once. Rhetorics of survivance are tactics by which Native peoples undermine and “trick” dominant narratives in order to make space for themselves.

our knowledge or “philosophies.” Together in *ixtli in yollotl*, signals to insight and to what it means to be a human being. In other words, Mexica build in *ixtli in yollotl* as a process of becoming human. Yolanda Leyba has argued that it is the process by which we as a people build “humanizing love” for one another (“Listening to Our Ancestors” 15). I want to highlight two things here: 1. Insight or knowledge is not only gained through the body, but the body is constituted upon on this knowledge. 2. Building knowledge is always-already a community-centered practice for Nahuas.

In *ixtli in yollotl* is a *practice*. While traditional rhetorical inquiry might have me look at texts like the *Cantares Mexicanos* in order to further develop what we might call a “Nahua rhetoric,” I want instead to practice in *ixtli in yollotl* as I write the remainder of this dissertation. For me this means building and using a methodology that is situated. It also means that I will try to privilege the body as a maker of knowledge rather than as an object of knowledge as much as I possibly can, but it also means that I must be transparent and honest about the fact that this work is still deeply implicated in the colonial project the “Academic Industrial Complex.”

In *ixtli in yollotl* (and all “*difrasismos*”) enact a kind of relationality that I wish to practice with regard to how Indigeneity is taken up in the academy. Though we work under the assumptions that our disciplines are distinct entities, I will show how the very act of constituting an *absolutely* distinct discipline at once *aligns* the various disciplines of the academy within a colonial project of making knowledge over and against Indigeneity. Knowledge is formed vis a vis *relationships*—this dissertation asks us to interrogate the relationships that have been formed and utilized in order to create

histories, languages, literacies, and discourses that have erased some of us. Specifically, this dissertation asks us in the field of rhetoric and writing to interrogate more carefully the relationship/s between languages, writing, and the history of rhetoric.

A Brief Map of What is to Come

To recap, I will remind you of what I will generally do in this dissertation. I will not take you chapter by chapter here, because the overall aim/s of the chapters overlap/s. I begin this investigation with Rarámuri dance traditions in order to offer a model for how embodiment can inform an investigation into embodied rhetorical traditions that is not contingent on mobility, and to show how we might be able to begin to think of language outside of a solely text-based approach in such a way that acknowledges difference and that sees the formation of knowledge happening through a series of relationships that are connected to peoples/bodies, lands, and culture. I then show how the relationship between spoken language and writing has erased many of us from the present—has constituted some of our realities as something to be contested while others are simply “whole” and uncontested.

Because the work in BCD studies complicates the idea that the relationship between language and writing must be abstract and textual, I will build on and challenge the work being done in BCD studies in order to complicate how Nahua codices and khipu are discussed in scholarly discourses. I choose these technologies because they are the one of the means by which our histories as Indigenous peoples have been recorded that continually puzzle academics and scholars. But, I also choose them because they are

some of the primary ways that Chicana@s both inside and outside of the academy seek to reclaim ourselves as human beings tied to the land base now called The Americas. I will argue that studying codices and khipu is important for rhetoric and writing, and that part of building a Chicna@, Latina, Indigenous rhetoric means including older and contemporary relationships to technologies like codices and khipu within the history and scope of our discipline.

CHAPTER II
SHIFTING ONTOLOGIES: LINKING LAND, LANGUAGE, AND PRACTICE
THROUGH RARÁMURI DANCE TRADITIONS

My father was a runner who taught and encouraged me to run from an early age. “It’s in your blood,” he used to say. “I used to run barefoot—you don’t believe me, eh?—all my relatives in Durango used to run barefoot. When I lived with my abuela in the ‘lote,’ every morning people would run. Shit, casi siempre andaban corriendo—they just ran everywhere, all the time. They were indios.” Later my dad would tell me about how some people came to recruit one of the men from his grandmother’s village for the Olympics (in the end, he did not fare well).

The only “indios” (“Indians”) in Mexico who are known for running in this way are the Rarámuri, who live mostly in the Sierra Madre of Chihuahua, but who are also known to have migrated into Durango. I do not know for certain if my dad’s family in Durango are Rarámuri because my grandmother spent most of her life fleeing from her people, striving for opportunities that she did not see possible in the life of an “indio.” She was not concerned with teaching her children her mother tongue, though she was very concerned about their learning to speak English well and without an accent. Whatever “Indianness” my grandmother carried in her, she did not want it passed on to her children, not so much because she despised it—she was actually quite proud of her heritage—but more so because she believed that a visible connection to indigeneity signaled poverty and oppression for her children’s futures. Though my father was very

young when he lived in Durango, he remembers the constant running, elaborate ceremonies, and his grandmother speaking to him an indigenous language.

“Nahuatl,” my dad would say. “How do you know?” I’d ask. “Pos que mas hay?” he would say—“What other languages are there?”

Certainly, there are many other indigenous languages spoken in Mexico, but I tell this story for a few reasons: one, it is important for me to highlight how indigeneity becomes erased in the minds of peoples of Mexican descent. This erasing manifests in various ways, including the ways in which the cultural differences of various indigenous groups of Mexico become homogenized. Second, embedded in this story is a web of relations that links language, culture/practice, and land bases—whole epistemologies and cosmologies.

This chapter will explore the ways in which the Indigenous model of relationality I have built in chapter one can serve as a foundation for explaining how Native science can challenge and transform how we think about what has come to be known as biocultural diversity.¹⁶ Biocultural diversity is a concept that has emerged out of the mapping of a correlation between linguistic diversity and biodiversity, which led scholars in the disciplines and various fields of linguistics, ecology, and anthropology to reconsider the readily accepted arbitrary nature of language. In order to do that, I first mark a point (or points) of rupture in the epistemological value of a Western based

¹⁶ I am referring here to Gregory Cajete’s notion of Native Science as outlined in his book of the same title. In staking claim on or referring to a “Native science,” I do not intend to universalize or reduce Native knowledge bases to a homogenous, universal system, but I want to make a gesture to the generally accepted idea that Native science cannot be separated from experience. Cajete articulates this distinction as “perceptual phenomenology” (14).

concept of biocultural diversity, then push past this to what Walter Mignolo calls the colonial difference in order to use “border thinking” to speak from a space that not only challenges the hegemony of Western discourse, but that also transforms it.¹⁷ It is from this space that Native science—a science based on relationality—can be articulated. Ultimately, I theorize the relationship between language, culture, and nature as one that is connected to and emerging from the body as an episteme. As such, this chapter (and the dissertation more broadly) seeks to complicate and transform traditional notions of materiality through an Indigenous-centered cultural rhetorics approach.

According to Paul Minnis and Wayne J. Elisens, the Rarámuri language is one of the indigenous languages of Mexico that has been on the decline since 1930, even though theirs is one of the larger populations of indigenous peoples worldwide (47). For Rarámuri peoples, language is tied to particular relationships to the land that are manifested through embodied practices that recapitulate Rarámuri cosmology and epistemology.¹⁸

The Rarámuri word for breath (*iwígara*) encapsulates an entire cosmology/philosophy¹⁹. *Iwígara* means the breath of life, and it pertains to the soul and

¹⁷ The colonial difference is the “location where the coloniality of power is at work in the confrontation of two kinds of local histories displayed in different spaces and times across the planet” (*Local Histories/Global Designs* ix). “Border Thinking” is the inevitable thinking that *only* the subaltern can perform because only they are physically stuck within the various physical and emotional and intellectual borders placed on them from the coloniality of power. Mignolo uses Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of *neplantera* to articulate how he has developed this idea (See *Borderlands: La Frontera*).

¹⁸ The Rarámuri people of the Tarahumara Sierra Madre number anywhere from 40-70,000 according to various sources (See Lumholtz, Salmón, Levi).

¹⁹ While in Eurocentric traditions, these categories are distinct, in Rarámuri tradition, there is no strict boundary between ontology and epistemology, or between experience and knowledge—how we understand the world and how we understand ourselves as “Beings.”

the integration of all life forms as kin (Salmón “Iwígara” 185). Concepts of breath, life, and soul are prominent in Rarámuri language and language practices. Breathing in higher elevations, like in the mountains of the Sierra Madre, is different from breathing in areas of lower elevation. It takes a bit more work, a bit more conscious effort.

Running in areas of higher elevation is also quite different in these areas, mostly because of the ways in which the body must train itself to work differently in order to breathe easier and the ways in which the climate and altitude “train” the body to breathe in particular ways that are conducive to the environment. At the same time, in mountainous regions like the Sierra Madre, running is the most efficient form of transportation. In part, the Rarámuri privilege breath (iwígara) as a foundation for their cosmologies because *breathing* is a fore-grounded activity linked to their land bases. Thus, iwígara becomes the word that they use to indicate life, activity, and motion.

Using and understanding iwígara as a performance helps us to better understand not only how biodiversity is a cultural product, but also how iwígara enacts a rhetoric of relationality that pushes us to see how culture is also a product of biodiversity. How the Rarámuri come to know about living on their land is through an embodied relationship to the spaces they call home, and that becomes the foundation, not only for how they understand themselves as peoples, but for how they understand *all* aspects of life.

Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor’s concept of the archive and the repertoire is fitting for theorizing the links between language, culture, and nature because it is rooted in epistemologies of the body and embodied knowledge, a perspective that would also greatly enhance understanding how iwígara as a

performance/practice enacts biodiversity. According to Taylor, the archive consists of the written and other methods of transmission by which Western epistemologies are always valued and “preserved” in tangible, material ways; while, the repertoire is revealed through the embodied practices by which indigenous peoples transmit cultural memory and knowledge. She argues that this relationship more accurately portrays the hegemony created by what most people would refer to as the “oral/literate” binary. The relationship between the archive and the repertoire is not inherently binary, Taylor reminds us: “Even though the relationship between the archive and the repertoire is not by definition agonistic or oppositional, written documents have repeatedly announced the disappearance of the performance practices involved in mnemonic transmission” (36). She questions the political implications of such a “violent” relationship between the two. If the repertoire—embodied practices and performances—are purely ephemeral and sub par, and if Western archives are truly “static,” whose memories disappear? (36). More importantly in light of the current efforts carried out by ecologists, how are scholars perpetuating practices that erase and dismiss indigenous peoples and their coveted “ecological knowledge?”

While Taylor disrupts the potential binary relationship between the archive and the repertoire insofar as she challenges any hierarchical relationship between them, she does not push the relationship to the limits of colonial difference so much as she rearticulates (to some degree) a Western epistemology of performance. However, Rarámuri epistemologies and cosmologies do not allow for an easy depiction of what precisely constitutes the archive and the repertoire in this exchange.

The archive and the repertoire are vessels of history, episteme, and practice. It is through the tension between the two that we might be able to conceive of the relationship indigenous people share with nature because it is in that tension that Indigenous cosmologies and what Jesse Little Doe, a Wôpanâak linguist, calls “creation responsibilities” surface (2). Archival documents are typically linked to language and often go hand in hand with embodied practices from the repertoire of dance, gesture, and the two emerge together, not separately. Certain words, phrases, or songs not only spark the onset of a set of ceremonial gestures that reiterate their responsibilities to their gods and to their lands, but are connected to them and they emerge coevally.

This invites the perspectival shift of understanding the mapped “overlap” of biocultural diversity and biodiversity.²⁰ Indigenous conceptions of space and “mapping” may serve to inform conservationists’ mapping method/ologies because their ideas about space are always-already linked to their languages and practices²¹.

While I primarily use Taylor’s concept of the archive and the repertoire to mobilize an embodied rhetoric of biocultural diversity, I will also show how indigenous practices can complicate and expand what we mean by “archive” and what we mean by “repertoire,” primarily because of how a Rarámuri Indigenous concept of materiality complicates any easy bifurcation of either category. Specifically, I focus on applying Taylor’s theory to the mapping of linguistic/cultural diversity and biodiversity overlap,

²⁰ Mark Warhus’ discusses Native cartography in his book, *Another America*. Additionally, Linda Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* and Vine Deloria’s *God is Red* both discuss Indigenous understandings of space (over and against “place” and as a concept that can produce time).

²¹ This is similar to Michel De Certeau’s concept of space as “practiced place.”

which I then theorize through an analysis of the Rarámuri practices/performances of iwígara in the Sierra Madre ecosystem, which scholars have cited as one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet (Maffi and Woodley, *Global Sourcebook*). I look specifically at the ceremonial dances of Rubáchi and Yumarí and the role that suwu-ki (Tesguino, or “corn beer”) plays in these ceremonies. This analysis will offer different responses to questions raised by scholars researching biocultural diversity, namely:

1. Is local diversity, at least to some extent, a cultural product?
2. How have the links among diversities developed over time, how are these relationships manifested today, and how does one form of diversity affect the others?
3. What are the causal links of biodiversity at the local level?

Maffi and Woodley 8.

These questions have been answered to some extent using Western methodologies and knowledge bases; however, enacting border thinking to answer these questions at the local level not only offers different answers, but also entirely different cosmologies and approaches to the understanding of biocultural diversity. Additionally, the answers that arise out of border thinking offer “an/other” way of understanding language and its relationship to materiality, which is a crucial point I will return to later in the chapter.²²

²² “an/other” thinking refers to a shift in the geopolitics of knowledge that critiques both Western and Islamic metaphysics, and that is not inspired from within its limitations so much as from within the limitations of the coloniality of power (See *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 67-68).

Native Science and (Em)bodying Knowledge²³

Unfortunately, the archive/repertoire *binary* still bears much weight on Western methodologies. One example, as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas points out, reveals itself in the very ways that linguistics orders itself as a discipline: “There are no linguistic criteria for differentiating between a language and a dialect (or vernacular or patois)”;²³ however, “One possible criterion which has been suggested is standardization. Only dialects which have been reduced to writing (a prerequisite for standardization), and which have been standardized, are languages, everything else is something else (dialect, vernacular, patois)” (Skutnabb-Kangas). Other criteria such as mutual intelligibility and structural similarity are far too ambiguous to apply, and as such, various “languages” which do not meet these criteria are nonetheless considered separate languages and vice versa. The end result, as Skutnap-Kangas reveals, is that very few indigenous languages (and sign languages) qualify as official languages. Thus, she concludes, “language is a dialect promoted by elites” because only those in power can claim what is and is not a language.

Linguist Andrew Pawley posits a critique of Western linguistics, arguing, “If we accept that a great deal of cultural knowledge is part of linguistic competence, I believe we must acknowledge that conventional descriptions of languages generally do a poor job of representing such knowledge” (“Some Problems” 228). For Pawley, the solution to this problem is in understanding that there are alternative ways of viewing language that are not contingent upon the grammar-lexicon model, but are instead conscribed in “situations” and “events,” phrases, clauses, and sequences of clauses, as well as in the

²³ I want to call attention to the “embodiedness” of knowledge but also to the “bodying” of knowing as an active process.

“conceptual components” that “are implied but conventionally omitted when [many indigenous communities] construct discourse” (244). Theorizing an indigenous-centered epistemology of the body connected to language and biodiversity allows for the “deep mind shift” that linguist and biocultural studies scholar Luisa Maffi deems necessary for intellectual endeavor into biocultural diversity (Maffi and Woodley 26).

To some extent, then, I take up Pawley’s suggestion to look to “events” that occur outside of a grammar-lexicon model in the Derridean sense. The “event” may very well be the moment(s) of rupture at which the limits of the nature/culture opposition are made manifest, even as that opposition continues to be utilized in contemporary discussions surrounding both biocultural diversity and Indigeneity.²⁴ If we are to enter into any kind of “free play” of meaning in order to uncover and recover indigenous knowledge, we must push to the exterior of the limits of what Walter Mignolo calls the colonial difference. He argues that “border thinking” is a consequence of this space of difference. Though, for Mignolo, this is not a “pure” space (in other words, it is born of and rests within the coloniality of power), it is nonetheless a thinking-space from which non-western, or subjugated knowledges can be articulated. Mignolo has argued that border thinking is a complement to Derrida’s deconstruction. Derrida would argue that the immediacy of lived experience (or “beingpresent”) can only be conceived of at the beginning of freeplay (“Sign, Structure, and Play” 290). Because border thinking arises out of the very tension that Derrida argues incites freeplay, this thinking can potentially

²⁴ In “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences,” Derrida refers to a tentative “event” in which the history of the concept of structure ruptured, opening up the field of metaphysics to a “freeplay” of meaning that marks the absence of a proper origin or transcendental signified.

provide an avenue for me to use a Native science of relationality that challenges the traditional epistemological/ontological split, which is the basis upon which much of Indigenous cosmologies are reduced to metaphor.

Running, Rhetoric, and Repertoire, or How a Rarámuri Epistemology of the Body is also a Way of Being

Anthropologist Enrique Salmón takes indigenous worldviews seriously, and he incorporates those views into the study of Rarámuri “ecological” activity.²⁵ Salmón is also transparent about the ways in which his positionality as a Rarámuri influences his scholarship. In a chapter of Minnis and Elisen’s collection entitled “Iwigara, A Rarámuri Cognitive Model of Biodiversity and its effects on Land Management,” Salmón contends, “Western cultural models of nature separate humans from nature, while indigenous models include humans as one aspect of the complexity of nature” (180). The Rarámuri value plants and see some of them as gods with ties to the spirit world (Merrill *Rarámuri Souls* 85-120). Their relationship to their land is kindled by their relationship to and understanding of plants, which is manifested through their dance ceremonies and through their curing practices. Iwigara, however, also reinforces Rarámuri cosmology and epistemology at the etymological level in that *iwi* has diverse and various meanings, though a central meaning is grounded in the concept of a circular or cyclical relationship

²⁵ I use the terms “ecological” tentatively as the word does not correspond well to indigenous activity, yet is useful for my discussion.

between all things on earth.²⁶ It also represents the fertility of the land and the soul. It means to “breath, inhale/exhale, or respire” (187).

It can be argued that *iwi* is the central, defining concept of Rarámuri culture. The soul, *iwi*, is not confined to the human, Rarámuri believe that *iwi* is present in all living things, including the plants and animals—nature is animated. Salmón also claims that *iwi* is a word used to identify a caterpillar found in the madrone tree. This allows Salmón to conclude that “there is a whole morphological process of change, death, birth, and rebirth associated with the concept of *iwi*” (188). *Iwigara*, then, as Salmón argues, is the Rarámuri concept of “biodiversity.”

Performing/ Practicing Iwígara

A closer consideration of the ways in which Rarámuri dance ceremonies perform or practice *iwígara* will be helpful for understanding how language is linked to bodies and practices that enact a rhetoric of relationality connected biodiversity. In Thord-Gray’s *Tarahumara-English, English-Tarahumara Dictionary*, the Rarámuri word *numatí* is constituted as meaning the “things of the world,” but the word also bears reference to a concept that is the “relatedness” of the people to plants around them in a very *literal* fashion (275). Rarámuri believe that plants are animated and that they (Rarámuri) are related to plants as cousins or siblings, etc (Levi, Salmón).

The “link” between language and thought as theorized by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf was the first to come closest to the kind of ways indigenous peoples

²⁶ See also LumHoltz and Levi

understand this relationship. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity suggests that the structure of language informs, perhaps even creates and limits, the worldview of the speakers of that language (Whorf 162). Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch expand on the Sapir-Whorfian concept offer a closer version of that relationship as being both embodied and linked to relationships with nature. In *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Varela et al. explore the relationship between cognition and experience (a kind of phenomenological approach), using theories about emergent properties and connectionism alongside the Buddhist concept of mindfulness/awareness to make a case for linking sign symbols to emergence. In other words, whereas traditional cognitive approaches see sign symbols as purely descriptive, Varela et al. argue that they emerge from parallel distributed properties linked to perception (experience), where “perception exists in perceptually guided action and...cognitive structures emerge from the concurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided” (173). This kind of “circular reasoning” suggests the reciprocal relationship between external and internal material, and suggests that two can collide at and on the meeting point that is the body.

Perceptual experiences with the land lead indigenous peoples to form and *grow* knowledge of the land, but that knowledge is thus encoded in the body, and in the memory bank of the body in such a way that it reproduces that knowledge and also shifts along with it. This brings us back to Diana Taylor and her notion of the performatic, a word that she borrows from Spanish. Performativity, she argues, which is the mainstream academic mode of inquiring into performance and embodiment, does not get

us close enough to the immediacy of live(d) performance because it is still text-based. For Taylor, performativity is a quality of discourse, which she believes can be complicated by the Spanish *performatico* (performatic), which captures the theatricality of performance (6). It is from within the theatricality of performance that the immediacy of experience outside of discourse can show or depict how the body is encoding and disseminating knowledge.

According to the Rarámuri, *Onorúame* (The Creator) provides for them, but only as they help him by offering songs, dances, and food (Lumholtz 332). Their repertoire consists of gestures, call and response directives, and curing practices that all include formation in some way or another of a circle to remind them of the kincentric, reciprocal relationship they have with their land. And, the word we translate as “dance” in the English literally means “to work”; the Rarámuri do not see dancing as a mere pastime or social event. In fact, Rarámuri believe that The Creator has given the responsibilities of “planting and dancing.” According to Salmón, dancers dance in a circle—*iwi*—as part of language practices linked to building and maintaining a relationship with the land:

with the awareness that one’s breath is shared by all surrounding life, that one’s cultural emergence was possibly caused by some of the life-forms around one’s environment, and that one is responsible for its mutual survival; it becomes apparent that it is related to you.” (56).

Encoded in the language and on the body are both a concept and a practice that are linked to relatedness. Ecologically speaking, the language is born of and

manifests/exposes what Salmón calls a “kincentric” a relationship between Rarámuri peoples and their land—this is a performance of *iwigara*.

Dancing and Planting

The Rutuburi and the Yumari dances, as tradition holds, were learned from the turkey and the deer, respectively, and are performed at various times of the year. The dances are for the sun and the moon; the Rutuburi calls them down, while the Yumari dispatches them, and thus the Rutuburi is performed at night. Again, the timing of the dances is linked to placement of stars, which is to say, as Lumholtz does, “the stars have some connection with the dancing.” This is because of the interconnectedness of the universe and the body and all other living things in Rarámuri cosmology. The stars, along with Rarámuri souls and butterflies occupy the third level of the universe, which is also where Onorúame, his wife, Bisa Rigachi, and their son, Chirisopari (Morning Star) also live (Salmón, 89). During night dances, the Rarámuri look to the stars to find cardinal direction, or sometimes to give offerings to ancestors or the Creator.

But, how do these dance performances/practices serve as acts of transmission—as embodied acts of transfer and embodied rhetoric? In part, the answer to this question stems from understanding how these practices challenge the archive/repertoire relationship by complicating what constitutes the materiality of the archive and repertoire. According to Taylor, “Since before the Conquest... writing and embodied performance have often worked together to layer historical memories that constitute community,” and I would add, that they transfer what we might call in a Western sense

“ecological” knowledge (35). Taylor elaborates, “Nature was ritualized, just as ritual was naturalized” (38). The Rarámuri performances are not imitative or “copies” in this sense; they bear, instead, what Taylor calls a “once-againness.” Fusing Varela et al.’s theory with Taylor’s yields the idea that the performed acts stay encoded in the body, and are renewed and transferred through performing cultural and embodied memory that can be manifested by and through language.

During the Rutuburi, Lumholtz observes that after the Rarámuri shake rattles for a few moments to call attention to the gods (Sun and Moon), they proceed to move in the cardinal directions, beginning with west and proceeding east, while shaking their rattles up and down. This also serves as a reminder of the relationship between the Sun and the Moon, which was represented by a cross even before “conquest.” Typically the West-East position of the cross stood for the Moon God, while the North-South position stood for the Sun God. These Gods are said to be the fundamental providers of good crops and what can be called “bio-richness.” They also remind the people of balance, as there must be a balanced relationship between the day and the night in order to yield a good crop (Lumholtz 336-338). The repertoire includes the songs sung, which correspond with the balance and cyclical relationships invoked through the dance. The songs reference the ways in which nature informs their ways of knowing:

The water is near;

Fog is resting on the Mountain and on the Mesa...

The flowers are standing up, waving in the wind.

The Turkey is playing, and the Eagle is calling;

Therefore, the time of rains will soon set in. (Lumholtz 338-339)

The “call,” here, is not a literal invocation so much as it is a “helping” and “affirming” what is already about to occur. Rarámuri believe that this is necessary for fruition, and the dance is seen as a form of “working” alongside nature and The Creator toward that process (Merill 125). If the Rarámuri do not dance, they will have failed in contributing to their portion of the communal work done by all actors in the “creation” process. What is important to see here, as well, is that dances are performed to promote iwígara—the life/breath/soul of the people, the land, and the universe.

However, because the Rarámuri believe songs to be active sites, they possess a kind of materiality that traditional philosophies and cosmologies do not allow for in thinking about music. The body, likewise, is able to encode knowledge in the way an archive might. In other words, it is not only that Indigenous epistemologies function in a relationship between archival (material matter) and repertoire (bodied gesture) is that Indigenous ways of knowing are materialized through the tension between what we might conceive of as an archive and a repertoire. While Indigenous peoples have survived and continue to survive histories of erasure, their presence is made known in an *active* and immediate way through the very dialogics that seek to erase them, and what’s more, their “beingpresent” affects a material reality that is felt at a universal level in the form of biodiversity.²⁷

²⁷ This is the manner in which Derrida attempts to show the difference between Presence and Being, which are concepts that are “after the fact” of lived experience, and “beingpresent” which is an *activity* of being from within the immediacy of lived experience.

The Yúmari is a curing ceremony/dance and includes suwi-ki (tesguino, or “corn beer”). It is also the performance in which women play a central role because of the connection yúmari has with corn, which is seen as one of the origins of their existence. In this process we can see an obvious connection between ecological habits and cultural *practices/performances*. Salmón argues that the Yúmari “nonverbally performs and expresses Rarámuri conceptualizations of flowers as symbols of fertility and reproduction” (“Sharing Breath” 179). The suwi-ki used in the ceremony is made from corn, corn being the staple crop of the area. However, there is, perhaps, a complex relationship between Rarámuri mythology, the land, and the diversity of maize. Using Valesco et al.’s, and Maffi and others’ theories, it becomes plausible to conceive of the diversity of corn as a “perceptually guided action” (Varela et al. 173), one that takes “hundreds of years of intimate contact with the land” to see and know (Mülhäusler 135). Rarámuri beliefs are intrinsically tied to the presence of Maize as well, though, as one of the gods of their culture is the Corn God, and they see themselves as “children of the maize” (Bennet and Zingg 30). It is not a passing survival instinct to plant seeds of corn, but is instead a response to deep connections to the land based on material—bodied—experience. “Look at our teeth. They still look like rows of corn,” Says Hector, a Rarámuri who works alongside Salmón. “Look at the hair on the corn, it looks like ours. We are still part corn.” (“Sharing Breath” 267). Additionally, the Rarámuri word for the germplasm of corn, sunú iwíga, literally translates as “corn-soul,” which shows how the depictions of human soul and corn soul become intermingled. The process of making suwi-ki for yúmari involves processing corn kernels (sunú iwíga) into beer. Rarámuri

believe they are consuming the soul of the corn when they consume suwi-ki. This is an important process of the cycle of birth, life, death, (and renewal). It is also important to consume this beer on occasion in order to reach “the other reality” and strengthen your iwíga. It is imperative to note, however, that in drinking suwi-ki and dancing, the Rarámuri believe they are *also* nourishing the Creator Onorúame (“Sharing Breath” 265-278).

This concept of performing iwígara plays out in other kinds of practices as well, and Salmón has recorded the methods of ecological activity promoted by the Rarámuri, citing the planting of “wild” plants in areas where they would not normally be planted (which is seen as ecologically unsound) as one method that has actually increased and nurtured the production of greens in the area. Lencho, a Rarámuri “informant” in Salmón’s research claimed that greens were planted with corns, but were left to gain more iwígara, acknowledging that they were planted in the “wrong place,” but could eventually be harvested after gaining more iwígara or strength. Salmón noted that the eventual yield of greens did in fact grow by the end of his study (*Native America and Biodiversity* 199).²⁸

These studies are indicative of the Rarámuri ecological *practices* based on experience and of their language practices that enhance this kind of knowledge. But, equally important in recognizing these language practices as ecological practices, is recognizing the kincentric relationship from which they are born. According to Salmón, there is no distinction between how the Rarámuri view human beings and how they view

²⁸ Salmón also finds that the Rarámuri harvesting practices of leaving smaller onion bulbs behind when collecting onions in order to promote a second harvest to be ecological.

“nature.” The universe is categorized exactly the same as humans are. Plants are alive and are relatives. Literally. However, some plants are human beings who are in plant form. Of those plants, some are Rarámuri, some are simply other indigenous people, and some are Chabochi (white people). So, while there is no such thing as “toxic” or “poisonous” plants, there are some plants deemed dangerous or that need to be handled with particular care. These plants are always Chabochi, sometimes Rarámuri, and sometimes indigenous (usually they are Apache if they are an indigenous group other than Rarámuri).

The Yúmari, according to Lumholtz and Salmón, is the most important dance the Rarámuri perform, and the component of suwi-ki presupposes that the Rarámuri harvest corn well not only *for* the occasion, but also because the occasion is a result of the land’s agrocultural health and the Rarámuri responsibility to cultivate that health through “dancing and planting.” Hikuli plants, some of which are Rarámuri, are used in the preparation of suwu-ki for the Yúmari. There are several types of hikuli plants, and one type (*Lophophora Williamsii*) is what some call “true” peyote (Salmón, “Shared Breath” 214). This particular type of hikuli is a Rarámuri (male) who has been on the earth since the beginning, which is why he is powerful. Some Rarámuri avoid using this hikuli, but others use it for treatment of bruises, wounds, bites, rheumatoid arthritis, and in the making of suwu-ki for Yúmari (Salmón, “Shared Breath” 215). This becomes especially important in considering that Yúmari is a ceremonial curing dance, one that is performed to promote the good health of Onorúame. Additionally, when analyzed, hikuli literally means, “to take hold of something that is spinning or whirling,” and kuli is one of the

terms associated with the spinning motion dancers make. According to Salmón, it may refer to not only the practice of it being eaten during Yúmari dances (which are circular) but also to its psychotropic affects. Again, this signals the reciprocal relationship between language, the body, and land.

Equally important, however, when considering the link between language, practice, and biodiversity, is that there are not always Rarámuri words to signal the distinctions between the different types of hikuli—they are mostly known through their distinct uses, which are connected to their role or place in Rarámuri cosmology. For example, plants are generally categorized in three ways: plants as chabochí, plants as Rarámuri, and plants as other indigenous people, all of which are also typically gendered. Plants designated as chabochí are considered dangerous. These plants are children of the Devil and pose a threat to Onorúame, which is why ceremonies for healing are performed. It is important to note, however, that some plants considered chabochí by some Rarámuri are considered to be Rarámuri by others. Additionally, while these plants are deemed dangerous because they are “mean, stingy, and fight all the time,” they are still used for specific purposes and handled in particular ways *because* they are chabochí (or potentially dangerous).

In other words, the practices that go along with maintaining (cultivating even) chabochi plants are informed by Rarámuri cosmology and their relationships with people—here white people—that can bear a relationship to their language but cannot be separated from their practices. Their ecological activity is always-already informed by their cosmologies, or ways of understanding the universe as matrix of relations which

includes people, plants, animals, etc, all working together in some way to maintain balance. Felicitas, a Rarámuri from the Sierra Madre, explains, “All plants are good to use. Some have to be used carefully because their *iwigá* is dangerous and can hurt you” (qtd. in Salmón “Shared Breath” 247). Noema, another Rarámuri, argues that there are no such things as “poisonous” plants (nor is there a Rarámuri word equivalent to this word) because all plants are all “good for something” and are all our relatives (qtd. In Salmón “Shared Breath” 264). This has a lot to say about the ways in which land (ecological) practices inform and are informed by relationships between peoples who populate the lands on which we all live. Ecological diversity is also always about learning how to behave and live with each other as humans.

Yúmari is also followed by sacrifices and eating and drinking during the day, as the Rarámuri celebrate and “work” or dance in preparation of the new day. This is when the Rarámuri light fires to offer sacrifices of food to the Creator. Brian H. Walker and Marco A. Janssen argue for the necessity of small fires in rangelands in “Rangelands, Pastoralists and Governments: Interlinked Systems of People and Nature,” as a practice that promotes maintenance, because “[f]ire is not a disturbance in most rangelands; it is the absence of fire that is a disturbance” (719). While the making of fires seems to remove agency, Salmón (“*Iwígara*”) claimed that the making of fires for alternate reasons as one of the ways Rarámuri promote the health of their lands (199). Still, the *practice* is a part of Rarámuri cosmology. According to Gabriel, a Rarámuri, evil “characters” who are associated with the Diabolo are scared of fire and will not attend dance ceremonies when fires are lit. Salmón adds that fire is a visible manifestation of

the “breath” that inhabits all life (“Shared Breath” 207). It is necessary to light fires in other of iwígara (breath/life), and that concept permeates throughout all of Rarámuri language (and ecological) practices.

Iwígara, Souls, and Aristotalian Reason

The Rarámuri understanding of breath as it related to embodied rhetoric and embodiment differ from a mainstream or western notion of embodiment, however. And that relationship complicates even our understanding of rhetoric in the traditional sense. For example, Aristotle argues in *On Rhetoric* and *De Anime* about the importance of the soul in the production of rhetoric and “good character.” In Book 2 of *Anime*, he argues that the soul and the body are not necessarily separate—that is, the soul has a kind of body all its own. But, the intellect lies in the soul, and while the soul can hold and exercise knowledge, the body alone cannot (362). This is why the any “animal” must possess both. Additionally, in *Rhetoric*, he makes clear that only humans possess the potential for rhetoric because while all living things have a soul, only humans possess the ability to reason—to “know.”

For the Rarámuri, the soul is equally important, but it is linked to the concept of breath, and it is extended to all living things in the same manner as it is for humans. The Rarámuri believe that plants, animals, even stones possess iwígara that must be nourished just as the iwígara of humans must be. They believe that plants are human and related to us because they too possess iwígara, and they believe that plants and animals teach us—give us knowledge—that we need to survive and so we must listen to and

learn from them. Additionally, while the soul can function independently from the body in Rarámuri epistemologies, it is not in such a way that dismisses the importance of the body as an episteme or holder and dispenser of knowledge. According to Salmón, during dance ceremonies, there are typically people dancing and some who are not:

These people are not spectators, they are dancing with their breath. This means that, they, like supporters at a healing ceremony, offer their thoughts and energy toward the dancers as a way to strengthen their actions. In this way, they keep the dancers intention of keeping the land strong. (“Shared Breath” 219-220)

As mentioned earlier, the dancing (“work”) is performed by everyone in diverse ways and is connected to nurturing the land in order to nurture themselves. The dancing that people do with their bodies is valued equally with the dancing that people do with their breath (soul) in a way that Aristotle would not deem acceptable. Additionally, all living things possess the potential to both hold and exercise knowledge. The difference here becomes imperative not only to understanding and theorizing the link between language, culture, and biodiversity, but also to understanding the breadth of rhetoric as well as the rhetorical implications of understanding all living things as having the potential to produce rhetoric. Because rhetoric as a discipline is concerned with continually debating and (re)defining rhetoric in terms of its social and societal impact, this shift in understanding the ways in which *all* living things can communicate knowledge in complex ways becomes paramount. The rhetoric that is embodied must be validated if scholars are to truly comprehend the link between biocultural and

biodiversity, and rhetoricians must value it as well in order to maintain social justice and equality.

This investigation has been an attempt to explode the archive/repertoire *binary* that exists not only in the scholarship about Rarámuri people and in the fields represented, but also in understanding the relationship between the “repertoire” and the “archive” as mutually informing. This work is especially crucial to me as scholar who works at the intersection between the fields of Indigenous Studies and Rhetoric and Writing because of the ways in which language and writing theories collude, each informing the other, and also because of the ways in which writing and books have been used as means to define “civilization” over and against indigenous *bodies*. As such, theorizing language outside of a text-based, grammar-lexicon model can inform the ways in which indigenous material productions made by Indigenous peoples in Anahuac (Latin America) and Tawantinsuyu (the Andes) get talked about in academia vis a vis writing.²⁹

²⁹ For a more in depth discussion on the relationship between writing, history, civilization, and the book, see Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo’s *Writing Without Words*.

CHAPTER III
INTELLECTUAL TRADE ROUTES: KHIPU (DIGITAL) RHETORICAL
TRADITIONS OF TAWANTINSUYU

“This state of being haunted, which keeps the city from returning to nature, is perhaps the general mode of the presence or absence of the thing itself on pure language.

The pure language that would be housed in pure literature, the object of pure literary
criticism”

—Jacques Derrida

“There are stories caught
in my mother’s hair
I can’t bear the weight of”

--Qwo-Li Driskill

Today I spun khipu for the first time with Nikhil and Chad. You probably don’t know Nikhil and Chad, and I’ll confess that I don’t either, though we have messaged each other on youtube. I’m referring to a perhaps comical, perhaps brilliant (both?) youtube video called “Making Quipu with Nikhil and Chad.”³⁰ Broadly defined, Khipu are knotted, textile recording devices used by Incan/Andean peoples. This video is one of the few available for learning about how to make these recording devices in a rather

³⁰ Quipu is the popular spelling, but in keeping with Quechua/Runasimi tradition, I use ‘khipu.’

quick and easy, accessible manner. As I am making khipu with Nikhil and Chad, I am struck by how different thinking about khipu becomes when you actually *make* one as opposed to reading about making them or even simply watching someone make one. And, while the video is (perhaps unintentionally) comical, I think that it offers a starting ground for discussing the ways in which indigenous bodies are and have been erased from the “present,” through the media(ted) representation of their epistemologies as “ancient” or “mysterious” because of how traditional language and writing studies equate presence and advancement with writing.

“Making Quipu with Nikhil and Chad” opens with a cheesy, gameshow-esk tune, reminiscent of “how to” or DIY (do it yourself) theme music of TV shows from the 70s. Nikhil starts us off by positioning quipu (which he initially pronounces, “kwee-poo”) as an “ancient” recording device practiced by Inkas in a distant past. But, he also shows how much of the making of khipu is predicated upon an epistemology of the body. In some ways, the video also highlights the ways in which making khipu can hardly be grasped in even verbal terms. As he is making the main cord (*cordele principal*), he uses his foot to hold the folded string in place as he twists it with his fingers in a “motion forward,” claiming, “you’ll know when to stop when you run your hand down the yarn...it’ll be really tight.” As I mentioned earlier, the youtube is really the only form of public discourse available for a public sphere on how to make khipu in a contemporary setting.³¹ As a form of public history, then, Nikhil and Chad stand in for

³¹ I am referring to publics as the sphere of what is called the “vernacular,” meaning the space and discourse in/from that the “everyday” people access and make knowledge. There are certainly other spaces regarding khipu and how to make

Runa peoples who made khipu, and who arguably still do. They discuss khipu as a thing of the past, and they displace Runa people now, who see themselves as descendents of the Inka who originally made khipu.

I gestured to the relationship between this erasure and history, literacy, writing, and language in Chapter One with a scene that I recalled from a sociolinguistics course I took during my second year of Ph.D. coursework. I have chosen to open this chapter with Nikhil and Chad's youtube video in order to open up a discussion that I will expand upon: increasingly public histories are mediated through digital technologies as forms of public spheres. Because the ways that digital technologies map knowledge are always understood as "modern" and disembodied, they displace other kinds of material technologies like khipu that I argue can be seen as predecessors of contemporary digital technologies. Case in point: I recently assigned the making of khipu for a course on Indigenous History and Culture of Latin America. Part of the assignment was a comparative analysis of making khipu and using a contemporary form of digital technology to encode information. On more than one occasion in a journal response regarding the assignment, a student remarked about the interesting juxtaposition of watching Nikhil and Chad on a very "advanced" form of technology and their trying to make this "antiquated" khipu. At the onset of the project, the students found it difficult to see any kind of relationship between khipu and contemporary digital technologies as interfaces because they could only understand them within the concept of efficiency.

khipu available on the internet for public use, but they are typically run by academic institutions and/or scholars, and they talk about how to make khipu in largely esoteric terms.

However, by the end of the project, most of them said that while the khipu are less efficient, they could see the relationship between khipu and digital technologies as interfaces much more clearly after having made one. Additionally, most said that the khipu helped them to better see the physicality of other digital technologies that are typically disembodied.

In Chapter One, I developed a rhetorical methodology of relationality that challenges the traditional linguistic approach to the study of language in order to displace logocentric, textual definitions and articulations of language in favor of an embodied, mobile understanding of language that sees the body as an origin or opening for the emergence and depiction of language. In Chapter Two I argued for understanding language as performatic, and in this chapter, I will extend the notion of the performatic to show how, within Native science, the performance of language yields language artefacts that function as “things” that are animated and that complicate a binary relationship between what Diana Taylor calls the archive and the repertoire and that emerge out of a relationship between the body and the environment. Because khipu are posited as a kind of binary or graphic coding device in contemporary scholarship, this allows for an intersectional analysis between digital/visual rhetorics (dig/viz rhetorics) and material and performance studies that can also make visible how digital technologies bear a relationship to the environment.

In short, this chapter will look to answer two major and overlapping questions:

1. If we are to understand khipu as a type of digital media that is embodied, that are the rhetorical implications of that connection? (What does this mean for language studies?)
2. How is the materiality of khipu connected to the body and to landbases? (How do theories of practice get us closer to answering these questions?)

The Khipu (Writing) Problem

Research regarding khipu is continually shaped and limited by the extent to which khipu devices can function as writing systems. This type of scholarship typically includes an exhaustive interrogation of the multiple and competing definitions of writing, citing at each juncture how khipu do or do not meet requirements for what constitutes writing. What's more, however, the question of whether or not khipu can be conceived of as writing systems determines whether or not *or* how we might be able to link them to language. Thus, any inquiry into khipu must take up this ongoing discussion of writing in relationship to khipu. In this section, I will briefly summarize the trajectory of that scholarship, though I will ultimately argue that khipu simply cannot and should not be conceived of as a type of writing. Nevertheless, I do believe it is necessary to understand how they might be linked to language and biodiversity, and I will show how understanding them as a form of digital technology/rhetoric can make those connections visible.

Frank Salomon's *The Cord Khipus: Khipus and Cultural Life in a Peruvian Village*, devotes an entire section to theories of writing. According to Salomon, "True writing" is phonetic writing, though there are certainly variants of this kind of "pure" writing, and khipu falls into this latter category. Ultimately, however, only true writing can be directly connected to language. Salomon, therefore concludes that khipu are related to nonverbal performances/practices linked to Andean civilization rather than language, arguing, "I believe it likely that khipus functioned at a distance from language syntax, conforming rather to the nonverbal 'syntax' of fixed social performances such as inventorying, accounting, attendance-taking, calendrical registry, quota-giving, sacrificing" (37).

Salomon is not alone in his conceptions of writing and khipu. In the only exhaustive history of khipu to date, Galen Brokaw argues that khipu may be better understood as a type of media. He argues that media is a term that, while being more inclusive of various kinds of communication devices, does not reduce any type of media to a single genre of communication:

"One might argue that the communicative function of such objects as clothing and architectural structures is merely incidental to their primary role of providing individual and collective shelter, protection, storage capacity, privacy, and so forth. They certainly do not appear to record the kind of knowledge that alphabetic writing does. In theory it would certainly be possible for these media to encode information to the same extent as a medium such as alphabetic script, but their pragmatics and

their inherent limitations constrain them from developing in this way.”

(*History of the Khipu* 11-12)

He nevertheless does understand writing to have a particularly *linear* evolutionary presence in civilizations, even while he does not believe that writing is synonymous with a complex polity. Likewise, Gary Urton finds the debate over whether or not khipu can function as writing to be potentially reductive of the potential for writing as a technology. In his book, *Signs of the Inka Khipu: Binary Coding in the Andean Knotted-String Records*, he revises Elizabeth Boone’s more “inclusive” definition of writing as she has articulated it in *Writing Without Words*, claiming that writing is “the communication of specific ideas in a highly conventionalized, standardized manner by means of permanent, visible signs” (28). But he wants to qualify this further, with the assertion that the highest specificity comes from systems in which the signs of writing denote sounds of the language in question. He further believes that he avoids ethnocentrism by claiming that need, rather than intelligence, is what determines whether or not communities developed “complex” script-based systems of communication. Ultimately, his revised version of Boone’s definition excludes iconography, because “Referring to such productions as writing, while perhaps satisfying what [he] would argue are essentially politically motivated programs or agendas promoting inclusiveness and multiculturalism [...] renders the concept of writing virtually meaningless and (more to the point) useless for analytical purposes” (27). For Urton, however, part of the problem in understanding how khipu function as communication devices stems from what he conceives of as an either/or dilemma,

namely the extent to which khipu *stored* knowledge and the extent to which they *communicated* knowledge. Urton's conception of khipu as binary coding devices leads him to be more concerned with the former, noting:

[T]he physical features resulting from the manipulation of fibers in the construction of khipu constituted binary-coded sequences; these coded sequences—each represented by a spun, plied, dyed, and carefully crafted knot—were the sites of the storage of the units of information in a (hypothetical) shared system of binary record keeping among khipu keepers and readers throughout the Inka Empire.” (37)

Urton concludes that the 8-bit sequences of binary coding, consisting of 1s and 0s though a code system called American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) is a better analogue by which we can understand how khipu code information. These sequences in ASCII are “arbitrary” to a certain extent, though it would seem that khipu constructions were not since they were “by nature” binary coding devices. In other words, they are physical, three-dimensional manifestations of binary coding. This is a concept I will return to later in my discussion of khipu as digital rhetoric.

Contemporary uses of khipu pose a “problem” to the study of khipu as well, given that they pose a threat to linear evolutionary theories of writing and civilization. This is primarily because of a small village in Tupicocha, where peoples own and make khipu that heavily resemble the khipu of “ancient” Inkan societies held in museums. For Salomon and most theorists, the reason that Khipu cannot bear a relationship to language is because language is conceived of through logocentric understandings of speech as

essentially text-based—lexico-grammatical. In other words, it is because scholars believe that writing actually captures the phonetic sounds of speech that they can only conceive of language being documented or communicated across space and time. As Derrida would argue, however, even Western alphabetic print does not signal to any real phonetic or verbal language sound in the “pristine” and finite manner that linguists might hope for us to believe.³²

Additionally, if we are to take so-called “new” theories of language emerging from bicultural diversity studies seriously, we might extend our inquiry to the extent to which khipu practices enact a relationship between language and land outside of a lexico-grammatical model. If language actually has more to do with land and bodies—if it emerges from within a reciprocal relationship between land and bodies and practices, then contemporary khipu practices, even those outside of Tupicocha, can actually tell us a lot about language and embodied/embodying knowledge, even though we may not be able to decode their literal meanings.

This becomes important because Salomon attempts to understand khipu under the concept of “semiological pluralism shaped by practice,” but he does not then take into account the connections made between land, language, and practice for Indigenous communities. He mentions that the Khipu function at the hinges of “civic” and “brotherhood,” becoming the thing that glues these two concepts together. The performance of civic practices associated with khipu lead Salomon to believe that there is strict dichotomy between the civic and the familial because formal titles are used in

³² See *Of Grammatology*

place of more familial ones during these performances, but I would argue that this is the case in performance of any civic duty. It would seem that what is more likely is that, like most other Indigenous communities, civic duties are carried out through the family—there simply is no separation because Andean governing systems *are* communal. In fact, the annual civic meetings are often called “family reunions.” In other words, it is not so much that the familial is sacrificed at the cost of the civic during these performances; it is that the civic performances are deeply ingrained in the familial, so much so that upon entering the realm of civic performance, the family unit (called an ayllu), along with the respective roles of the individuals in the ayllu, are maintained, though individuals are given civic titles.

For example, while many would argue that Andean polity is patrilineal because the “heads” of the ayllu are typically male, and because children inherit the ayllu of their fathers, this becomes complicated by the presence of some women khipu makers who are also heads of their respective ayllus. This is because the heads of ayllus are determined by who the heads of the family unit are, and while this is typically considered to be a man, single women with children or women who are of a certain age but have no children or spouses, as well as women who are widowed or orphaned can be the heads of their own ayllus. The order of ayllus becomes important in thinking about Salomon’s insistence that the khipu are manifestations of nonverbal performances linked to civic engagement, but they are also important because not only are Tupicochan khipu practices similar to Inkan practices, but so, too, are their political and civic arrangements.

I would like to point out, however, that each of these major khipu studies scholars—and the field of khipu studies at large—never actually move away from a text-based articulation or understanding of khipu, though they may all portend to in some way. This is because the “obsession” with the alphabet, even in media studies, is really an obsession with the Logos as it pertains to textuality/Truth. Even if we take up Brokaw’s assertion that media studies opens up an understanding of communication to include pottery or clothing or other types of artifacts, we nevertheless typically “read” these artifacts through some form of text-based *practice*, and what’s more, we typically interrogate their relationship to language through linguistics, which as I have noted in previous chapters, is inherently logocentric. In the same manner and form that Renaissance men believed writing to get closer to some real “truth,” contemporary scholars’ recourse to the alphabet stems from the same sort of preoccupation.

Additionally, scholars tend to see spoken language as a “primary” medium, with writing and other kinds of media being “secondary.” Interestingly, while Brokaw would argue that secondary media (to which he attributes khipu and alphabetic writing) as *emerging from* the primary media, that emergence still necessitates a semiotic dimension because “writing endures the passage of time” (11). Additionally, Urton furthers the notion that looking to the text—or the object—is sufficient to discover the practices that arose from it (in the past), rather than looking to language and contemporary practices, even to potentially understand past uses. He explicitly states that he is not concerned with recognizing the extent to which human interaction informs the practices of meaning and memory-making as they pertain to khipu, that is, he believes that placing memory

and practice within a social context does not necessitate analyzing human interaction, only, “the middle range of the work of memory and notation, that between the individual and the collectivity” (9). For Urton, the “text,” or in this case, khipu, constitute the “middle range” object.

Decolonizing Khipu Studies is also Decolonizing Rhetoric Studies

In her essay on the rhetoricity of needlework, Maureen Daly notes that the field of rhetoric has much to gain from looking to practices typically deemed outside of the purview rhetoric. Though Daley’s project concerns needlework, she nevertheless points to a problem in rhetoric studies that intersects with quipu studies, namely the extent to which rhetoric’s concern with discursive practices/texts displaces work that cannot be readily conceived of as discursive. However, Daley does what many khipu scholars have done and tries to broaden definitions of writing and discourse to include needlework rather than trying to expand or complicate definitions of rhetoric. The latter project concerns me more because the emphasis on text in rhetoric studies informs much of the ways by which Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been and continue to be colonized and positioned as “uncivilized” or “Other.”

As we have seen thus far, recourse to writing in khipu studies has continued the colonial project through use of totalizing discourses that *in practice* perpetuate cultural hegemony through attempting to somehow position khipu as writing and that limit Indigenous peoples to a reductive, romanticizing, and dehumanizing identity grounded on the extent to which their practices can be legitimated by “ancient” Inkan practices. As

such, a primary concern for a decolonial approach to the study of khipu as rhetoric is an understanding of Indigenous intellectual traditions on their own terms. One of those terms as it has been articulated in Indigenous studies is the understanding of Indigenous practices that are predicated on an epistemology of the body, as we have seen in my use of Diana Taylor's concept of the archive and the repertoire.³³ Since the move in khipu studies has been to articulate khipu as some type of media or data graphic or coding device, I believe that positioning khipu as a kind of digital rhetoric or technology can be especially fruitful. However, in order to make this move, it is necessary to perform what Angela Haas has called a "rhetoric of interventions and interruptions" in this history of both khipu studies and the field of digital and visual rhetorics (*Rhetoric of Alliance*).

What I offer through Angela Haas' decolonial approach to the study of digital and visual rhetoric is an alternative imagining of khipu that disrupts the ways in which mainstream scholarship "reads" them through the lens of a Western production of knowledge. My imagining of khipu as rhetoric offers an approach to positioning khipu technologies as material/digital/visual rhetorics that can be understood only in their specific cultural contexts. Additionally, my understanding of khipu as *digital* rhetoric, using Haas' work, can allow for khipu to be understood as a non-textual technology, given that Haas shows how etymologically, digital refers to the *digitales*—the fingers

³³ See also Qwo-Li Driskill's "Stolen From our Bodies: First Nations Two Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," and *Yelesalehe Hiwayona Dikanohogida Naiwodusv/God Taught Me This Song: It is Beautiful: Cherokee Performance Rhetorics as Decolonization, Healing, and Continuance*, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings from Women of Color*, and Jaqueline Shea Murphy's *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*

and toes. Though discourses on digital technology typically disembody these technologies, she shows how digital technologies have always come out of and held a relationship with the body. Additionally, digital media productions challenge dominant theories of literacy because they demonstrate how people make meaning through layered, non-linear textual formations.

Because of the ways in which khipu is discussed in terms of technology, this will also allow for a critique of disciplinary boundaries that inform how we conceive of science, technology, language, and communication. In positioning khipu in this way, I hope to expose the ways in which the materiality of khipu as it is understood from an indigenous perspective of Native science can complicate Western notions of materiality. Ultimately, I will show khipu as a material/digital/visual technology can complicate theories of writing, literacy, time, space, language and how we understand the concept of land bases.³⁴

Borrowing from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonial methodology, as well as Emma Perez' work in *Decolonial Imaginary*, Malea Powell's work with material rhetorics and other scholars in cultural rhetorics, Haas offers an approach to the study of digital rhetoric that interrogates the ways in which the field is complicit in a larger disciplinary project that is always-already imperial and colonial. She points out that the recent uprising in the study of digital and computer technology has created a false understanding of "technology" as something born out of a linear development that

³⁴ Here I am referring to a complicated, recurring argument in Indigenous studies and transnationalism that juxtaposes migration and transnationalism against what is often called "sacred landscape" or "land base" in thinking about identity and culture.

marginalizes culture and erases Indigenous peoples. She further shows how in its complicity with ongoing colonialism and imperialism, claiming that American Indians have *always* been constructed *vis a vis* technology (2).

In order to illustrate how the master narrative of the discipline of digital rhetorics is an extension of “early” colonial practices, Haas shows how the linear narrative of the development of technology that privileges the computer as a contemporary marker for progress and the creation of the World Wide Web (which she says is much like the Wild Wild West) simultaneously denounces cultures without alphabetic/print literacy and reaffirms and privileges its own (85). This notion, coupled with the discursive representation of the Internet as the “information super highway,” expresses a familiar narrative of Manifest Destiny as a travel narrative of expansion and colonization—the desire to “know” is always linked with travel. Haas also points to *browsers* with names like “explorer,” “netscape,” and “safari” as signs that the “digital age” recapitulates colonial mentalities, and reminds us that Indigenous peoples are always-already in some kind of relationship to the narrative of these technology travel stories.

So a decolonial dig/viz approach to the study of digital rhetorics must *both* offer a critical discourse analysis of how self-professed “experts” talk about Indigenous peoples in relationship to technology, and “interrupt” the linear trajectory of how technology gets defined in relationship to Indigenous peoples practices. As Haas points out:

little research has been done on the technological expertise of American Indian communities outside of the fields of fine arts, ethnobotany, ethnohistory,

archaeology, and anthropology—and these disciplines are less concerned with rhetoric than they are with interpreting cultural, historical, and artistic artifacts, despite their obvious reliance on rhetoric for such interpretations. If we fail in this interrogation, we risk being complicit in the colonization of knowledges, which diminishes the capacity for a coexistence of languages, literacies, memories, and spaces.

In order to advance this Hassian approach, I want to mark and hold on to the connections she is making between “languages, literacies, memories, and spaces.” These are some of the most fundamental—and *interconnected*—concepts of culture that the academy and institutions of power more generally colonize. And Khipu scholarship positions itself at the center of the matrix of language, literacy, memory, and space not only for Latin American Studies, but ultimately for the larger hegemonic goal of universalizing these concepts for “the betterment of all of us.” In his book, Salomon claims that “the technique for keeping records on knotted cords, called khipus, is on aspect of America that Europe never really discovered,” and he then goes on to state the importance of khipu scholarship in (apparently) continuing that project, citing “The Khipu Frontier” as the site of potentially monumental discovery that can help shape what will ultimately be conceived of a Western production of *universal* knowledge (XVII).

Interestingly, when khipu scholars posit khipu as some form of technology, they do so because they believe them to be *either* part of a notational/semasiographical system *or* part of a glottographic system, which visibly represents speech. Systems that cannot be linked to speech utterances are not typically deemed “scientific.” In other

words, it is through the binary assumption verbal and nonverbal as non-scientific and scientific, respectively that khipu studies are articulated. In fact, Salomon believes, “the khipu art presents a genuine ambiguity between *semasiography of production* and *lexigraphy of recitation* –and that this ambiguity was a great hazard to Spanish attempts at understanding Andean code” (italics in original 30). While Salomon ultimately argues that we can conceive of khipu as a “data graphic,” as previously noted, he believes this data graphic to function more so at a distance from language. Urton, however, argues that khipu could potentially represent speech as a logographic or logosyllabic system of writing as a binary code composed of “7-bits” of information having to do with color spectra, material used, knot formation, and others. From this perspective, a decolonial turn might emerge, given that “the sign which a cord contains is not ‘on’ the cord, but rather is the aggregate of the binary decisions made in constructing all its features” (15). The decisions made in constructing those information bits are informed not only by (bodily) gesture, but also by land-based materials, hence the conditions upon which khipu might be made manifest—the rhetoricity of khipu—are always-already linked to biocultural diversity.

Furthermore, digital encoding (with the digitalis) dictates the visual formation that signals to things like font or layout in web design, and the same kind of thing happens in the constructing of khipu. In discussing hypertext, Haas claims it is, “an interactive system of storing and retrieving images, texts, and other computer files that allows users to directly link to relevant images, texts, sounds, and other data types in a non-linear environment,” and that the information encoded in Indigenous hypertext

media like wampum belts or khipu can only be retrieved from within certain communities and spaces and with certain, *emic* knowledges about the community and spaces in which they have been constructed (95).

Khipu as Interface

Despite the ways on which a discourse of authenticity has limited the ways in which scholars have thus far conceived of contemporary Indigenous peoples in the Andes khipu practices, recent ethnographies nonetheless suggest that contemporary khipu practices still enact a relationship to space and language. That relationship is made most readily accessible through the understanding of khipu as digital/visual/material rhetoric. In fact, Rocío Quispe-Agnoli has argued that Spanish writing colonized Inkan iconography, noting that recognizing the iconographic nature of khipu can help to bridge a connection between khipu and tocapu.³⁵ In the next few paragraphs I will show how focusing on the visual elements of khipu can help us to better understand khipu as a kind of interface upon which biocultural diversity manifests and is made manifest.

In considering khipu's relationship to language, Salomon argues that khipu is not in any "one" language, and he additionally contends that "Hispano-Quechuan" terms associated with khipu signal a "forgetting" of original Quechuan language relationships to khipu.³⁶ Two immediate language moments in which "Hispano-Quechuisms" become imperative to my discussion here are the terms "equipo" and "quipocamayoc."

³⁵ Tocado are rectangular-woven cloths, typically worn by Inkan elite. Brokaw and Urton also argue for a need to understand khipu in relation to tocapu, placing them within a continuum of textile traditions.

³⁶ For example, khipu are called "chinu" in Aymara.

Tupicochans refer to khipus as “equipos,” which is the Spanish term for an athletic team, most commonly soccer. But, they also refer to khipu using the term *quipocamayoc*, which originally was a term used to describe a khipu maker.³⁷ In the former example, what is interesting to note is that *Ayllu*’s (the kinship-based governing unit) sponsor and participate in soccer teams, but they also participate in “friendly rivalry” amongst themselves in the building of local infrastructure (5).

Salomon calls the Tupicochan use of these terms part of “folk-etymology” in that they have taken the Inkan term “*khipucamayuc*” and the Spanish term “*equipo*” and combined them to refer to the khipu maker in a kind of “slang” fashion. However, he also notes that both the khipu and the khipu maker are referred to using these terms. Additionally, Tupicochans—unlike other Indigenous groups who make khipu—*wear* the khipu as a garment or sash during *ayllu* meetings.³⁸ The link between the body and the material object in this sense is reminiscent of the complicated tension between the archive and the repertoire, as I have noted in Chapter Two. Rather than assume that these “Hispano-Quechuisms” signal to a forgetting of Inkan tradition, I want suggest that this practice is demonstrative of a continued relationship between the archive and the repertoire in a contemporary moment that helps us to better understand how khipu function as an interface for understanding BCD. We have already been able to see how writing bears a relationship to language and vice versa, and how this relationship evokes what Gerald Vizenor would call the manifest manners of discourses that aim to limit

³⁷ Alternatively spelled “*khipucamayuc*,” or “*khipu camayoc*.”

³⁸ It is also interesting to note that while Tupicochans have adapted a “Hispano-Quechuan” relationship to khipu, they have maintained what Salomon calls an “ancient” term (*ayllu*) in their civic relationships.

Native subjectivity to an authentic past, but that relationship also has everything to do with time and space/land.

Here, I want to shift discussion to a story that Gregorio Condori Mamami tells about when Spaniards first introduced writing as linked to words/paper/books:

The Inkas didn't know anything about paper or writing, and when the good lord wanted to give them paper, they refused it. That's because they didn't get their news by paper, but by small, thick threads made of vicuña wool...these cords were like books, but the Spaniards didn't want them around; so they gave the inka a piece of paper.

'this paper talks,' they said.

'where is it talking? That's silly; you're trying to trick me.'

And he flung the paper to the ground. The Inka didn't know anything about writing. And how could the paper talk if he didn't know how to read? And so they had our Inka killed. (qtd. in Salomon **16**)

Although Salomon believes this story reveals a possible confirmation that Andeans did not conceive of khipu (or perhaps even of writing) as a referent to speech or "sounds" of talk, I believe that it is more so a rhetorical remark that calls into question the notion of Western writing as a universal system of communication *while also* positing a theory of writing and its connection to legibility. When Mamami argues, "how could the paper talk if he didn't know how to read," he is not saying that he cannot conceive of verbal encoding, but that he does not possess the knowledge base from which to decode the language encoded in "talking paper." His earlier affirmation that

vicuna strings (khipu) offer for the slate (like paper) with which to communicate suggests that khipu could signal to a verbal language in some way, but it also suggests khipu can function as an interface.

It is also poignant to note that the Inka's response in this story comes after the Spaniards tried to offer the Inka a paper—informing him that it could “talk.” His refusal to accept the paper, and his dismissal of it (calling it “silly”) could also serve as a subtle, rhetorical validation of khipu as a communication device. In part, Salomon's suggestion that Mamami could be signaling to the semasiographic rendering of khipu is predicated upon his privileging of a Western production of knowledge always and inevitably bears recourse to text and writing in conceiving of language. Nevertheless, while I disagree with Salomon's suggestion, I do not either wish to take up the binary argument about how khipu may or may not exhibit speech. Instead, I want to make note of the various kinds of knowledge that both Tupicochans and people like Guaman Poma, and Garcilaso de la Vega have cited as being encoded into khipu and take them seriously to the extent that we might be able to uncover a rhetorical positioning of khipu that exposes its relationship to BCD. All of these people have said that khipu can house not only numerical data, but also stories and histories.³⁹

In fusing Vine Deloria's critique of Western time in *God is Red*, which shows how “space generates time, but time has little relationship to space,” with Michel De Certeau's concept of space as practiced place, we can see how khipu *practices* (which are at times also ceremonial performances) generate space (71). Taking Deloria's claim

³⁹ See *Good Government*

that space can produce time, and privileging contemporary practice as a marker of that concept, we can see that when Tupicochans (re)produce khipu as a continued *practice* for whatever specific context, they recall the many histories constructed—encoded—in them. Salomon argues that when asked, Tupicochans do not claim that they can read or understand the khipu, claiming instead that, “they contain laws[...]they are like an almanac, the days, the harvests are in there, everything, whether it will be a good year or not. They’re writings, every knot is a letter, they have an alphabet, a credential, an insignia, a law” (35). However, if we understand khipu as a digital rhetoric, it is easy to understand how they *can* hold all of those different and perhaps divergent types of knowledge and information.

Khipu as Digital Rhetoric

It is necessary for me to highlight at the onset of this section the complicity that digital rhetoric as a field of study has with writing studies. Part of why it is difficult for khipu scholars to posit khipu as a digital technology interface rather than a mnemonic device is because of the very distinction made between writing and mnemonic devices, but also because the coding used to create (on) digital technologies is understood as a form of writing. According to Brokaw and Urton, if khipu functioned purely as memory devices, they could not be seen as a form of writing, and thus could not be seen as a type of digital technology. Testing this theory is part of the reason that the National Science Foundation has sponsored the online khipu database project: if scholars can decipher the “codes” in ancient khipu, it is more likely that they can be understood as a form of

writing. Again, we see writing as a necessary step in an evolution-based story about progress and technology. Digital rhetoric as a field is complicit in this narrative, naturally, because, as Angela Haas points out, dig/viz inquiry is concerned with how students use digital technologies.

At the same time, however, dig/viz inquiry has also positioned itself to complicate its relationship to that narrative with the rise of new media studies. New media studies comes out of the recognition that literacy is not limited by the ability to read and write in standard in English. Nevertheless, the “new” rhetoric deployed in this trajectory of scholarship displaces the practices of Indigeneity, which are still understood as “primitive.” However, as Haas shows, if digital rhetorics are about how students map knowledge with the *digitalis* and/or in nonlinear, nontextual, visual ways, then Indigenous technologies that precede the creation of digital technologies like computers or HTML coding can still be considered as part of dig/viz inquiry.

Looking to khipu as part of a decolonial dig/viz inquiry nevertheless requires a tentative and critical lens. While khipu can certainly complicate our understanding of contemporary digital technologies as well as the history of digital technologies, I do not want to bring them into the discussion to dig/viz rhetorics in order to enable the colonial agenda of “deciphering” them or of using them to build the breadth of a Western production of knowledge. Instead, I want to look at them as language artefacts that *challenge* the breadth of a Western production of knowledge. As language artefacts, they simultaneously challenge the disciplinary boundaries placed on knowledge in the academy, materialize BCD, and they assert the presence of Indigenous bodies and

knowledge in the formation of what we might call Western knowledge. In his work among the Huarochiri, Salomon has noted the interesting connection between the visual aspects of the khipu and nearby landmarks, claiming that the khipu resemble the water canals of Huarochiri. Water plays a sacred role in the areas where the Huarochiri live, and is the fundamental actor in many stories and traditions for the Runa peoples who live there.

Khipu as Digital, Rhetorical Language Artifacts

Khipu as a made (digital and rhetorical) thing, then, enacts a rhetoric of BCD given that, as mentioned earlier, the relationship between khipu and language is always-already linked to the body and the land base from which it is derived. In fact, Rapacinos, who regard themselves as descendents of the Inka, have allowed anthropologists to study the “ancient” khipu they have in their possession, but only in exchange for help to conserve not only the khipu but the entire area in which the khipu are housed, called the Kaha Wayi. It is important to note that the Kaha Wayi rituals are rituals for discerning weather and climate change. The Kaha Wayi is seen as a sacred space for the invoking of land based activity linked to harvesting practices. Additionally, for Rapacinos, the khipu are not necessarily used, but are “invoked” for ritual performances, and they look much different from Huarochiri khipu. They often have fewer knots and have objects such as dolls weaved into the *cordeles colgantes* (the hanging cords).

The ways in which khipu help to construct BCD, however, challenge traditional philosophy and traditional approaches to understanding rhetoric. Native science

challenges us to see khipu as animated, but not in a solitary manner. Though the Rapacinos use khipu as an invocation, they see the khipu connected to the Kaha Wayi, and what's more the Kaha Wayi is needed in order for the entire invocation to occur. As part of a ritual practice, the khipu help to make the space of the Kaha Wayi a sacred one, but the space also helps to make the khipu as well. The khipu fibers contain elements of land-based materials, including but not limited to the hair of animals who inhabit the space. Tim Ingold's work on basket making as objects that trouble the dichotomy between substance and form and between made things and "grown" things apply to khipu as well. According to Ingold, the basket maker may very well come to the process of making a basket with an idea of what it might look like, but the basket "comes into being through the gradual unfolding of the field of forces set up through the active and sensuous engagement of practitioner and material" (84). And, for Ingold, this means that the spiral designs of a basket, which can be found on a snail's shell or even in the manner in which water goes down a drain form out of a "relational field" comprised of diverse movements. Even the snail shell's design is only partly informed by genetics.

What this means for baskets and other made things is that while we typically understand weaving as a kind of making, we can and should also understand making as a way of weaving. Made things are *also* grown things. Khipu as an interface that "spins" lands and bodies into itself, even while it also influences land and bodies in its "making." If the relational forces comprised in making a khipu include language, then we can better understand, then, why the Huarochiri now use the terms for khipu and khipumaker interchangeably: in Tupicocha, the relationship Tupicochans have with their

land and with the khipu is predicated on the allyu—the central governing unit that understands communal identity as something that includes the land and all of its inhabitants. Part of the linguistic diversity that is enhancing biodiversity stems from these “relational forces.”

CHAPTER IV

TATTOOING, CODICES, AND EMBODIED SIGN CARRIERS

"To dismiss image events as rude and crude is to cling to 'presuppositions of civility and rationality underlying the old rhetoric,' a rhetoric that supports those in positions of authority and thus allows civility and decorum to serve as masks for the protection of privilege and the silencing of protest"

--Kevin Michael DeLuca

This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book, and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only my life, it's also the testimony of my people [...] what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.

--Rigoberta Menchu

I have a tattoo imprinted on my back (See Figure 1). It is from plate 53 of the *Codex Borgia*, which is one of the few pre-colonial codices of Mexico that have survived conquest and colonialism⁴⁰. It is imprinted specifically on my back to pay homage to the critical book, *This Bridge Called my Back*. I didn't know very much

⁴⁰ When the Spanish first conquered Mexico and other parts of Latin America, they had ordered that all codices be destroyed, deeming them heathenish and full of evil. (*Darker, Archive and the Repertoire*)

Figure 1: *Arbol De La Vida*



about the image when I initially saw it except that it resonated with me. As soon as I saw it, I knew I wanted it tattooed on my body. I had begun to do some research about it and found that scholars don't say very much about it, though they can recognize the deities pictured. At the very bottom of the image lies Mictlantehcutli, the god of the underworld.⁴¹ Out of him comes blood and corn, flowing into a corn-like plant or tree that forms an axis mundi. But, the blood flows simultaneously into Mictlantehcutli and into Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, who are floating to the left and right of

⁴¹ Mictlantehcutli is also called Tlaltechcutli. It is also important to note that the deities represented in Mexica, or any other Indigenous culture of Cemanahuac (Latin America), are not gods in the Western sense. They represent energies that humans and other living creatures can possess.

Mictlantehcutli, respectively.⁴² At the very top of the image rests what looks like a Mexica rendition of a quail.

When I first showed the image to my tattoo artist, Luar, he recognized it as the *Arbol de La Vida* (Tree of Life). Luar is Yucatec Mayan, and the Tree of Life he is referring to is a popular Mayan image.⁴³ Though the origins of the *Codex Borgia* are not known for certain, most scholars argue that it is probably Mixtec, though some scholars maintain that it is Mexica, and most scholars use Nahuatl deities and the Nahuatl language when discussing the names and affiliations of images located within it. We do not know for certain what land base the *Codex Borgia* is connected to, but we believe it is most likely Puebla. Luar told me that the story linked to this image on my back is connected to Mexica stories, but is also related to Mayan origin stories that he heard growing up. What is interesting here is not only that Luar recognizes the image—a “prehispanic” image—but also that he recognizes it as having a connection to Mayan origin stories, not necessarily Mexica or Mixtec ones. This signals a kind of relationship between Mayan and Mexica (and perhaps Mixtec) culture that scholars are still not able to fully theorize or even recognize outside of linear (hi)stories. Part of the problem in theorizing relationships among Indigenous peoples of Anahuac and other nearby areas stems from how scholarship depends primarily on codices to tell or illuminate those (hi)stories and

⁴² Quetzalcoatl, or the Feathered Serpent, is the god of wind, of knowledge (arts and crafts), and his arch enemy is Tezcatlipocam or Smoking Mirror. Tezcatlipoca is a Night Lord, and is the god of the night wind, of sorcery, of the jaguar, and a host of other things.

⁴³ The concept of a Tree of Life is common in many cultures, but I want to be clear that when Luar recognizes the image as such, he is doing so because he recognizes the gods and their positioning within the tree-like image from the perspective of his own subjectivity as a Mayan.

relationships. Further, argue that a large part of why we do that is because we believe that codices potentially have “writing,” and/but their potential to hold writing is understood in terms of their status as “books” (Boone and Mignolo). Certainly, scholars in the fields of anthropology and archaeology take up the study of material remains in their understanding of the histories of Anahuac; however, in the field of rhetoric and writing, understanding an epistemology for Indigenous communities of Anahuac is limited to and by this concept of writing and its connection to history and language. But, even anthropologists like Elizabeth Hill Boone can only “sympathize” with the need to include codices in a discussion of history, and can only *tentatively* do so by attempting to reframe definitions of writing proper. Additionally, the primacy that codices are given in scholarship stems from a belief that the codices are where “all” of the images of a given culture have been allocated, and they are the places from which these images can be understood within a proper context (Lockhart, Boone, Lopez Austin).

In the previous chapters, I have used emergent theories in biocultural diversity studies (BCD) to (re)articulate an Indigenous relationship between language, the body, and land via what I call language artefacts (or objects) like dance and khipu. In this chapter, I use this Indigenous concept of BCD to complicate the assumption that codices are “books” through an interrogation of Mexica and Mixtec images as embodied rhetorics. I show how images or visuality become a primary means/philosophy by which Indigenous communities of Anahuac transmit knowledge, but I also show how the relationship between image and knowledge has more to do with a particular relationship to embodiment and practice than it does with writing “proper” for precolonial Mexica

and Mixtec peoples.⁴⁴ In order to do this, I displace the primacy of codices in the discussion of image making, history and epistemology in Anahuac, and instead I open up a discussion of images and imagery more generally. Additionally, I argue that the desire to have all images of a given culture allocated into one “text” or “manuscript” not only projects a Western ideal onto Indigenous ways of knowing, but also misses the performatic, embodied, and fluid aspects of images as they were/are used by Indigenous peoples of Mexico and Chican@s. In other words, how the codices may have functioned in precolonial Mexico as one kind of episteme cannot be projected onto the entire understanding of how images—and the specific images located in codices—function.

Writing and Images in Anahuac

When Europeans arrived in Anahuac and began considering whether or not the Indigenous peoples they discovered there were “civilized,” one of their main concerns was whether or not the Indigenous groups they encountered had a form of writing that could archive history. Many Indigenous “informants” argued that the codices were the technologies they used to keep history in the same manner that the Spaniards used books. However, these “books” housed only images, and while some of the images in the codices have come close to what we might consider “writing,” many of them, primarily Mexica amoxtli, do not. The Mayan glyphs found in the vuh and the Mixtec symbols found in the tacu are more easily accepted as being linked to phonetic language

⁴⁴ I do not mean to insinuate that this will be a purist attempt at reclaiming a history

as valid kind of “writing proper.”⁴⁵ However, Mexica scholars like Boone have had to argue for a broader definition of writing that can include nonverbal language in order to be able to discuss Nahua codices as writing (*Red and Black* 30).

An additional problem stems from the very necessary separation between writing and “art” in most writing theories. For most Indigenous cultures, art would be synonymous with what we might call writing in the sense that Mexica art is also a form of knowledge and a way of keeping history. However, it is my contention that an Indigenous model of BCD challenges writing studies insofar as it posits the possibility of a sign system linked to verbal language that is *not* arbitrary, but that is also perhaps not contingent upon phonetics. Instead of broadening the definition for writing, I instead want to talk about how images from Nahua and Mixtec codices might be linked to verbal languages outside of a concept of writing. While I proffered in chapter three that khipu are *not* writing, I do not necessarily want to take such a stance here in talking about codices. However, I do want to extend the argument that codices are *not* books, which in some ways forces me to make that claim, given that the definitions for book and writing are so tightly interwoven in discussions about Nahua and, more generally, Anahuac writing systems. Nevertheless, I make this claim in order to set a foundation for the mobility of images within Mexica and Mixtec cultures. As part of a decolonial methodology, however, I will make a necessary intervention in the way that scholarship

⁴⁵ The *vuh* and the *tacu* are also words for “painting” and for “paper” or “skin” in Maya and Mixtec respectively. These objects take the same shape as Nahua *amoxtli*, and are likewise translated as “book” or “manuscript.”

discusses imagery in Anahuac before moving on to discuss images as language artefacts that are part of BCD.

Amoxtli as Practice: Image Rhetorics of Anahuac

I want to start with a Nahuatl word: amoxtli.⁴⁶ Amoxtli, which is the Nahuatl word used to describe what is usually translated as “book” (or codex), literally means “painting” in some contexts, and is also the plural form of the word paper (Boone). However, I look beyond amoxtli as merely one word in a Nahuatl lexicon and instead look to amoxtli as a practice. Interestingly, the word amoxtli was not only used to describe an entire codex, but also an individual image within the collection of papers also called “amoxtli.” A similar thing can be said for other Indigenous languages of Anahuac. For example, in Mixtec, there are two words used to describe a codex: tacu, which literally means “painting,” and ñee ñuhu, which can be transliterated as “sacred skin.” Scholars tend to want to explain these uses of the words by assuming that the former, tacu, relates to pictography more generally while the latter refers to the codex as a whole (Jansen and Jimenez, Leon-Portilla). However, I think that the connection between the seemingly disconnected translations for amoxtli and the multiple words used for “codex” in Mixtec signal to a different kind of relationship between language

⁴⁶ Nahuatl is a language spoken by many Indigenous groups of Mexico and Latin America more generally. It has a variety of forms and regional differences, but often times Indigenous groups, such as the Maya, take up Nahua imagery or figures (and by extension, the Nahuatl language) in their own cultural practices. As I have shown in earlier chapters, the “use” of the language varies over time and among communities, but it is always situated in some way to a larger shared land base than can be accounted for in Western cartography.

and materiality than Western linguistics affords. As such, I will talk about the ways in which the images found in various codices of Anahuac are manifestations of embodied language practices that are now being carried over into a contemporary tattooing practice by many Indigenous peoples living in Mexico, as well as by many Chican@s.

Tattooing is certainly not the only way by which Nahua or Mixtec images can be discussed in terms of embodiment, but I want to focus on tattooing for this chapter because of the large number of Mexicans and Chican@s who are tattooing our bodies with Indigenous images found in codices and archaeological remains from Anahuac as something that we see as a traditional practice that we can use as a form of anticolonial resistance.

Before I begin a discussion of images and community for Indigenous folks, I want to briefly recall Dylan Miner's work on what he calls contemporary "Native anticolonial visibility." While Miner's work is situated primarily in anticolonial thought, I want to use this idea of Indigenous visibility to talk about the contemporary uses of images among Chican@s and Mexican Indigenous folks. Indigenous visibility, according to Miner, is "a discursively and ideologically mediated process, which although *tied to modes of vision*, is distinguished from the more pseudoscientific notion of *vision*" (177, emphasis in original). Indigenous visibility, he argues, accounts for multiple ways of seeing, and as I will show, Indigenous image practices shape and are shaped by public and private discourses. However, I also want to talk about the images as having a particular kind of agency in and of themselves as well. From a rhetorical perspective, human intent is not needed for an object or discourse to have rhetorical effect. The

images I will refer to have their own rhetoricity, and I will discuss them in relationship to the kinds of rhetorical intent that Chican@s like myself afford when we use these images to mark our bodies.

When scholars take up codices they do so in a way that prescribes a kind of linearity onto them, presuming that the codices house “all” of the images of a given community, and even presenting them in a format that resembles a book rather than the form in which they were originally constructed. I believe they do this because of a Western proclivity for logocentrism. As I have argued in previous chapters, logocentrism manifests not only in the practices that privilege text above other types of literacies, but also in the practices that prescribe a textual analysis onto objects that may not be readily conceived of as texts. If we think of the codices as books, then it would make sense for scholars to believe that the codices bring together an amalgamation of image-texts, and furthermore that it is *through* the codices that we can better understand how the images function epistemologically. However, if *amoxtli* and *tacu* can refer to both the entire collection of images *and* any individual image, then I believe that the relationships that the images have with each other and with language are more likely to be predicated upon an Indigenous concept of relationality and community, and not so much one predicated upon what scholars call a “literary tradition of codices” (Jansen and Jimenez). A further complication in the study of Indigenous epistemologies of Anahuac is that scholars confine the whole of a “pictographic tradition” in Anahuac to the codices, claiming, as James Lockhart does, that the tradition of using images to make meaning culminated at the end of the 17th century, by which time most of the codices had been destroyed, and

Nahuas and other groups had developed writing systems based on Spanish orthography (30). Even when scholars attempt to challenge the idea that visuality is no longer used as part of an epistemic tradition, they do so in a way that still tries to legitimate that practice by linking it to some kind of contemporary object that resembles a codex. In fact, in an article published in the first edited book collection on (Indigenous) *Rhetorics of the Americas*, Tracy Brandenburg argues that “the image is alive and well in Mexico,” but does so through a dialectical approach to the study of how those images functioned in a “war” between Spanish text and colonial Zapotec images. In doing so, she argues that a recent painting made by Zapotec artist, Nicéforo Urbietta can be read as a “pre-hispanic codex” functioning in a contemporary moment not only because of how it layers meaning with metaphor, concealment, and duality, but also because it was commissioned specifically for the Pope, and Urbietta was highly monitored and censored during the creation process (“Invisible World” 155).

For Brandenburg, then, the evidence that image practices are alive and well in Mexico is found in an object that we can somehow relate to a pre-hispanic codex. What’s more, even though she argues that these practices are linked to a practice that is “pre-hispanic,” her analysis of Zapotec codex practices are all informed by how they functioned in a “war” against Spanish text and Catholic missionary agendas. In fact, a primary defining feature of Urbietta’s painting as a contemporary codex is that it “layers” meaning as a necessary form of resistance to contemporary church censorship. To be sure, Brandenburg certainly frames her argument within a pre-colonial context to some degree: “meaning is clearly layered in Urbietta’s painting, which brings us back to the

divinatory books that spoke of the ‘invisible world’ and did so through highly cryptic vocabulary where meaning was often masked and required a diviner to interpret it” (161). However, while the “invisible world” that Brandenburg speaks of is a pre-colonial concept, I would not be so quick to rearticulate a colonial practice based on resistance to the practices linked to the “invisible world” in pre-colonial times. Additionally, I would like to broaden a discussion of contemporary image practices in Mexico to more than only those practices that can somehow be linked to codices, but that are nonetheless linked to a *continued* practice of image making for Chican@s and other Mexican Indigenous folks that is at once old and new.

Image (Embodied) Rhetorics , Relationality, and BCD

The Indigenous model of BCD that I have been articulating asks us to recognize the material aspects of language outside of an arbitrary sign system. That materiality, I have argued emerges out of Native science—relationality. The “link” between language, culture, and biodiversity is formed out of diverse relationships among and between peoples, land bases, and even *ideas*. A common misconception regarding Indigenous culture and communal identity is that communal identity is the opposite extreme of individual identity—the individual is sacrificed for the sake of the community. But, communal identity, instead, is based on the notion that the individual only understands him/herself as an individual *because* s/he understands who s/he is as part of a larger community of not only people but also of plants and animals and even natural elements. Likewise, the images in many codices often can only be understood in relation to other

images, contexts, and performances, but the relationship is fluid and shifting. All of the images in a given codex are somehow connected, but so are the figures in a given image. Quetzalcoatl is often depicted alongside Tezcatlipoca because of origin stories in which they worked together to create humans. But, that story has many diverse actors, and the story can be told from the perspective of any of those given actors at any given moment, and then the image or the story will shift to privilege the perspective of that actor. Sometimes the story will privilege the land because the land is an actor in Indigenous (hi)stories. Additionally, the stories change over time, *even while they stay the same*.

The images located in the *Codex Borgia*, for example, bring together various actors or figures that can be found depicted outside of the *Borgia*. Some of the very same images in the *Borgia* are depicted on archaeological sites such as the templo mayor in Tenochtitlan (now called Mexico City), clothing, sculptures, vases, etc. The primary colors in the *Borgia* are black, yellow, red, and white, (and to a lesser degree, blue). The black, yellow, red, and white colors are used to signal geographical space, but those spaces—along with the colors—also signal to deities/energies that they represent. For example, the color black typically represents a cardinal direction and a deity figure (or “energy”), as well as some kind of plant or animal in most Indigenous traditions of the Americas. Therefore, the colors and figures that are used in the creation of codices are sometimes used to depict a cardinal direction, but the colors are also used more generally to signify all of creation. The images are depicted visually/materially through sculptures and wall carvings, and additionally through dance and oral story. These are practices that Anzaldua signals as she recognizes the embodied aspects of in tilli in tlapalli—of

writing knowledge as *also* connected to “an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several letmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing, in a crazy *dance*” (88 emphasis mine).

Elizabeth Hill Boone has also argued similarly that codices must be understood within the context of performance:

Aztec historians didn't just consult [codices] quietly in libraries or offices, nor did they read the histories to themselves, as we might do with a historical text or reference work. Instead, the pictorial histories are closer to being scripts, and their relation to their readers is closer to being that of a play's script to its actors. The Aztec pictorial histories were read aloud to an audience, they were interpreted, and their images were expanded and embellished in the oration of the full story. The pictorial histories were painted specifically to be the rough text of a performance. (*Without Words* 71)

The idea that the images in codices evoke performances does not limit the kinds of performances linked to the images included in particular codices. For example, the various origin stories that go along with the image of Tezcatlipoca, who is often referred to as Quetzalcoatl's “arch enemy,” say that he lost his foot as he was helping Quetzalcoatl create humans. Tezcatlipoca is a Mexica deity who is nonetheless featured in the *Borgia* in the same common depiction of him with a missing foot. Thus, the performance of the origin story travels with Tezcatlipoca from Mexica to Mixtec codices, but also into spaces and diverse land bases. Additionally, it travels with him

onto the walls of archaeological sites where he is also depicted, and/or it is made into sculptures. And, there are dances that correspond with the images depicted in the codices and on walls as well. For example, in *Danza Mexicayotl* (*Danza Azteca/ Aztec Dance*), there is a dance called *Quetzalcoatl*, which is typically performed as an “entrance” into the dance circle, and dancers “crawl” into the space by dancing in twists and turns, as a snake does. We do this to honor *Quetzalcoatl*, but also because the energy he represents is wind, and he is associated with knowledge/arts. When *danzantes* (dancers) perform *danza*, it is also creating and remembering knowledge that is linked to the kinds of images portrayed not only in codices, but also on our *trajes* (regalia) and on our instruments *as well as* in our bodily depictions of him, and in the dance steps associated with stories relating to him. These diverse images are linked to language in this way that is performative and verbal, even though it may not be through a concept of phonetics.⁴⁷

However, the rhetorical value of images as visibility for Indigenous communities of Anahuac must include the land as well as the body, and it must do so in a way that drastically challenges traditional approaches to the study of rhetoric and writing. A central concern of this dissertation has been a critique of the ways in which the field of rhetoric and composition is often limited to and by textual analysis. While much scholarship has challenged this notion, it often does so in a way that still turns seemingly non-textual forms into textual ones in order that they may be analyzed to determine their

⁴⁷ I want to make clear that the concept of dancing with your breath discussed in Chapter Two is not one that I have personally experienced or heard talked about among *danzantes*, which is why I am not extending that complication of embodiment into this particular discussion of *Quetzalcoatl*. It is, however, something I plan to further investigate as a potential heuristic for complicating how we conceive of dance as having/transmitting meaning.

rhetorical potential. Scholars like Qwo-Li Driskill, Angela Haas, Kendall Leon, Stacy Pigg, Casie C. Cobos, and Donnie Johnson Sackey have made some of the more recent interventions into the field with their focus on embodied and material rhetorics through frameworks of performance and actor network theory; however, conceptualizing images as having a relationship to embodiment from an Indigenous perspective challenges us to conceive of images as language artefacts or “things” that hold a particular kind of agency in the shaping of private and public discourses.

In particular, I want to talk about how Nahua and Mixtec image practices at once radically challenge racist discourses about Indigenous peoples of Mexico and mainstream environmentalism. In his book, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Racism*, Kevin Michael DeLuca argues:

When taken seriously as rhetorical activity, image events challenge a number of tenets of traditional rhetorical theory and criticism, starting with the notion that rhetoric ideally is ‘reasoned discourse,’ with ‘reasoned’ connoting ‘civil’ or ‘rational’ and ‘discourse’ connoting ‘words.’ 14

While DeLuca is referring primarily to radical environmental activist groups, he makes a crucial point in highlighting the rhetorical tradition’s relationship to hegemony and “text.” Ultimately for DeLuca, however, the image-based activism of radical environmental groups create a “new” rhetoric that challenges the Western nature/culture or nature/human divide by showing how discourses help to shape and create nature in addition to commenting on the interconnectedness of nature and humans. However, an

Indigenous model for BCD that intersects with rhetorical inquiry will challenge us to also see how nature shapes and creates not only discourses, but also culture and humanity. And, while the point of origin for a radical Western environmentalism is still the human, we shall see that the point of origin for an Indigenous approach to environmentalism is nature itself.

Image Rhetorics of Relationality: How We Became Human

I want to bring us briefly back to the image on my back (Figure 1, Page 2). I want to point out that recognizing Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca pictured alongside quail signals the story of the creation of corn and how we became human. I want to suggest that as a language artefact it bears its own materiality that is distinct from the kind that it suggests when it is being imprinted onto my body, and even still once it has become a thing imprinted onto my body. None of these acts challenge or cancel out the image's rhetorical potential so much as they work alongside it to shape and create meanings that are *both* old and new. If we think of the image as a made thing, part of its making comes from language, and if we think of images as having rhetorical agency to shape and form public and private discourses, then as Tim Ingold argues, we run into a problem of "*metaphysics*":

If making thus means the imposition of conceptual form on inert matter, then the surface of the artefact comes to represent much more than interface between solid substance and gaseous medium; rather it becomes

the very surface of the material world of nature as it confronts the creative human mind. (81)

This imposition is not so much an imposition if nature is the point of origin for how we conceive of human relations and of being-present. In other words, if ontologically speaking, we assume that whatever traits we have as humans comes from nature as the *primary* (though not solely) creative and generative force in the making of our reality, then we cannot argue that we are necessarily imposing a human trait or characteristic onto a nonhuman entity.

Though contemporary ecology studies, for example, will argue that we most certainly do recognize a connection between humans and the natural world in Western culture, the point of origin for perceiving that connection is human in a way that sees humans as having more generative force in the creation of nature than vice versa. Additionally, when some scholars try to articulate that nature might have rhetoric, we are often accused of doing so in “anthropomorphic” terms, which is to say that any kind of rhetorical agency we “allow” for nature to have is inevitably colored by our human “terministic screen,” to use a Burkean term (Killingsworth and Palmer). However, as Native science articulates, nature is a relative, and nature has more generative force than humans do, which turns this critique on its head: what we attribute to human agency is actually created by nature; therefore, when we attribute these characteristics to nature we are not doing so in anthropomorphic terms because we understand these characteristics to be derived from nature itself. We are simply speaking from fundamentally, radically different ontologies.

The image imprinted on my back—an accumulation of multiple and intersecting practices—has rhetorical value that emerges out of Indigenous relationality as well. The practices associated with this image as a language artefact challenge histories of Anahuac as a land base, of my body, of language, and of tattooing more generally. The rhetoricity of these multiple and intersecting practices highlights how tattooing is a form of contemporary BCD linked to precolonial Indigenous language practices and anticolonial visuality. While I described the image before, I will now tell the (hi)story it signals or calls. In doing so, I seek to offer what Walter Mignolo might call a pluritopic hermeneutics, one that bridges “stories woven through images,” and bodies and relations that are often conflicting (Anzaldúa).

When the gods were making the Fifth Sun, which is the time we now live in, Quetzalcoatl was given the task of traveling to the underworld to collect the bones that would be used to create humans from the earth monster, Mictlantecuhtli.⁴⁸ This was after Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca had worked together to defeat the earth monster, splitting him into two parts, which created the underworld and the sky. Tezcatlipoca lost his foot in that battle, which is why he is often depicted without a foot in most images and stories about the creation of humans. While he was in the underworld, Mictlantecuhtli forced

Quetzalcoatl to undergo many tests before he was allowed to take the bones. When he

⁴⁸ This is one version of this story. As is typical in Indigenous traditions, there are diverse versions of this story; however, while certain parts of the story change, there are central or key aspects that do not. This version of the story I tell is influenced by things I have read and by stories I have been told. Eras or epochs are divided into “suns” in Mexica tradition, and the time we are now said to be living in is referred to as the Quinto Sol, or the Fifth Sun.

had finally won the bones and was traveling back upwards to our world, quail came swooping down and caused Quetzalcoatl to drop the bones. The bones were broken and scattered, and to make matters worse, it had begun to rain, and so the pieces of bones were wet and difficult to find. Nevertheless, he gathered up the pieces and sought the help of the goddess Quilaztli (also called Chalchicihuatl) to revive the bones. He sprinkled some of his own blood onto the bones and she chewed them up, forming a malleable cud. The first two humans were thus formed in the likeness of Quetzalcoatl and Quilaztli (as wind, or breath, and corn).

The humans quickly fell weak, however, and Quetzalcoatl realized that they needed sustenance in order to stay alive. It was then that ant helped him to discover corn from a nearby mountain. Once Quetzalcoatl brought the corn to the humans, they were able to become strong and live a long life. This is why we say we are the people of the corn.

I chose to tell this story from the perspective of Quetzalcoatl because his primary energy is wind, which is associated with breath, which in turn fits nicely with the concept iwígara (breath) from Rarámuri culture as the source of life. This is part of the relationality built into the practice of imprinting this image onto my body. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, I was raised in the tradition of running as an Indigenous practice, one that is linked to the Rarámuri in the Sierra Madre of Mexico. Additionally, Quilaztli refers to corn, and in her other names—Chicomexochitl or Chalchicihuatl—she refers to the seven types of corn that are said to be native to Anahuac.

But, I also want to point out that part of the fluidity of this image stems from the fluidity of the individual parts of the image. Quetzalcoatl is a god/energy who transforms into various other gods/energies at various times. He is always-already linked to an array of gods/energies, including Tezcatlipoca, Ehecatl (wind), Tlaloc (rain), and even various human gods. His relationship to either of those figures signals to stories that intersect with each other. I could have easily told this same story from the perspective of ant or quail or Tezcatlipoca, but I chose to tell it the way that I did because of the communal identity that I referenced earlier in order to offer an example for how communal identities function alongside individuality in a contemporary moment. This at once complicates essentializing depictions of Indigenous practices and identities that are linked to reductive notions of communal identities as well as ones that link contemporary image practices tied to Mexico to only those that can be somehow linked to codices.

Though, as Miner has pointed out, a contemporary Indigenous visuality linked to image practices is necessarily foregrounded by colonialism, this visuality nevertheless also recalls a history of image-based practices that are not predicated on colonialism, but on relationships to space that were necessary for survival. This brings me back to the Indigenous model for BCD that I believe challenges us to understand language as a land-based practice, and additionally to understand images as language artefacts rather than writing proper.

Tlilli/Tlapalli, An/Other Way of *Being*, Here: Tattooing Practices and Images as Anticolonial Visuality

In Chapter Two, I argued that the very dialogics that seek to erase Indigenous epistemologies actually materialize them from the perspective of Indigenous culture. In some ways, this practice of tattooing as a writing practice that intersects with the image practices of Anahuac does the same thing. Most scholarly work on tattoos contributes to the discourse of erasure of Indigenous peoples because the historiography of tattooing in the Americas (and really, everywhere) is framed within a dichotomy of either “primitive” (read: Indigenous) tattoo practices or “modern” tattoo practices. What’s more “modern” tattoo practices are framed from a historical perspective that traces the development of tattoo practices into a “modern” moment comprised primarily of Western and Eurocentric relationships to tattooing and tattoo history. This means that even though the history of tattooing as a practice in the Americas begins before colonialism, contemporary notions of tattooing nevertheless privilege a history of tattooing that begins after colonialism and outside of the Americas. For example, tattoo scholar Marge DeMello argues that tattooing is seen as one of the “simplest” forms of exchange, widely practiced among “prehistoric” cultures as form of socialization: “succinctly put, modifying the body is the simplest means by which human beings are turned into social beings—they move from ‘raw’ to ‘cooked’ with the tattoo” (10). She then goes on to argue that tattooing as a practice originated in Polynesia and was “imported” into the Americas by Western explorers who brought Native Polynesian slaves into the West. Additionally, she credits the “working class” Westerner with

“transforming” and “reinventing” tattooing as a practice into something that is “modern” in the 1980s.

However, as other scholars have noted, tattooing practices were already prominent in the Americas, by the time of colonization (Margot Mifflin, Nikki Sullivan). Whether or not the Mexica tattooed their bodies has been debated; however, what is clear is that they certainly painted their bodies with images associated with gods (*Codex Borgia*, FAMSI). Additionally, it is primarily women who were tattoo artists all across Anahuac. For the Rarámuri, it was customary for women to tattoo the men they had chosen to be their life mates. Interestingly, in some parts of Anahuac, the “ink” used in tattooing was formed out of the sap of sacred trees that are now extinct. This suggests a more direct connection between language practices and biodiversity as well: the initial decline of tattooing practices in the Americas stemmed from both the disdain that colonizers had for what they deemed to be a “savage” practice *and* from the ways in which colonialism was destroying land-based practices due to the destruction of the actual land base through acts like deforestation. Once again, the language *practice* says more about the degradation of biodiversity than the language as mere *text*, as I have noted in Chapter One. When linguists and linguistic anthropologists look to salvage language by merely “documenting” it in hopes that this will somehow “save” biodiversity, they miss the point that the link between linguistic diversity and biodiversity is contingent upon practice.

While that practice in a contemporary setting for Chican@s and Mexican nationals is affected by colonialism, however, it still speaks to BCD, and the images we “paint” into our bodies still carry with them the language of the Mexica and the Mixtec.

My own story, as I mentioned previously, pays homage to the collection of stories written by women of color in the book *This Bridge Called My Back*. *Bridge* was first published in the same year that I was born. In the same manner that this book sought to create a bridge amongst women of color for the sake of survival and alliance, I tattooed this story/image of the creation of humans onto my back to hold myself accountable to my own community. The story of the *Arbol de La Vida*, as Luar calls it, is one of community sacrifice for the betterment of all of the members of the community (not individual sacrifice). It recognizes that we all need each other in order to survive as a species and as a people. It also recognizes that we understand our role in this world through our relationship/s to it. Quetzacoatl did not create humans by himself—all of Nature helped to create and sustain us. Additionally, there are some figures or energies that we might write off as inherently “bad” or “evil,” such as Tezcatlipoca, who had a hand in this task. And, finally, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca—who are archenemies—had to form a temporary alliance (a dangerous one, no doubt) in order to create us. The magnitude of responsibility that I gathered from this story, the pain I knew I would endure in having it tattooed onto my back, and the attention I also knew it would grab from people were all part of why I decided to carry this image on my back in the way that I have chosen. The multiple ways in which my memory of this “image event,” would remind me of the responsibility that my privilege of being a scholar has afforded

me amidst the community of poor, “ghetto,” underprivileged Chican@s who I represent wherever I go manifest through each of those parts of tattooing as a practice. They remind me, as my ‘buelo used to say, “of where [I] come from..’pa que sepas,” so that I know, without a doubt, and so that would never allow myself to forget. But, it also reminds me of my commitment to this land base. It reminds me that the land sustains me *and* it creates me as *an hija del maiz*, a daughter of the corn.

This is a private discourse. One that really only my immediate community would recognize, though a larger community of Chican@s might as well. But, it affects a public discourse. In *The Writing of History*, Michel DeCerteau argues that writing, and particularly the writing of history, legitimizes Western traditions while “un-writing” Native embodied traditions. Writing, he argues, always strategically erases bodies and Others, but the act of writing itself produces the very bodies it wishes to erase:

The paradoxical procedure that posits death is symbolized and performed in a gesture, which has at once the value of myth and ritual: *writing*. Indeed, writing replaces the traditional representations that that gave authority to the present with a representative labor that places both absence and production in the same area. (6)

The act of writing (as a *practice*) creates an absent-present Other, in this case the Indigenous Other. The act of tattooing as a public discourse, then, highlights the agency that the image always-already has in tying whatever surface it is placed onto to this land base—to Anahuac.

As Luar tattooed me, I thought of my mother. I remember that I got my very first tattoo because of my mother. She always taught me that I could be one of two things: Mexican or Indian. She understands these categories as interchangeable, but she knew—and still knows—that they are not perceived this way in the general public. She often had pictures of Indians around the house. In the pictures, the people had tattoos all over their bodies, and I always thought they were beautiful works of art. But, as I winced in pain while Luar tattooed me, I could hear her already:

“Gabriela, did I teach you this!?”

People often ask my mother if she is Navajo. I do not know why, but it is always Navajo. I have always thought of how ironic it is that my father, if mistaken for anything, is always mistaken for white. It’s ironic to me because his mother was *pura indígena*, and spoke an Indigenous Mexican language.⁴⁹ As I write this, I remember all of the times that people have asked me if I am Chinese. I remember getting ready to sing in a karaoke at a bar in Zacatecas, Mexico, and while I was nervously contemplating what song I would sing, the host sang “La Chinita” at me for five minutes.⁵⁰ And, then, I laugh as I think of the countless times that I explain to people that I am not Chinese, that I am Mexican Indigenous, and how they often remark, “Yes! That makes total sense considering your ancestors crossed the Bering Strait!” I remember the Nahuatl course I took in the summer of ’09, and how a classmate remarked to me that she and another

⁴⁹ “*pura indígena*” is a Mexican census category for “fully Indigenous.”

⁵⁰ *La Chinita* means “The little Chinese girl,” and it is a popular folk song sung in certain parts of Mexico.

classmate had been commenting on my Mayan features. She assured me that this was a compliment.

These are stories of lands, peoples, histories—all creating particular discourses of erasure that get reproduced and perpetuated to create realities that I live out on my body. They are linked to *written* stories that people hear about what a Mexican—what an Indian—is supposed to look like. They are maps of my body and of this land base of the Americas. We take them up and carry them with us into everyday spoken encounters. They work to disappear or unsee the body (my body) that is tied to *this* land—to Texas, to Zacatecas, to Mexico, to “these United States of America.” And yet, all the while they signal to this *Indigenous* body by their sheer fascination with it. Likewise, the very act of tattooing a story of this land to my body—much in the way that my people have done for centuries—that at once ties me to this land of maíz and the peoples who come from it, rewrites me into existence as an Indigenous person.

I remember that as Luar was finishing up the outline for this tattoo, all I could really focus on was the pain. I felt like I had just been flayed. Then my mother’s voice again:

“Gabriela—did I teach you this!?”

But, this practice as one that rearticulates an Indigenous form of BCD is also one that Malea Powell signals when she argues, “tattooing is a way of disappearing, of rewriting trails across the signifying space of my body, reimagining the stories that can be heard in the text that is my flesh” (“Listening to Ghosts” 18).

My body has been written upon—has been *storied* upon—as Casie Cobos argues. I see the contemporary tattooing of Mexica and other Indigenous images of Anahuac onto our bodies as part of how we continue an Indigenous tradition of making meaning through images, one that creates an absent-present in the De Certeauian sense, but also one that materializes in the form of BCD—of biological and cultural diversity. The link between linguistic diversity and biodiversity is not accidental and it is not ephemeral. But, we must also recognize that it is not disembodied—the link between language and land cannot merely be “documented” in dictionaries, it must be lived. Part of how that link has materialized through practice is through tattooing.

But, tattooing is not the only way that Chican@s or Mexican Indigenous folks continue an image-based epistemology. We still paint walls and vases and other objects with these images, and we still perform them in danza. I want to point out that the image itself bears a kind of agency for shaping public discourses tied to this land base and its biodiversity. When people see the image of Quetzalcoatl or even Tezcatlipoca, they recognize it as an Indigenous one, and more often than not, they recognize it as “Aztec.” These images agitate people in diverse ways, and they tell a story not only about colonialism, but also about this land base because of the language practices that they recall. They remind us all that this is a land of *maíz*, of corn, they remind us that we have to work together if we hope to survive on this land base together. And, they remind us that, “this land was Mexican once, was Indian always, and is, and will be again” (*Borderlands* 3).

When I sat for my last session with Luar, we talked about my mother and how upset she had been when she learned about this “massive *thing*” I had carved into my body. I told him I remembered seeing images of Indigenous people decorating my house growing up. My mom, I told him, always taught my siblings and me that we are Indian. I remember in some of the pictures she hung, the people had beautiful artwork all over their bodies. I always knew one day I would too. When my mom finally saw the finished product, she said to me,

“Aye, Gabriela...is this how you were raised? Did I teach you this?”

Yes, *ama*—remember—you taught me this.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: TLAYOLPACHIVITIA, MAKING OTHERS HEARTS STRONG:

PEDAGOGICAL AND DISCIPLINARY IMPLICATIONS

The relationship between education and indigeneity has historically been a violent one. In fact, most institutions of learning were initially created in order to impose some kind of thinking and behavior onto people's bodies and minds for the sake of empire and hegemony. For Indigenous peoples, this "miseducation" has been founded upon the "Indian Problem," which Sandy Grande notes is a "problem that has been consciously and historically produced by and through the system of colonization [...]. Indian education was never simply about the desire to 'civilize' or even deculturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources" (Grande 19).

In this chapter, however, I use theories of critical pedagogy and testimonio/story to articulate the complicated relationship that Indigenous folks have with education and with institutions of education as simultaneously systems and spaces that are both empowering and oppressive. Additionally, the oppression that Indigenous people face in educational institutions is influenced by racism that affects policy in ways that are not necessarily marked as Indigenous or as having anything to do with Indigeneity. But, as an act of reclamation, I also want to talk about how I and other Chican@s are using Indigenous educational philosophies to advance Indigenous pedagogies that are grounded in Nahua, Maya, or other Indigenous languages. But, I also want to highlight

how I have been practicing in *ixtli in yollotl* up throughout this dissertation alongside and as part of the decolonial methodology that I mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation.

A Brief History of Educating the NDN⁵¹

The initial attempts at educating Indians in the U.S. were aimed at “salvaging” Indians, so that as Richard Pratt famously argued, instead of literally killing Indians, settlers could “invite them into experiences in [white] communities.” Why not “kill the Indian and save the man” instead? Such was the mission of the boarding schools created in the 1800s. However, as Grande points out, that mission included not only forced manual labor, but also forced assimilation into an industrial society (*Red Pedagogy* 13).

In Mexico and other parts of “Latin America” Indigenous folks underwent similar “civilizing” processes. And, Chican@s and other peoples of Mexican descent here in the U.S. have similar stories as well. I remember my own mother telling me of how she was punished for speaking Spanish during recess at her school: two swats on the tops of her hands with a ruler for every offense. During my junior year at Del Río High School, two of my classmates came tardy to English class. As they rushed to take their seats, flustered, one girl apologized:

“I’m sorry, Miss, we were taking our pictures for drill team, and ..”

⁵¹ NDN is a popular term used among American Indians, and because of our relationships with American Indians in the States, many Chican@s have taken to using the term as well.

BAM! The sound of our teacher's hand slamming onto her desk startled us all into an awkward silence.

“No you were NOT! You were having your pictures taken!” she yelled. “The problem is you Mexicans and your Spanish—saca fotos, ‘take pictures,’—you need to learn that you can’t think in Spanish when you’re speaking in English...”

I think she went on to explain more, but I had a hard time getting past the sound of her hand swatting her desk so hard. The sound resonated in the room and made me remember my mother's stories of her hands, bruised from getting swatted often for speaking Spanish with her friends because she “never learned” when to stop resisting and simply obey.

But, I also remember that institutions of education have paradoxically been spaces of refuge for a lot of us as well. For those of us growing up in poor neighborhoods and/or abusive homes, being at school meant we would have at least two square meals a day. It meant we would have hot water and air conditioning to spare us some grief from the unrelenting Texas heat. It meant we might be around adults who supported and even loved us, and who provided a warmer environment than the ones we had waiting for us at home. And, then again, for many of us throughout history, getting an education was never an option. In Mexico during the earliest waves of colonialism, Indigenous peoples taught themselves to read and write, often in secret for fear of being caught because they were not legally allowed to learn how to read and write. In her autobiography, Rigoberta Menchu (Quiché Maya) recounts that getting a formal education was hardly a part of the material reality for her or her family in Guatemala.

Children had to work, either in the fields or at home, to help their families survive. In the U.S., Indigenous peoples, too, often had to make arguments for why they deserved to be educated. My friend Estrella was a Camp Kid. Camp Kids are what we call the children of migrant workers who attend special public schools or who attend college and participate in the special programs offered for Camp Kids. I listened to Estrella and some other former Camp Kids tell stories about what it was like for them in high school and college. As they tell their stories, I cannot help but notice that in some ways they are all telling the same story about how they, along with their concerned parents, fought to be educated. They fought to be placed into “normal” classrooms instead of being placed into vocational tracks for students who weren’t “college material.” They also often fought accusations of cheating on exams and of being lazy when they came tardy to class. And they fought to be able to afford to be educated.

“I remember when the recruiters from Detroit Mercy had to come and sit with my folks to assure them that they wouldn’t be losing income if I went to college on a track scholarship because I could share some of that money with them to make up for the loss of my pay check,” Estrella told us.

My story is similar to theirs, though I am not a Camp Kid. I remember being asked if I were in the wrong classroom more than once as I entered an AP (Advanced Placement) English or Calculus class, and I remember that same Del Rio High School English teacher I mentioned before accusing me of plagiarism after she had read only the introduction to a draft of one of my essays.

But, I also need to point out the privilege that I had in even being able to take AP courses, and in being able to go to college. Not all of my friends were able to do this, and while many people throughout my life have always told me that this is because I made better choices and worked harder than they did, the truth is that it has more to do with privilege than anything else. I was able to perform in the way that society favors, and even though some of my friends are very successful now, they do not have the kind of cultural capital that I afford because of how society favors certain kinds of “vocations” over others.

These are the stories that partly inform my own pedagogy. Like many other Chicana@s--those who are teachers in the formal sense as well as those who are not—I “teach to transgress,” as bell hooks would say. And, I attempt to teach from an Indigenous knowledge base. What this means for me is that I try to use Indigenous concepts as the guiding force by which we ask critical questions in the classroom. With the rise of critical pedagogy, scholars have used theorists like Freire and Foucault to show education can also be used as a form of empowerment. Critical pedagogues see education as always-already complicit in the oppressive structures that enable the nation-state (Denzin). However, as scholars like Grande and Andrea Smith have pointed out, while critical pedagogies are primarily informed critical theories linked to race, sex, gender, etc, for Indigenous folks, the primary oppressive structure affecting our lives is colonialism. I would like to point out, however, that while colonialism is the immediate framework of oppression that we resist, it must be understood as a site upon which these other forms of oppression emerge in daily activity as well as in legal policy. In other

words, while some scholars of critical theory and critical pedagogy argue that patriarchy is a universal form of oppression that all women combat equally in the classroom, I want to proffer that Indigenous pedagogies challenge us to instead understand patriarchy's relationship to colonialism, and the different ways that this relationship has played out and continues to play out in terms of educational policy for Indigenous folks.

Additionally, I believe that Indigenous pedagogies also challenge to see the material consequences of those policies.

Decolonizing Rhetoric and Writing: Cultural Rhetorics and Indigenous Pedagogies

As Qwo-Li Driskill has noted, the discipline of rhetoric and writing has been complicit in a colonial agenda by disembodiment the work that we do in our field. In part, this has to do with Western cultural hegemony and logocentrism. Cultural Rhetorics not only exposes the cultural sites that create *all* meaning, but also aligns itself with decolonial struggles within and outside of the academy, because, “the constant disembodiment of our scholarship reinforces binaries that help maintain oppressive systems” (*Cherokee Performance Rhetorics* 186). The disembodiment of scholarship is what unsees the bodies that institutions of education are literally built on through forced manual labor, genocide, and forced assimilation. As my scholarly relations have argued for some time now, it is what maintains an archive/repertoire split as well as a rhetoric/poetics split (Powell, Driskill, Haas, Pigg, Leon).

In the field of rhetoric and writing, we claim to be concerned about civics, publics, and the politics surrounding what it means to engage the public sphere as

“good” and “politically correct” citizens. However, as a field we privilege text-based literacies for doing this when in both a historical and contemporary moment, not all peoples have been “literate” in alphabetic or text-based literacies, and in fact *most* people engage in the public sphere in ways that cannot be readily textualized. While the field of rhetoric and writing would like to see text as a central origin or framework for how people make meaning in the world, Indigenous epistemologies challenge us to see Nature as central to meaning-making, but in a relational and mutually-informing system that includes actors (in the actor-network theory sense) who are not seen as actors within Western philosophy. While the field has been making strides in addressing the multiple literacies that not only humans, but also nature and material objects afford, the methodologies and philosophical frameworks we deploy often limit the extent to which we can engage non western philosophies. Additionally, we often base our approaches on understandings of history that are linear and exclusive. We talk about “alternative” literacies that are “new,” particularly in terms of how we see technology and “new media” presenting “new” ways that a new generation of people are making meaning outside of alphabetic approaches. In fact, someone recently said to me in a job interview,

“Well, codices and all this here is just fine and really fascinating. But, we need to know—how does studying codices make our students better writers?”

To be sure, this person was sympathetic to my work:

“I mean you have to understand that this is what people will ask of us, people who have the money to fund us. I am really excited about what

you say here, but you will need to be able to address that concern if we bring you to campus.”

This story highlights not only the complicity of the field with a colonial project of unseeing how all people make meaning and engage a public sphere, but also the complicity that the whole of education has with it. While I offer a critique, here, I am also sympathetic to very real fact that often times it is not that people in our discipline simply do not *get* what we do, it is that what we do is tied to a much larger goal of educating people to serve the Nation State. Rhetoric and writing programs are supposed to make students better *writers*, not necessarily better citizens or even more engaged citizens. Can I play the game? Sure. We all have to. But, I still believe that we need to at least mark the limits of what our discipline can do if all we ever concern ourselves with in terms of *pedagogy* is how to make our students better writers. And, because we are all such great rhetors, and because we do stand in spaces of much power and privilege *because* we teach writing, we should be able to make some kind of paradigmatic shift in due time. It is actually already in the making. That said, I want to offer up an Indigenous paradigm for education based on the Nahua concepts that are all tied to what it means to be a teacher and what it means to acquire knowledge.

In Ixtli In Yollotl: Nahua Rhetorics as Modes of Inquiry

The Nahuatl word for teaching, *temachtiani*, literally means “one who makes others know something, to know what is one the earth” (*Aztec Thought*, Leyba). Teachers were responsible for five major roles: *teixtlamachtiani*, *teixcuitiana*,

tetzcahuani, tlayolpachivitia, and netlacaneco. Ultimately, the teacher's role was to help people foster these attributes as phases of *ixtli in yollotl*—developing a (wise) face/heart. *Ixtli in yollotl* is both what it means to acquire knowledge and what it means to be human. Human beings, according to Nahua Tlamantine (wise people or teachers), are responsible for formulating *ixtli in yollotl*—for learning about the world around them in order to become fully human. *Ixtli in yollotl* also asks us to understand ourselves as relatives.

Teixtlamachtiani, which literally means “the one who gives knowledge, especially traditional knowledge to the faces of others,” is a word that links the eyes with the face (Leyva 103). In Nahua culture, the face (or the countenance) of a person represents their humanity. Teachers were responsible for *teixcuitiana*, or “causing others to take face” by *tetzcahuani*, “putting a mirror in front of the faces of others” (*Aztec Thought*). In doing so, teachers can *tlayolpachivitia*, “make others hearts strong,” and encourage *netlacaneco*, “humanizing love for all people and tempering relationships between people” (Leyva 103).

In Nahua culture, teachers are not responsible for lecturing or “dispensing” knowledge to students so much as they are responsible for guiding students in acquiring that knowledge for themselves. As Leyva points out:

“...most Indigenous learning was experimental and occurred in the course of ‘doing work.’ When the time came to learn specifics, general rules were given and a context was set up. However, each person chose the

way and how much he or she would learn based on his or her own way of learning and doing” (97).

In my own teaching experiences it has been difficult to enact this framework, not only because of the strict kinds of guidelines stipulated by university standards, but also because students are not accustomed to learning in this fashion in Western institutions. In fact, learning in this ways seems counter-intuitive to most students I have taught, who typically see teachers who don't have a heavy hand in their learning process as “not doing anything.” But, additionally, enacting an Indigenous pedagogy is difficult to in a *writing* classroom because it also asks for students to see writing as a politicized act that has as much potential for bad as it does for good. Additionally, because writing classrooms are also rhetoric classrooms, an Indigenous pedagogy asks students to attune to the limits of writing as politicized act that everyone uses and has access to.

Indigenous peoples have historically used music, dance, story, and other types of non-textual practices to make meaning, and we still do. But, we also have philosophies that can be used as modes of inquiry. In a special course that I have taught on difficult dialogues and social justice, the students and I worked to talk about difference and social justice using in *ixtli* in *yollotl* as a mode of inquiry, but we also aimed to create nonalphabetic projects alongside writing projects. Not all students were receptive to the aims of the course. Additionally, it was not always easy for me to guide students in seeing themselves beyond their own terministic screens.

Here is another scene. In this scene, we had just finished discussing Rose-Marie Garland Thompson's article “Freaks and Queers.” In her article, Garland Thompson

offers a history of the words “freak” and “queer.” She talks about how these words have been used to exploit people of color, gender nonconforming people, peoples with disabilities, and people who simply did and do not fit the mold of normalcy advanced by dominant culture, but also how people have used their “freak” status to resist oppression and exploit the fear and wonder that people have for them by getting paid to perform in freak shows. The students used the moment to talk about how peoples with disabilities are treated in the workforce today. One student wouldn’t have it:

Student 1: You see, now, this is ridiculous. I go over to the Taco Bell, and I see this little guy with some kind of disability, and he is an inspiration to me, and he should be to all of us! He makes no excuses for anything. And, I don’t understand how one minute these people are crying about their disability and they want special treatment, but then the next they get all offended if you act like you notice they are different. The fact of the matter is that they should be grateful that they even have a job. Thanks and Gig ‘em.⁵²

Student 2: Well, yea, but this one woman who worked over at the McDonald’s—that is kind of messed up that the manager made her work the back just because she has a scar on her face.

⁵² This student ended every (often very long) comment he made in class with “Thanks and Gig ‘em,” and I did not want you, dear reader, to lose the full effect of his speech, and so I chose to keep each utterance in rather than editing them out.

Student 3: Weeeeelll, I mean can we really assume that he made her work the back just because she had this scar? And, should she really feel entitled to sue McDonalds? I mean, this is the problem with society today—entitlement.

Student 1: Exactly!! Like I say, she should be lucky she even has a job. If her boss wants her to....I dunno, do jumping jacks, then bygolly she should just do it. People have got all sorts of entitled feelings these days. Not to mention all the excuses they want to make. You know what, if you got a splotch on your face, then that's because god made you that way and how dare you try and complain about that!? Thanks and Gig 'em.

Eventually, that discussion became pretty heated, mostly fueled by Student 1's insensitive comments about how lazy or entitled peoples with disabilities are. This was a conversation that continued into the next class meeting, which talked about how Mexican migrant workers were being pathologized as migrants in terms of their “hyperabilities” as farm workers and their potential threat to the health and safety of U.S. citizens:

Student 1 (again): Mam, this may surprise you, but I am of the opinion that we should grant these Mexicans amnesty, and every farm owner I know is on my side. I agree with the people who this author apparently disagrees with. We need the Mexican workers, mam.

[he looks very directly at me at this point and tips his hat before continuing]

These Mexicans are good little workers, no doubt. Fact is, white folks just can't work as hard. I wish the Mexican-Americans could remember their roots instead of always making excuses for why they can't be civilized like the rest of us. Thanks and Gig 'em.

After this class, which he was *characteristically* 24 minutes late for, he came up to me ask for an extension for the paper that was due that day.

Student: Oh, you just don't even begin to understand the ordeals I've had to face. My girlfriend broke up with me, and I have two tests this week alone, and I am the new leader of my Bible Club—“

This was already the third time this student has asked for an extension. I had tried more subtle approaches to get him to see that what he might be arguing in class might reflect more on his own behavior than the people we were discussing in class. I saw this an opportunity to take a more direct approach for practicing tetezcahuani, for putting a mirror to his face:

Me: You know, those sound an awful lot like excuses to me.

[He stares at me in bewilderment]

Student: Are you kidding me?? I don't think you understand how busy I am

Me: I'm a graduate student—I think I understand.

Student: [*chuckles*] No, mam, with all due respect—I was dumped. I had a *calculus* test this week *and* a—

Me: [*cutting him off*] I'm sorry. I have had all of five hours of sleep this week—this *entire* week. One of your classmates lost a relative this week, too, and they still got their paper in. These things happen to everyone on the daily—that doesn't mean that you get a free ride. It sounds an awful lot to me like you feel more entitled than the rest of us.

Student: [*looking utterly shocked*] I don't believe you are gonna understand me, mam.

That student never did see what I was trying to show him—or perhaps I didn't see what he was trying show me—but I also know that the work teachers did in the *calmecacs* (what we might think of as a “school”) was never intended to be complete in one sitting or even in one year. I also know that teachers are supposed to learn from their students just as much they learn from us. These lessons take a lifetime of self-reflexivity to take hold.

But, I recall this story scene because it was a moment for me when I realized that what *tetzcahuani* required of me was *less* of me. Furthermore, *tetzcahuani*, cannot be separated from *teixcuitana* or any of the other attributes a teacher must *practice* in terms

of helping all of us to develop in *ixtli in yollotl*. I thought of my Nahuatl tutor, Eduardo, who often initially frustrated me because I felt like he would give so little to our sessions. Then I realized that while I thought he would give very little, he often followed my cue and gave me work to do that was based on what I wanted to do. Every lesson he would ask, “what do you want to do today?” He never had a lesson plan that he handed to me or that we discussed in advance, we simply walked the streets of Zacatecas, working around whatever activity I wanted to do that day. I realized that I had to really let go and allow this student to explore what social justice might look like on his own terms. In the end, he chose to do a final project based on new leadership role as a Christian leader in his “cell group.” He wrote a sermon of sorts that was much more compassionate and kind than anything I had ever heard him argue in class. Does this mean that he changed his mind? I’m not sure. I’m also not sure that using *ixtli in yollotl* asks for that—what it does ask for is for a teacher to be able to provide enough guidance and resources for a student to be able to use as they embark on their own journey, setting *their own* limits for what and how much they decide they will learn.

In the end, using *ixtli in yollotl* as a pedagogical framework helped me to be more generous with students who make comments that—to be blunt—pissed me off and hurt me. It helped me to realize that part of making others hearts strong means making my own heart strong enough to recognize when students are giving as much as they possibly can give, but it isn’t what I am expecting or wanting. It also helped me to recognize my own misgivings and racist, ableist, etc etc attitudes toward student behavior. But, in using *ixtli in yollotl* as a mode of inquiry in class, students were also

able to advance a way of thinking that *they* argued was fundamentally opposed to traditional forms of rhetoric based on pure debate. In *ixtli in yollotl*, students argued, forced them to think about each issue that was raised in terms of humanizing love for society in a way that did not allow for blame to be placed on any individual.

Though some students believed that in *ixtli in yollotl* was idealistic, they were intrigued and even perplexed by the idea entire groups of people based their lives and philosophies on that idea. What I am suggesting, then, is that using traditional forms of rhetorical inquiry, such as tropes, enthymemes, and even appeals can extend a form of analysis that is not concerned with making connections for civic engagement.

Traditional rhetorical approaches for inquiry, in fact, often work to promote American ideal of freedom that is counter to the aims of social justice or civic engagement. In fact, some students found in *ixtli in yollotl* to be oppressive, because it forced people to monitor their behavior for the betterment of other people. In another class, a student who was a philosophy minor raised this concern regarding slavery:

“Slavery was never really wrong—we just voted against it at a certain point, but there really wasn’t anything inherently bad about it. We could easily have it back if we were all to agree on it.”

I asked this student what kinds of philosophical frameworks she was using to make this claim. She said that she was borrowing from Machiavelli and Hobbes, but that she was ultimately speaking from universal principles. I then challenged the idea that her

thinking could be universalized, citing in *ixtli in yollotl* as a philosophical framework for understanding slavery. She was skeptical, to say the least:

“I think that sounds like a communist attempt to control people. Slavery wasn’t a bad thing, and it wasn’t something based on hate or inhumanity. Lots of slave owners loved their slaves. But, I think freedom is a better framework for understanding slavery because it was wrong that we were not allowing people to be free when American culture is all about freedom.”

Another student then raised a question:

“If we use freedom as a framework, then couldn’t you argue that not allowing people to enslave other people takes away from their freedoms? It makes more sense to me to use this concept of in *ixtli in yollotl* for social justice because at least it makes us really think about whether or not an argument someone is making is based on love. When we talked about the rhetorical triangle and all that, we never really went anywhere with it other than to point out how people were trying to persuade us one way or another.”

Implicit in that argument is also the idea that traditional rhetorical analyses are good for understanding the assumptions of a particular claim while in *ixtli yollotl* could add a

different perspective that questions the extent to which our underlying assumptions are predicated upon relationality. In other words, *ixtli in yollotl* asks us to think of ourselves as relatives. But, as I have shown in this dissertation, our relations, our kin, include Nature and the rest of the cosmos.

Performing Nahua Rhetorics in the Classroom: Nahuatl Difrasismos, Writing, and Civic Engagement

A predominant feature in Nahuatl language and thought is what Ángel María Garibay has called a *difrasismo*.⁵³ According to Garibay, a *difrasismo* refers to the *process* by which two words are used together to signify a single meaning, much like the English phrase “bread and butter,” which together signify money or livelihood. He argues that *difrasismos* are metaphors, and they signal to the overwhelmingly metaphoric nature of Nahua thought. *Ixtli in yollotl* is a *difrasismo* which signals to knowledge or insight. But, another common *difrasismo* that is associated with knowledge is *ixochitl in cuicatl*, or the flower/the song. Together, *ixochitl in cuicatl* signify the arts. But, *ixochitl in cuicatl* is also a foundational philosophy for Nahua speakers. While many scholars study *difrasismos* in written texts, my friend, Manuel, who is a Native Nahua speaker and a linguist has told me that you can hear *difrasismos*. In fact, his thesis project was focused the use of *difrasismos* in “modern” Nahuatl spoken in his hometown in Tepecxitla, Vera Cruz. What this suggests to me is that *difrasismos*

⁵³ Garibay’s work has not been translated into English, and *difrasismo* is a neologism even in Spanish, but some scholars have suggested that “diphase” might be an appropriate translation. The fluent Nahua speakers I know also use the term *difrasismo*.

come together through practice. They are not necessarily set in stone. In other words, while *xochitl in cuicatl* is a commonly used and recognized difrasismo, others can be and are (re)made. Some even go out of mode. Eduardo (my Nahuatl tutor and friend), for example, recognizes *ixtli in yollotl* as a concept that “works,” and is “very beautiful,” but he had never heard of it before I brought it to his attention.

I want to refer back to a claim that made in the Introduction regarding the use of Indigenous rhetorics in the field of rhetoric and writing. As I mentioned, a central concern for me has been the problematic ways that many Chicana@s and others have taken to advancing a Nahuatl or other form of Indigenous rhetoric because we have done so using primarily a Western frame of reference and because we exercise a Mestizaje hegemony over other Indigenous peoples in Cemanahuac (Latin America) when articulating a Chicana@ or Mestizaje rhetorical tradition. But, because scholarly production—much more than any other kind of production—is how Chicana@s and Mexican Indigenous folks reclaim our histories and knowledge bases in order to enact healing and resist colonialism, it is important to me that we approach scholarship with a decolonial lens.

In rhetoric and writing, we talk about how Nahuatl’s “appealed” to certain colonial figures during the first waves of colonialism in Cemanahuac, or about how certain “tropes” can be analyzed in precolonial stories that have been written down in the *Cantares Mexicanos* or elsewhere. For example, in his article on the “Precedents of Racism,” Victor Villanueva argues that the Mexica used *xochitl in cuicatl* to appeal to the Spanish because it was already an established mode of rhetorical inquiry and appeal

that was based on five parts that were all parts of Greco-Roman rhetorical appeal: proemium, narratio, dispositio, refutatio, conclusio (646-647). Loosely translated, those concepts refer to an introduction, a narrative, a claim and counterclaim, and then a conclusion. Ironically (perhaps), Villanueva is using this Western framework to discuss a moment of *in xochitl in cuicatl* in which Mexica people are arguing about the *difference* between their traditions and the traditions of the Spanish invaders:

You have said that we do not know the lord-of-the-intimate-which surrounds- us, the one from whom the-heavens-and-the-earth come. You have said that our gods were not true gods. We respond that we are perturbed and hurt by what you say, because our progenitors never spoke this way. (qtd. in Villanueva 646)

However, *in xochitl in cuicatl* is a mode of knowledge making that is performed and that does not necessarily begin with any concrete “matter at hand” (*dispositio*). It is a way of building relationship with the earth in order to gain more self knowledge, and it is performed through song and dance. ”

Difrasismos offer a way to think about knowledge and argument in terms of relationality, and specifically, the kind of relationality that emerges from a Nahuatl cosmology. “The rhetorical value of difrasismos comes out of a relationship to materiality and embodiment that are enacted through performance. In other words, if we are to learn about *in xochitl in cuicatl* in a rhetoric and writing classroom, it simultaneously posits the limits of writing as a mode of inquiry and suggests that students need to *perform* some kind of song or dance as a way of better understanding

their relationship to the land they currently inhabit. It also suggests that they will learn something about the world and society more generally through doing so, but it does not necessarily suggest *what* the students will or should learn. The only given in this process is that language practices are linked to knowledge about Nature and that we come to in *xochitl* in *cuicatl* with the understanding that we are related to all the living things that surround us. But, it also suggests that “things” like songs are alive and are “active sites,” as Kimberly Lee has argued regarding American Indian song making.

Civic Engagement, then, must also include engaging with and learning from Nature, and not as a thing disconnected from humans, but as an origin for knowledge and for becoming fully human.

Final Thoughts on Nahua Rhetorics and BCD

Throughout this process I worked from what I naively assumed to be a simple enough goal—to situate my understanding of rhetorical practices from the perspective of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, and within Indigenous forms of science. This has been difficult, not only because it entails making a series of connections between ideas and concepts typically deemed disparate, but also because the concept of “Native science” is *hardly* an accepted one.

Nevertheless, The most compelling aspect of this journey for me comes from what has been made visible and (im)possible for rhetoric and writing studies through a relational understanding of knowledge, namely the opportunity to engage material artefacts and land bases in a conversation about language. Here is where I believed I

could bring a fruitful conversation about khipu and codices and their relationship to language into a dialogue with rhetoric and writing theorists and practitioners. Language studies inform writing studies and *vice versa*. Writing is defined and limited by the extent to which it can represent “language,” verbal or nonverbal.

But, this also becomes a way in which I can enact an interdisciplinary dialogue that is more fitting for Indigenous philosophies and practices. Scholars in the emergent field of biocultural diversity studies note a material connection between language and culture and land, but the model of BCD that has been advanced thus far is still heavily (counterintuitively) Logocentric in that it reduces language to text, makes language “preservation” a feat of written archival documentation, and at times employs a problematic understanding of culture through the concept of blood quantum. For me, this was also an opportunity to spark an interdisciplinary dialogue between rhetoric and writing and language studies. It gave me an opportunity to do the decolonial intervention on Master narratives that is needed in order advance a more just form of scholarship, but it also allowed for me to practice what Robert Warrior calls intellectual trade routes, which are the loci of exchange by which “intellectuals participate in going out from and coming back to the places from which they came, learning along the way new ideas that inform the creation of new knowledge.” Intellectual trade routes, according to Warrior are how Indigenous peoples have *always* created knowledge out of relationships with other peoples they bartered and/or traded with.

This project takes part in the concerted efforts at enacting decolonizing methodologies/theories that have looked to theories of embodiment and performance in

order to think outside of text-based approaches to the study of knowledge-making in Indigenous communities. This is not to suggest that writing is not an embodied act, but it is to suggest that literacies of Indigenous peoples of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyi, namely codices and khipu, represent a veritable limit to the scope of writing studies (and by extension, language studies). It frees an image-based epistemology for Nahua speakers from being confined to the codices and it challenges us to see khipu outside of a concept of writing entirely. As such, the approach that I developed stems from a situated understanding of language as a practice rather than as a text, and as a practice that bears a relationship to the body and to land and culture for Indigenous peoples. Scholars like Sid Dobrin, Jimmie Killingsworth, Nedra Reynolds have all discussed the importance of understanding writing as a networked practice that bears a relationship to place among other things. More recently scholars like Donnie Johnson Sackey have pointed to the limitations of tracing ecologies of writing from a text-based approach because there are a series of practices that help to construct a text or perhaps a situation (specifically in organizations) that cannot be readily textualized.

What images, khipu and Indigenous language practices add to this complexity is the extent to which Nature cannot be “read” as a text, and the extent to which we must conceive of Nature helping to construct discourse just as discourse constructs nature. In Native science, there is no such thing as “place,” there is only practiced space. However, space is shaped by practices that are mutually and reciprocally constructed by people and and “nature” literally, not metaphorically. Thing theory, for me constitutes a way by which we might better be able to understand the extent to which images, khipu and other

indigenous technologies manifest this literal relationship between language and land and peoples. These artifacts clearly bear a relationship to language, though it manifests as an embodied relationship based on practice. We have seen how khipu represent a kind of tension in the relationship between the body and the object, not only because of how current language use complicates that relationship, but also because of how khipu are used to encode diverse types of “language” that result in images or image markers and a variety of other types of data and information. And, we have seen how the fluidity between the uses for the words for an image and a codex as both a thing and a practice have also allowed for us to understand the relationship between an image object and language as one that is based on practice and mobility and relationality.

In order to truly address civics and publics in the rhetoric and writing and writing classroom, we as teachers must address the limits of what writing studies can account for in understanding how all peoples practice meaning-making. We must additionally also ask students to engage in the world around them as a form of meaning making, and we must be flexible enough to allow students the freedom to decide for themselves what and how (much) they will learn in our courses.

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