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Mitotiliztli ↔ Teochitontequiza:
Danza as a Way of Knowing

By

Marcelo F. Garzo

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Laura E. Pérez, Chair

Professor Keith Feldman

Professor Angela Marino

Professor Kimberly TallBear

Summer 2020

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Abstract

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Marcelo F. Garzo

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Laura E. Pérez, Chair

This dissertation explores questions of embodied knowledge, power and consciousness through the study and practice of Anahuacan ceremonial dance. Danza – also known as Danza Azteca, Danza Mexica, Danza Tolteca-Chichimeca, or Mitotiliztli, Macehualiztli and Chitontequiza – is a rich tradition of Indigenous and syncretic dance rooted in transnational movements across Mexico, Central America and the United States. Reflections are offered on the nature of danza as a human movement system and as a social, cultural, political and spiritual movement. Centered in critical and comparative Ethnic Studies, theories of decoloniality, and “theory in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983) this work thinks *from* and *about* danza as an embodied modality of Anahuacan science, art, spirituality and activism. Research has been conducted through transdisciplinary, scholar-practitioner methodologies: combining analysis of archival sources, secondary research and Indigenous and Performance Studies approaches to ethnography, creative writing and “research as ceremony” (Wilson 2008). Body chapters consider questions of decolonial aesthetics, poetics, ethics and philosophy of science through danza theory and praxis. Evidence demonstrates the necessity of integrating embodied, communal and ceremonial ways of knowing into existing critiques of epistemology, cosmology and cultural memory. Re-membering to relate, danza serves as a medium of intergenerational and community-based healing for Indigenous Latinx, Xicanx communities in Abya Yala.

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Dedication

*Para mis abuelitas,
Ana y Elba,
con mucho amor.*

Acknowledgements

In ixpantzinco, Ipalnemohuani, in Moyocoyani, in Tloquenahuaque. Tlazocamati Ometecuhtli Omecihuatl, nimitztlazohtla Tonantzin tlalli Coatlicue, nimitztlazohtla Tlaloc Chalchihuitlicue, nimitztlazohtla Tonatiuh huan nana Meztli. Tlazocamati Nauhcampa, nochtin nomecayotzin. I begin by asking permission, by giving thanks to the Creator for another day of life, for the opportunity to be here. I must begin with gratitude, for our beloved Mother Earth, the water and all the sacred energies that give us life. I must begin by acknowledging the Indigenous peoples on whose ancestral territories, lands and waters I write, dance and think: my Chochenyo, Muwekma, Lisjan, Ohlone relatives, here in this place called *Huichin*. As a visitor on these lands, I must begin by giving thanks to them, and their ancestors for protecting this beautiful and sacred place.¹

Two of the principles that guide the path of a *danzante* are humility and respect. This ethic reminds me to always begin by asking permission, acknowledging all my relations – beginning with ancestors and closest circles of family and community – human and beyond human. This *danzante* ethic also reminds me to begin by acknowledging, and asking permission, of my elders and teachers. This is the only good way I could begin, in ceremonial protocol. Practicing this in a settler colonial, imperial university such as UC Berkeley is an act of resistance, of refusal. I resist a neoliberal academic culture that seeks to acknowledge and celebrate degrees such as a PhD as achievements of exceptional individuals alone. In my view, there is no such thing as a wholly autonomous individual achievement – we are all related, and therefore we must celebrate our achievements as a concrete expression of this inter-relatedness, of this inter-being. In this way, I think of this project as a practice of *tequio*² – an ancestral concept that privileges collective work for collective benefit. As part of a *danzante* state of mind, *tequio* is a ceremonial act. It a way to work together that centers the process, not just the end product, and thus rethinks the privileged position of productivity that is so normalized in heteropatriarchal, capitalist notions of work. This dissertation is not an end, but only a momentary glimpse into a much larger process of continually coming to know and become, in relationship. In this way I would like to acknowledge my mentors and communities, not as inspirations but as co-authors.

As a *danzante*, I am the product of my Maestra Chicueyi Coatl Patricia Juárez and our *Calpulli Huey Papalotl. Tlazocamati calpulequeh* past, present and future: Laura, Nayeli, Yayita, Carmen, Vero, Lolita, Teo, Atzin, Quena, Pablo, Sewa, Tomás, Yaocipac, Marinette, Vreni, Coyokiztli, Melissa, Eliannita Yei Huitzitzilin, Atava, Liz, Marisol, Gingi, Dani, Raheni, Nickolas, and many others. I am a reflection of our

¹ In this dissertation, I will use italics throughout to emphasize the first usage of each non-English key term, all internal narration, and when defining a key concept regardless of language. As the text progresses, I will still include parenthetical definitions for many terms from non-English languages to maximize clarity for all readers.

² *Tequio* is the modern, Hispanicized translation of *tequiyotl*, from *tequi-* and *-yotl*, the process of working together in community that is still practiced throughout Anahuac.

community, our circle, our mirror, and I carry this *cargo* (ceremonial position) with the humbleness that must accompany such a huge responsibility. I must give thanks to my plant teacher, Atava Garcia Swiecicki and Ancestral Apothecary for teaching me to communicate with our “plantcestors.”³ Both Atava and the plants themselves were some of my most adamant guides who encouraged me to start *danzando*, following the *consejo* (advice) of la Jefa Maria Miranda, who said that if we really wanted to deepen our relationships with the beloved *plantitas*, that we needed to dance. After Maestra Atava brought me to one night of *ensayo* (danza practice), *el huehuetl me jaló*, the medicine called on me to become a danzante, and I have been dancing ever since.

Tlazocamati, *mucha chikawa*, gratitude for the many *jefxs de la danza* who have influenced and taught me through their example: Maestro Alvaro Tellez and Jefa Irma Piñeda del Grupo Teokalli, Jefa Xochitezca Yaocihuatl y Maestro Eheca de Danza Chikawa Conroe Texas, Jefe Ixtliocelotl Pedro Díaz de Calpulli Xolalpan Teopanacazco Teotihuacan, Maestro Juan Anceno de Calpulli Nanahuatzin, Maestro Güero de Grupo Mixcoatl Anahuac, Maestro Juan Esteva de Danza In Xochitl, In Cuicatl, Maestrx Xico Garza de Calpulli Tepeyollotl Cuahuítlan, Maestro Wash, Maestro Xavier Quijas Yxayotl, Jefa Fabiola Medina de Eztli Chikawa, La Familia Tochtli, Jefe Luis de Danza Azteca Coyolxauhqui, Lxs Maestrxs de Calpulli Ayamictlan Tlalokes, Maestro Juan y Maestra Paty de Ehecatl Tonatiuh, Capitán Gerardo Salinas y Maestra Lucia Caballero de Xipe Totec Esplendor Azteca, La Jefa Macuil Xochitl de Danza Xitlalli, Jefe Yaohecatl de Calpulli Metzcualo Tonalyeztli, Maestra Alejandra Macias de Panquetzaliztli, Jefe Genaro Martinez y Maestra Lidia de Grupo Xochiquetzalli, Jefa Cristina y Jefe Emilio de Grupo Cuauhtonal, Maestrxs Roberto y Laura Castro y la Familia Castro de Danza Izcalli. A special tlazocamati to four super *jefxs* who I have never met in person, but whose work in danza has profoundly touched my heart through the *semillas* they helped *sembrar*. Three are ancestors and one an elder: Maestro Florencio Yescas, Capitán Andres Segura, Don Chuy Ocelotl Ortiz, y la Señora Angelbertha Cobb.

I must also begin by honoring and acknowledging my blood family and DNA ancestors – all those who came before me, who made my life possible. *Chaltu may, gracias* to my Mamá – Dra. Lucy del Carmen Montalvo Hicks – for giving me life, for creating, birthing and raising me with a strong ethical commitment to being kind, patient and just in my relationships. I admire how you move with grace, power and beauty despite unkind worlds and circumstances. *Chaltu may ñuke*. Thank you Papá, *tañi chaw* – Dr. Vicente Gabriel Garzo Toro – for choosing to be a father, and for choosing me as your son. *Gracias* for living from a place of generosity, humility, and a commitment to laboring for and with love. Gratitude to my brother, *peñi* from the same mother, Gabriel Andres Garzo, for your love and support over the years. Our ongoing conversations and debates have shaped me profoundly as a thinker and as a person. I give thanks for my small but fierce *familia* for being such a strong nucleus

³ A term I learned while working with Atava and Layla Kristy Feghali, founder of *River Rose Apothecary*.

from which we could grow together in exile, in diaspora. Chaltu ñaña, to my *querida* Tia Jacqui, *gracias por toda la medicina que siempre llevas contigo*. Prima, my queer kin, I love you and celebrate every little part of you, just as you are. Gracias Tio Tito *por sus guanzas y apoyo en todo, especialmente en este camino de mantener nuestra conexión con nuestro origen a través de la música, el canto, y la poesía*. I give thanks to my bloodlines – Mapuche, Chilean and Spanish – and to the places that I carry in my DNA memory – Wallmapu, Chile, Logroño and Valencia. To my *abuelitas*, Maestras Ana Hicks and Elba Toro Donoso, gracias for teaching me to love education, philosophy and music, for being educators of the heart. To my Tata, thank you for teaching me that math is all about fun, creativity and love. To all my ancestors, to those whose names and origins I know and to the many more who I do not know, I acknowledge you and pray I make you proud. To all my plant, fungal, non-human animal, and star ancestors, to all living beings that make my life possible, this offering, this prayer, is for you.

To my amazing dissertation chair, *Profesora* Laura Pérez, you are the reason I came to this PhD, the reason I stayed, and the reason I am finishing. Your mentorship, guidance and *apoyo* has been the foundation of all of this. I am grateful to learn from your example, as a student and as a human being. Deep gratitude to Prof. Keith Feldman, for your steady and generous support, for always finding a way to offer something positive to the classroom and to our training as Ethnic Studies scholars, and for always starting every class with excellent music. Gracias *Profesora* Angela Marino for your unconditional support and enthusiasm, for teaching us to engage the world with love, fire and genuine curiosity. Prof. Kim TallBear, thank you for modeling integrity, care and playfulness while doing deeply critical work. While writing this dissertation, you were the only advisor who was genuinely interested in hearing what my dreams were saying about my research. You are probably both the funniest and the smartest person I know. *Profesor* Nelson Maldonado-Torres, I would never have considered doing anything like a PhD had you not encouraged and mentored us as *La Colectiva*. Gracias for teaching us to *luchar y pensar con el corazón*.

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Con mucho amor,
Marcelo Garzo Montalvo Nahui Acatl
Huey Tecuilhuitl, 8-Tecpatl
August 2020

Preface

Reflections of a Young Mitotiani

This dissertation is a work of *corazón y conciencia*.⁴ It is a labor of love. When originally proposed, this project did not look much like the text you see here. It was trying to do something else – something that came from the head more than the heart. I am proud of that work, as it is woven throughout this project, but the center of this study is not in the university, it is in ceremony. As I began writing what eventually became this project, other voices and ways of knowing beckoned, cried out to be witnessed, acknowledged as unrecognized relatives. I have come to understand these voices as those of the ancestors.⁵ They⁶ who speak in dreams, in our guts, through the heart, through poetry – feminine ways of knowing that are “dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness” (Lorde 36). Energetic bodies that cannot be sensed by the intellect alone, but by some combination of the many other senses we hold as human beings. In this project I engage in dialogue with these ancestors as a *danzante*, a musician, a researcher, and an educator – focusing on *danza* as a way to translate these many ways of knowing.

I began my path as a *mitotiani*, a *danzante* in the *Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl* tradition, at the end of 1-Calli Xihuitl.⁷ I am a young *danzante*, especially in relation to my relatives who have grown up in the tradition, or the elders who have been dancing and teaching for 30-60 years. Who am I to write this? Beyond imposter syndrome this is also an earnest question in relation to my personal experience and positionality. I identify as *Chilenx*, a son of exiles from the lands currently occupied by the settler nation-state of Chile.⁸ I am a diasporic person, an *im/migrante*, of Indigenous (Mapuche) and Spanish settler (Logroño, Valencianx) descent. I identify as queer. I was born in Tkaronto⁹ and raised in Kumeyaay, Payómkawichum, Lisjan, and Muwekma Ohlone lands.¹⁰ I write, think and dance as a descendent of these lineages, and influenced by these places, communities and lived experiences.

I started dancing in ceremony not as an academic exercise but as part of my own personal healing path. In fact, I began *danzando* soon after withdrawing from my doctoral program in Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, with no intention of returning to academic work. Suffering from unexplainable fevers, inflammation and chronic

⁴ Of the heart and the mind – a teaching from Maestra Chicueyi Coatl.

⁵ Human or otherwise. The notion of ancestors is too often reduced to being anthropocentric and thought of only in relation to direct, human blood ancestors. They are included in this definition of ancestors, but so are all entities that have made life possible in this moment, everything that came before us.

⁶ Throughout this study, I will use the singular, gender-neutral pronoun “they,” especially in relation to entities such as ancestors or energies for whom ascribing a gender as such would be problematic.

⁷ The beginning of Gregorian year 2013.

⁸ Unceded Mapuche, Quechua, Aymara, Rapa Nui, Kunza/Linkanantay, Selknam, and Diaguita territories.

⁹ Traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

¹⁰ North County San Diego and East San Francisco Bay Area.

pain,¹¹ and having recently lost my health insurance coverage that was tied to my being a PhD student, I asked for help from my community. These relatives introduced me to comfrey, to white yarrow and other plant allies that started cleaning out my mind, body and spirit from the inside out – inducing profuse sweating and deep crying that broke me open like a seed.

It was these relatives – human and more than human, plant friends and teachers – that brought me to danza. I have since learned from other *maestrxs* that “*la danza te jala*,” (Hernández-Ávila 2004: 365) that danza pulls you in, that danzantes do not necessarily choose to dance, but that danza chooses you.¹² The beat of the drum, the cleansing copal smoke, the physical movements in the body, the sense of mental, physical and spiritual discipline, many aspects of danza *me jalaron a mi*. My first time danzando felt, at once, like a return and an initiation. Moving and being in my body in ceremony with my community felt like coming home, at the same time that it felt like the beginning of a long journey.

The reflections I share in this dissertation are rooted in these lived experiences as a young mitotiani, shaped through a largely urban, transnational and intercultural Latinx and *Xicanx Indígena* danza landscape. As a non-Mexican, non-Mexican-American danzante I am a minority in the danza community, but by no means an outsider. In my path I have met danzantes from many different nations, including other Chilenxs, Mapuches, and *Andinxs*, as well as relatives from many different parts of *Abya Yala*¹³ – from South, Central and North America. As a danzante in the San Francisco Bay Area,¹⁴ I have come to understand danza as a generous and important intercultural Indigenous space of intergenerational healing – one that honors and welcomes danzantes who carry many different lineages but share a common commitment to honoring and protecting *Anahuacan* danza and knowledge. Through danza I have found a sense of community and belonging that doesn’t necessarily come from one’s credentials or ideology. It’s not “show me your papers,” but show me how you show up for y/our communities – with respect, humility and a good heart.

Though it is also profoundly beautiful, danza is not an easy path. It will kick your butt in more ways than one. In this way, I share my own reflections, mindful that there are many different perspectives and understandings of how we have come to know and practice danza today. Contemporary danza exists in a complex and interconnected field of lineages. Though I respect the very important debates currently taking place within danza about how to maintain the tradition as it is rapidly expanding, I leave those arguments to my elders and *jefxs* who carry a much longer and deeper view of how danza should or shouldn’t be practiced. These are not

¹¹ A growing list of what I have come to call “academic injuries.”

¹² As Yaotekatl Kuikapike Abraham Endoqui sings in his *alabanza*, “*Hoy Me Ha Sonriado Dios*”: “*que felicidad tan grande/pues a mi él me escogió/para que fuera danzante.*” (Endoqui 2011)

¹³ The Kuna concept of *Abya Yala* appears throughout this dissertation, as a way to refer to “the Americas,” as an idea that has emerged from transnational Indigenous dialogues and social movements in particular.

¹⁴ Unceded Ohlone, Karkin, Chochenyo, Lisjan, Muwekma, Mutsun, and Miwok land.

the terms of my debates in this study. Instead I write as a *danzante de la Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl*, a student of the tradition since it has migrated/returned to territories such as California, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona – a post-1968, post-1992 historical moment.¹⁵ It is through *danzando* in this conjuncture (Hall and Massey 2010), *danzando* in these decolonial cracks (Walsh 2014), that I have come to know the things I share in these writings. From this location, in sacred time and place, I offer this study as the reflections of a young *mitotiani* – a *danzante* from Calpulli Huey Papalotl in Huichin, under the *palabra* of Maestra Chicueyi Coatl, in community, in ceremony.

¹⁵ 1968 is a temporal marker for global, Third World solidarity and liberation movements, while 1992 marks an important moment in the formation of transnational Indigenous and decolonial movements across Abya Yala. Both these historical conjunctures have greatly influenced *danza*'s shape and trajectory as I have experienced it.

Introduction

La danza cósmica anahuaca, nos permite vivir nuestra realidad dual de manera plena, viendo nuestras raíces. Mientras danzamos todos somos Omoteotl, unidos por nuestras raíces comunes: nuestra madre tierra, la lluvia, el aire y el sol...Cuando nos asumimos como parte del cosmos, como una manifestación consciente de estos cuatro elementos cósmicos, nuestro Ser esencial entra en armonía total. Podría decirse que, nuestra responsabilidad social es justamente ésta, vivir en permanente armonía total. Cuando fallamos en este compromiso fundamental, es cuando se manifiesta Tezcatlipoca dentro de nuestra conciencia, para recordarnos que no estamos cumpliendo cabalmente con nuestro deber. El universo, es decir Omoteotzintli, se manifiesta en cada uno de nosotros como Tezcatlipoca: como lo que se siente en nuestro propio corazón...Quienes practican la danza cósmica anahuaca de manera diaria o regular, se mantienen siempre en armonía total. Al danzar, se mantiene uno consciente de su integración con la totalidad. Una vez en armonía interior, nuestro cuerpo se encarga de sanar, cuando padecemos alguna enfermedad, o nuestra mente se encarga de descubrir la solución a nuestro problema vital. Esta es la trascendencia de la danza cósmica anahuaca: mantenernos en permanente armonía cósmica.

[Anahuacan cosmic dance allows us to live fully in our dual reality, seeing our roots. While we are dancing, we are all Omoteotl, united by our common roots: our Mother Earth, the rain, the air and the sun...When we join ourselves as part of the cosmos, as a conscious manifestation of these four cosmic elements, our essential Being enters into total harmony. It could be said that our social responsibility is precisely this, to live in permanent and total harmony. When we fail in this fundamental commitment, is when Tezcatlipoca manifests within our consciousness, to remind us that we are not fully completing our duties. The universe, that is to say Omoteotzintli, manifests in each of us as Tezcatlipoca: as what we feel in our hearts...Those who practice Anahuacan cosmic dance on a daily or regular basis, always remain in total harmony. By dancing, one remains conscious of their integration with the whole. Once we are in inner harmony, our bodies take on the work of healing when we are suffering from a disease, or our minds work to find a solution to our vital problem. This is the transcendence of the Anahuacan cosmic dance: maintaining ourselves in permanent cosmic harmony.]

Maestro Tlakatzin Stivalet,
quoted in (González Torres 191, my translation)

The heritage of an Indigenous people is not merely a collection of objects, stories and ceremonies, but a complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity. The diverse elements of an Indigenous people's heritage can only be fully learned or understood by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by the peoples themselves, including apprenticeship, ceremonies and practice. Simply recording words or images fails to capture the whole context and meaning of songs, rituals, arts or scientific and medical wisdom. This also underscores the central role Indigenous peoples' own languages, through which each people's heritage has traditionally been recorded and transmitted from generation to generation.

Dr. Erica-Irene Daes, *Preliminary Report of the Special Rapporteur: Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous Peoples* (1994)
quoted in (Battiste and Youngblood 20)

Vamos a volar a las estrellas
sin spaceship.

Luis Valdez, *Pensamiento Serpentino*

Introductory Note

A short note on the protocol and structure of this dissertation. I will begin with an overview of the background, purpose, importance and scope of the study. This will include research hypotheses and questions. I will then turn to the theoretical frameworks, key terms, concepts, method/ology and literature review. These first sections serve as the academic protocol necessary to situate the study in its overall approach. The study will then enter into a more direct engagement with the content of Anahuacan ceremonial dance, which includes an important shift in form and style. This is one of the intentions of the study itself, to engage through these different voices that represent different ways of knowing. If the reader is most interested in the content of danza practice itself, the body chapters will be of the most interest, beginning on page 64. These chapters were written first and remain the heart of the dissertation. Nonetheless, reading through the study in its entirety is recommended if the reader seeks to engage this work through existing intellectual discourses and academic fields of study. The ultimate goal has been to weave these ways of knowing into something that can be engaged from many points of entry. Having been designed as such, the reader is also invited to experiment with how to engage the text: reading from the middle and folding out to each chapter, flipping to random pages and passages, reading from the end to the beginning, and other non-linear ways of knowing.

Background of the Study

Danza is a rich tradition of ceremonial dance rooted in Mexica, Azteca, Tolteca, Chichimeca, and other Indigenous Anahuacan¹⁶ lineages. Contemporary danzantes and *calpultin*¹⁷ continue to practice and protect this sacred knowledge throughout Anahuac/Turtle Island (Central/North America) despite centuries of settler colonialism and genocide.¹⁸ Contemporary danza is descended from generations of danzante ancestors whose resiliency, creativity and vision guided a process of encoding Indigenous knowledge in covert ways, to survive/resist the ongoing invasion of *Cemanahuac/Abya Yala* (the Americas) by European settlers. Through embodied practices of dance, music, poetry, and *artesanía*,¹⁹ danzantes continue to water the seeds of ancestral memory – awakening *huehuetlahtolli*²⁰ in community and

¹⁶ I use the Nahuatl-based concepts of Anahuac and Anahuacan to describe the cultural system in which danza is situated. This extends from the teachings of my maestra Chicueyi Coatl, and other maestrxs who advance this discourse and terminology. For the sake of building common understanding, the closest analog in English would be the term coined in 1943 by German archaeologist Paul Kirchhoff, “Mesoamerican.” See also: “Purpose of the Study,” p.8 and (Rodríguez 4).

¹⁷ Plural for calpulli, meaning danza communities, can also be pluralized as calpulumeh, others also use calpulli for both singular and plural.

¹⁸ An understanding of colonial invasion as “a structure not an event,” where “settler colonizers come to stay” (Wolfe 388).

¹⁹ Hand-made craftwork that includes sewing, painting, feather work, metal work, leather work, and flower work.

²⁰ Translated literally from the Nahuatl as “the elder words” or “the original word,” refers to ancestral ways of knowing, original instructions transmitted through the oral tradition.

in ceremony. As a young danzante and Ethnic Studies scholar, my work traces how danza is an embodied, ceremonial and communal way of knowing. Through my dissertation project, I evidence the ways in which danza serves as a *decolonial* practice, theory, and pedagogy – as a resistant way of producing and transmitting Indigenous epistemologies amidst a *coloniality of power and knowledge*.²¹

This work emerges from a critical and comparative Ethnic Studies engagement with Xicanx/Latinx Studies, Dance and Performance Studies and hemispheric Indigenous Studies. Dancing/thinking from this transdisciplinary crossroads²² I combine analytical and *theoretico-praxical*²³ frameworks to think *from* danza as well as *about* danza, as a “complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity” (Battiste and Youngblood 20). This approach is informed by projects (academic or otherwise) that are working to recover and protect Indigenous knowledge systems in their own languages and on their own terms – resisting continued colonial misinterpretations of Native thought.²⁴

These linguistic, cosmological and political commitments to Indigenous epistemic sovereignty refuse reductive, or otherwise superficial readings of danza. As *Mexicano* professor and journalist Roberto “Dr. Cintli” Rodríguez (2014) argues, “the danza ceremonial tradition is a place where Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and memory are stored and a principal vehicle by which this knowledge continues to be transmitted and communicated, often at a level not apparent to the casual observer” (145). In this way, if danza emerges in the popular cultural imaginary, it is often interpreted as a form of “ethnic dance,” as a colorful cultural performance of ethnic and national pride.²⁵ For example, when included in public cultural events, such as celebrations of *Cinco de Mayo* or *Día de los Muertos*, danza is seen as a short, intense cultural *ofrenda* (offering) for the community. Though these community blessings are an important aspect of danza as a form of community service, they are only a tiny fraction of the deep, everyday commitments that define Anahuacan ceremonial dance theory and practice.

Another contemporary performance space in which the general public may encounter danza is in the theater or concert hall, as a performance taking place on stage. For example, public events such as the yearly *Ethnic Dance Festival* in San Francisco, CA, have included danza-inspired performances as part of their

²¹ A preliminary definition provided by Steve Martinot: “The coloniality of power is an expression coined by Anibal Quijano to name the structures of power, control, and hegemony that have emerged during the modernist era, the era of colonialism, which stretches from the conquest of the Americas to the present” (Martinot, “Coloniality of Power,” 1).

²² Which is in fact an intersection of intersections, an interdiscipline of interdisciplines.

²³ Building on the liberatory philosophical work of recent decolonial ancestor María Lugones (2003), who wrote of the “theoretico-practical” (ix) and “praxical thinking” (8) as ways to think and work together in “coalition against multiple oppressions” (Lugones 2003).

²⁴ Pro-Indigenous scholars working on this include Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Zairong Xiang (2018), Liv Østmo and John Law (2018), Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo (1994), as well as Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl community projects such as Anahuacalmecac in Tongva lands and Calmecac Tlalocan in Ohlone lands.

²⁵ For example, in Peter Bratt's (2009) film *La Mission*, in local newspapers, or through witnessing danza at protests or cultural events in public if one lives in a place where danza is a regular part of the cultural landscape.

programming numerous times since their founding in 1999. In this context, danza is presented as a form of “*ballet folklórico*,” as an ethnic or folkloric dance (“Festival Dancers”). Within this performance space and cultural marketplace of world dance and music, danza exists as a spectacle – with clear lines drawn²⁶ between the practitioner and the observer, the performer and the audience.

By way of background to this study, I must juxtapose and problematize these momentary, public glimpses of danza in relation to the contemporary ceremonial practice of Anahuacan cosmic dance. Danza is not an event, nor a performance in the commonsense usage of the term. Reducing danza practice to a form of “ballet folklórico” runs the risk of rearticulating neocolonial tropes of *mestizaje* that rely on the “exotification of the ‘folk’ that is part and parcel of colonial conceptions of the world,” where “Indigenous cultures are valuable only in their ancient forms” (Hutchinson 219-220). Removed from its context of contemporary Indigenous community and ceremoniality, this practice of cultural performance represents something else – though not something entirely separate, as there are many danzantes who dance across all these spaces.

Tracing these slippages between danza on the stage, in the community, and in ceremony, however, does provide insight into the politics of performance space (Ngũgĩ 11) that danza traverses. In other words, juxtaposing danza as an everyday ceremonial praxis vis-à-vis an event-based cultural spectacle provides an important opening through which we can begin problematizing danza as a way of knowing.²⁷ Pointing to these differences is not meant to simply criticize public displays of danza, nor the danzantes and jefxs who participate in these ways.²⁸ Instead, I mean to point to the problematic cultural landscape in which these danzantes are dancing – that is, a *modern/colonial matrix of power and knowledge* (Grosfoguel 2011). Conscious of these politics of performance space – of the cultural struggles that take place through practices such as danza – I argue that it is *ceremoniality* itself that radically transforms these relationships of power, knowledge, and community. Danza in its communal, embodied and ceremonial form, as an Indigenous theoretico-praxis, is a “complete knowledge system” (Battiste and Youngblood 20). It is a way of life, *a way of knowing*.

Centering danza as a way of knowing leads us to the question of epistemology. In his lectures, Ethnic Studies scholar and ancestor Ronald Takaki (2008) would often ask – “how do you know, you know, what you know” (441)? From the perspective of Ethnic Studies, this epistemological question is being posed critically, in a dominant intellectual milieu that is understood to be Eurocentric, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, secularized, abilist and capitalist. When viewed from dominant, Westernized perspectives and epistemologies, practices such as danza are seen as marginal to studies of philosophy or science – infantilized through discourses of

²⁶ In the form of elevated stages and professional-grade lights, sound, costumes and dancers.

²⁷ See also: Jacqueline Shea Murphy’s (2007) *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*.

²⁸ While some jefxs are quite critical of danza being considered a form of “performance” or “spectacle,” others point out that dancing professionally and for money allows dancers to commit their lives more fully to the practice, on and off stage. This remains an active debate, which serves as an important future direction for this research.

Indigenous ceremonial knowledge as mythology or superstition, as “an attempt by people less sophisticated than ourselves to explain the constitution or origin of the world” (Deloria 352). In this context, if practices such as danza are understood to carry any knowledge at all, it is only the technical information needed to remember the steps and protocol of dances for the purposes of being presented at events that celebrate one’s cultural heritage and identity. In many cases, Indigenous knowledge is not understood as knowledge at all. Through Western eyes, one cannot, in fact, see the complex and living system of knowledge that is being embodied and animated through practices such as danza. This colonial epistemic attitude is often unconscious, as it is so profoundly embedded in institutional and popular prejudices of what counts (and doesn’t count) as knowledge. As Maori scholar-activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has argued, the notion of an “Indigenous intellectual” has been oxymoronic to the West for so long.

Therefore, this study of danza as a way of knowing is an effort to challenge, subvert and radically transform these dominant epistemologies and worldviews from an Other perspective, “from below.”²⁹ Imperial ways of seeing and knowing have been constructed precisely in the service of genocide, colonialism, imperialism and other projects of domination and exploitation (Grosfoguel 2013; Smith 1999). Thus, I cannot rely on existing disciplinary methodologies of study alone as they carry these implicit teleologies of erasure, elimination, silencing and dehumanizing Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing. Perhaps this is why Frantz Fanon (2008) declares: “I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves” (14). To achieve this shift in perception I must explicitly engage in a decolonization of knowledge and power process. In the context of the modern/colonial, settler research university, this entails shifting “the geo- and body politics of knowledge and power” (Mignolo 2005) in ways that actively center danzantes (and Indigenous peoples at large) as knowers – in their own right and on their own terms. This is what I have already described as thinking *from* danza as well as *about* danza. This will allow a more holistic and radical understanding of danza as a way of knowing itself, as well as critique and reimagine (for the Westernized mind at least) what currently counts as knowledge. Indigenous ceremonial dance is a powerful theoretico-praxis from which to reconsider these questions in generative ways – as a challenge to multicultural, anthropological and other modern/colonial oversights of danza’s embedded and embodied epistemologies.

²⁹ The Other, from below, is a sub-Other, is speaking and intervening from the zone of nonbeing, see also: (Gordon 2015), (Maldonado-Torres 2008).

Purpose of the Study

“Scholarly papers and dissertations based wholly on the knowledge of the tribe could well hasten the day when our species could deal intelligently with the world in which we live” (Deloria 71).

This dissertation provides an in-depth look at danza as a theoretico-praxis of an Indigenous knowledge system – as a way of knowing through an Anahuacan *cosmovisión*. In this study I utilize the Nahuatl concepts of Anahuac and Anahuacan to describe the cultural system from which danza emerges. Anahuac literally translates from the Nahuatl as “the place surrounded by water,” or “the place with water in all four directions” (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2015). Danzantes and other participants in the Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl movement will also refer to the concept of *Cemanahuac*, adding the prefix *cem-*, meaning “the one”, and thus referring to “all of Anahuac” (Rodríguez 201). Most translations from early colonial codices translate “cemanahuac” as “the universe” or “the world,” as a more abstracted term, while Anahuac continues to circulate as a way to refer to more specific territories of influence (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*).

What this term means geographically remains an active debate. This is in part due to the fact that Anahuac is a way to describe many territories at once. At the scale of the city, *in altepetl*, Anahuac refers to the ceremonial center of *Mexico-Tenochtitlan* – the floating urban *xictli* (belly button, altar) that sits in the middle of the ancestral brackish water of Lake Texcoco. At the largest scale, Anahuac is used to refer to the territories and cultures of all Indigenous nations who speak Uto-Aztecan languages (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Fall 2018). To illustrate the boundaries of Anahuac at this scale, maestrxs (danza leaders) will point to contemporary place names at the northern and southern extremes of this geography. In this way, the country now known as “Nicaragua” is understood as a mistranslation of the term “*Nicananahuac*”, which in Nahuatl means, “here is the limit of Anahuac” (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2015). To trace some of the northernmost connections within the Anahuacan cultural impulse, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl teaches that the city of Seattle, named for Dkhw'Duw'Absh (Duwamish) leader Chief Seattle, is also an Anahuacan term. In this way, Seattle is *Ce-Atl*, “1-Water,” the *tonalli* or “cosmic identity” of this great ancestor (Fieldnotes, Spring 2015). The presence of Anahuacan-style mounds in the ancient city of Cahokia (outside St. Louis, MO) provides further evidence of migration patterns and cultural cohesion across these vast areas (Fieldnotes, Summer 2016).

It is important to note here that these geographies are traced primarily through the oral tradition³⁰ and mobilized most often by danzantes to demonstrate deep ancestral migration patterns and cross-cultural interconnections amongst original peoples of these lands. In this way, Dr. Cintli (2014) points to similar transnational

³⁰ And are thus also the subject of heated archaeological debate.

Indigenous concepts such as Turtle Island, Abya Yala, or *Pachamama* (Rodríguez 201). To my knowledge, however, none of these concepts, including Anahuac, have been used to make contemporary territorial claims to Indigenous land rights or sovereignty. Though outside the scope of this study, it is important to recognize that these are all different ways of tracing and honoring Indigeneity across Abya Yala/Cemanahuac. Similar debates abound regarding the concept of *Aztlan*. My usage of Anahuac and Anahuacan, therefore, are meant to situate danza in a transnational Indigeneity that I could also term an *Indigenous cosmopolitanism*.³¹

Anahuacan then refers to the palimpsestic accumulation and collaborative cross-pollinations of the many Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems that have emerged from these places – radiating from the *ombligo* (belly button) center of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, stretching out in all four directions. With Maya and Olmeca as mother cultures, the Anahuacan tradition also includes Toltec, Zapotec, Aztec, Diné, Shoshone-Bannock, Mixtec, and many other Uto-Aztecan cultures. Indigenous knowledges and cultures migrated throughout these circuits for millennia before being interrupted by European colonization and nation-state borders. Dr. Cintli’s (2014) work tracing the ancestral connectivity and continual presence of “maíz-based cultures” makes similar articulations across the continent. Extending the work of Maya linguist Domingo Martínez Parédez (1960), Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1996), and many others, Dr. Cintli (2014) argues that “maíz itself is the civilizational impulse or seed (*xinachtli*) that triggered the development of what is today known as Mesoamerica” (4). Importantly, he clarifies “this is not to suggest that all maíz-based cultures are the same but that they generally do exhibit traces of that civilization impulse” (Ibid.). “Mesoamerica” however, “is not a native concept,” and must be redefined (Ibid.). Following Dr. Cintli’s work, I argue that danza, as a maíz-based, ceremonial theoretico-praxis, helps to trace an Anahuacan cosmovisión as a decolonial, Indigenous-centered alternative to more Eurocentric discourses such as Mesoamerican, or even relying on nation-states as unit of analysis.³²

With Nahuatl as its primary spoken language and ceremony as its central locus of enunciation, danza sits at the heart of an Anahuacan cosmovisión and way of life. In this way, it becomes clear why danza has historically served as such a durable vessel of Indigenous continuity and creative resistance. Contemporary danzantes activate a field of ancestral consciousness that is not simply a reclamation of an essentialist Indigenous identity, but a form of cosmic belonging and decolonial re-articulation. This understanding of danza as *re-membering* implies a deeper critical engagement with dominant philosophies and worldviews that reduce dance to merely a form of entertainment or aesthetic expression. Instead, understanding danza as a form of theoretico-praxis presents a more radical epistemic break, a

³¹ Though I have formulated this concept within the terms of my own study, see also: (Forte, et al. 2010) and (Flores Silva 2017).

³² I will return to this connection at-length in Chapter Five, working again from Dr. Cintli’s research, which includes danza as a way to trace maíz-based cultures and civilization.

paradigm shift, a decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2008) away from Cartesian, Kantian, Humboldtian and other dominant, modern/colonial, hetero, white male epistemologies. For *danzantes* in ceremony – including myself writing/thinking here – this is a creative act of refusal, an enactment of power (Ngũgĩ 1997), a temporo-spatial re-centering, a performance of epistemic sovereignty.

Dancing the Word

As a dissertation about ceremonial dance as a way of knowing - where thinking is dancing, and dancing is thinking – this work itself explores writing on the page as a form of dancing in ceremony. This is a way of creatively interpreting one level of the *danzante dicho* (saying) – “*mi danza es mi palabra*” (“my dance is my word”), or “*danza tu palabra*” (“dance your word”) (González Torres 2005).³³ One way I have witnessed this teaching in ceremony is by way of closing ceremonial space, while the community gathers in *palabra* (talking circle protocol). Whoever is in charge of giving *palabra* – of organizing who gets to speak in front of the altar, and therefore also who doesn’t, most often a *jefx* (danza leader) – will sometimes apologize for not being able to give everyone an opportunity to speak out loud. In this way, they will take the opportunity to remind those present that “*tu danza es tu palabra*,” “your dance is your word.” This danza-based philosophy implies that we actually don’t even need to speak our thoughts and prayers out loud for them to be known. If we danced with a clean heart, mind and intention – our prayers will be heard, our thoughts will be transmitted to all beings to whom they were directed.

An Anahuacan *cosmovisión* is rooted in this understanding of the power of the word, of *palabra* as *tlahtolli*. As Yaocuahtli-Tolteca elder Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) writes, “Through the word you express your creative power. It is through the word that you manifest everything. Regardless of what language you speak, your intent manifests through the word. What you dream, what you feel, and what you really are, will all be manifested through the word. The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The word is a force; it is the power you have express and communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in your life” (26). The word, as *tlahtolli*, is the creative power we carry as human beings. Language is the medium through which we create our reality. In this way, *palabra* is a gift, a power, a responsibility.

The connections between the power of the word and the movements of dance are reflected in the linguistic morphology of Nahuatl terms that describe each of these concepts – *tlahtoā* as “the word” and *mihtoā* as “the movement,” or “dance.” Both these words share a root concept of *-itoah*, which means “to express.” At this level, *-itoah* could refer to any form of expression, or using language to transmit a message, including a bird singing to the rising sun, for example (Calmecac Nexticpac 2016).

³³ Though most often associated with the Concheros themselves, this saying also circulates in Mexicayotl-Toltecatoytl communities. I evoke this concept here to honor the intergenerational wisdom it teaches through danza. See also: *Danza Tu Palabra: La Danza de los Concheros* by Yolotl González Torres (2005).

Palabra (the word) as *tlahtoā* is *tlah-toā* – expressing oneself with words, or more literally translated as “saying something.” Mitoah then is *mo-itoā*, expressing oneself with movement and gestures, more literally “they express themselves.” Palabra as ceremonial protocol is *tlahtolli*, while danza in ceremony is *mitotiliztli*. All these concepts grow from the shared root of *-ihtoa*, to express (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*).

This is part of the ancestral knowledge that is embedded in the *danzante* teaching of “our dance is our word.” Our expressions – whether they are sung, spoken, danced or expressed through any other language – are simply other ways of speaking the same intention. Therefore, this study is not bounded by the notion of writing (with words) as a privileged form of thinking, nor with language as a necessarily *worded* concept. As a *danzante*, I also dance my words, I also sing these words. In this expanded framework of ceremonial expression, this study provides only one small window into a much larger expressive process. These ways of knowing and expressing/thinking interrupt Eurocentric, linear narratives of intellectual progress that classify Indigenous knowledge systems as “pre-literate” or as coming from “nonliterate” societies.³⁴ *Danza* is not simply “pre-literate,” but an *Other* literacy. It is *super-literate* – beyond written literacy – and *inter-textual* – containing many ways of reading, writing and expressing/speaking at once. These *danzante* ways of knowing inform and shape how I read, write and think on the page throughout this dissertation. In other words, while I write these words, I have also danced these words, I have also sung these words, I have also sewn these words, I have also drawn these words, I have also cried these words – which are ways of speaking, in other words.

Decoloniality as a Paradigm Shift

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2012),³⁵ historian of science Thomas Kuhn provides a robust analytical framework through which he traces “paradigm changes” in the trajectories of Western science (84). Although the notion of a “paradigm shift” now circulates in popular discourse with its own flexible definition, I return to Kuhn’s work here to unpack and reconsider one of its most developed and well-known theorizations (xix). For Kuhn, the term *paradigm* provides a few important epistemic and historical functions. As a “fundamental unit for the student of scientific development,” Kuhn theorizes “paradigms” in close relation to what he calls “normal science” (11). For Kuhn (2012), “Men³⁶ whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science, i.e. for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition” (Ibid.). As a social structural study of the history of Western science, Kuhn

³⁴ See also: (Houston 1994).

³⁵ Originally published 1962.

³⁶ For Kuhn, scientists are always men.

develops this discourse in relation to historical “paradigm shifts” such as the “Copernican, Newtonian, chemical, and Einsteinian revolutions” (67).

As scientists practice “normal science,” they engage in “puzzle solving” – a metaphor that Kuhn (2012) relies on to describe the ways in which scientists who purport to make “discoveries” are, in fact, more so involved in the enterprise of solving “puzzles” (36). In this way, the “rules” and “acceptable solutions” are predetermined, as the paradigm remains unproblematized (or perhaps, unproblematizable). The puzzle is a metaphor for the paradigm in that it provides the limited space of “coherence” within which acceptable scientific inquiry can take place. However, as “normal science” continues to “solve puzzles,” problems that fall outside the epistemic, methodological and cultural scope of normal science – outside the boundaries of the puzzle as it were – are set aside as “anomalies,” as unanswerable or perhaps un-askable questions. These anomalies accumulate at the margins of normal science over time, until certain anomalies bring normal science to a point of “crisis” (68). Kuhn’s (2012) evidence here are historical problems in Western science that led to paradigm shifts, such as the question of “ether” (74) for astrophysicists working at the turn of the 20th century, or the cumulative problems that arose from astronomy that relied on the Ptolemaic, geocentric model of the cosmos (67).

From these “crises,” brought on by “anomalies,” come the possibility of “revolution” (90). However, this process is not a simple, linear accumulation but instead a struggle over competing ways to respond to the crisis. Of course, the possibility of revolution is often subdued by scientists who are willing to continue reconciling the anomalies from within the existing paradigm – what Kuhn describes as “resistance” (64). However, for Kuhn (2012), as these crises continue to create the possibility – and necessity – of alternative paradigms, there comes a time when these competing responses to crisis become “incommensurable” (147). At this point, scientists are no longer debating about different interpretations of anomalous results but are now in a fundamental conflict over paradigms – moving from solving puzzles to now requiring a “a shift in worldview” (111).

My own study considers Kuhn’s (2012) discourse in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in light of the question of the decolonization of knowledge and power. I hypothesize that a full-length study of danza as a way of knowing may provide a rich case study from which to theorize decoloniality itself as a paradigm shift. The key aspects of danza that I will unpack – as an Indigenous, ceremonial, embodied and community-based theoretico-praxis – compel a reimagining and decolonial appropriation of Kuhn’s own lexicon. Redefining science, crisis, revolution and incommensurability from Other theories and worldviews (Cajete 2000; Boggs 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012) I will trace a genealogy from “liberation” (Dussel 1985; Lugones 2003) to “decolonization” (Maldonado-Torres 2008; Sandoval 2000) and “decoloniality” (Pérez 2019; Mignolo and Walsh 2018) as a paradigm shift.

Thinking/dancing from an Anahuacan cosmovision, I posit that studying danza in this way provides a window into the paradigm shift that is emerging from our

current moment of crisis and (r)evolution (Boggs 2012). As a structural phenomenon, this is a crisis that is rooted in 500-year-old projects of settler colonialism, genocide, racial slavery and heteropatriarchy (Grosfoguel 2013). From this perspective, the paradigm shifts that Kuhn describes in his own study are re-situated as their own forms of “puzzle-solving” in their own right – as Westernized ways of knowing that have yet to problematize their own coloniality of power and knowledge. In this way, I explore danza as a radical critique of the dominant epistemic order – as a *holistic* approach where science, art, spirituality and philosophy dance together in community and in ceremony. The shift in worldview here is concrete – from a modern/colonial paradigm of Eurocentric knowledge and power to an Anahuacan cosmovisión that is rooted in *re-membering right relations*. The final hypotheses that guide this study emerge from the question of ceremoniality. What is ceremony? Why is it important? What does danza teach us about ceremony and ceremoniality? What happens when we place ceremony at the center of our projects of decolonization and decoloniality? What role does ceremony play in the shifting of the geo- and body politics of knowledge? How is ceremony situated within current decolonial movements?

On Black Holes and the Possibilities of Interculturality

In her book *Punk Science: Inside the Mind of God*, Dr. Manjir Samanta-Laughton (2006) offers a novel theory of black holes. She posits that what we understand as “black holes” are not simply objects in spacetime but are just one scale at which a “black hole principle” manifests and therefore can be observed and understood (Samanta-Laughton 173). Dr. Manjir’s central argument is that a black hole is not just a *what* but a *how*. She finds evidence of the black hole principle³⁷ in stars, quasars, galaxies, and surprisingly in thunderstorms on earth, and even surrounding the human heart (202). Of course, it is now generally accepted that at the center of our own home galaxy of *Mixcoatl* (“The Milky Way”) sits a super massive black hole, or perhaps two. After exploring the dynamics of black holes through these principles, Dr. Samanta-Laughton (2006) offers a radically different theory of “the event horizon,” stating:

We are now ready to totally reverse what we know about black holes. Black holes are not destructive; they are the source of creation for the universe. At the center of the black hole is the singularity, which we can now redefine as an infinite source of light. From this infinite source, light makes its journey, stepping down through the higher dimensions that lie beyond our perception, until it reaches the edge of our reality. This is

³⁷ Which includes evidence such as light energy splitting into its component parts: gamma rays, matter/antimatter.

the event horizon of the black hole, delineating what lies above and below the speed of light (240).

In this way Dr. Samantha-Laughton posits that the cosmic boundary currently known as the “event horizon” of a black hole is in fact a “perception horizon” – that it is not nothingness that lies beyond the “blackness” of a black hole, but infinity itself. However, humans cannot readily perceive the infinite. Here Dr. Manjir posits that we must consider practices such as meditation, lucid dreaming, energy healing, and psychedelic experiences as “mystic technologies,” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2013) as other ways of knowing that open up the possibilities of perception, and therefore expand what can be known. This perception horizon can also be understood through looking at the human senses. In this way, our physical senses have a perception horizon – what we can and cannot perceive in terms of wave frequencies that manifest as, for example, temperature, sound, and color. The black hole principle therefore is not only another way to see black holes as such but a framework for transforming perception itself. The black hole principle is not only an astronomical phenomenon but a cosmological and metaphysical intervention. In other words, it asks us to consider the sensoria and worldviews through which we understand the nature of reality.

I learned of Dr. Manjir’s work while attending her workshop at the *Institute of Noetic Sciences* (IONS) bi-annual conference in California’s Palm Desert in 2013. Throughout the full-day workshop I was overcome by feelings of profound synchronicity, making deep and surprising connections with what she was presenting. At the time, I was working as an apprentice for two traditional Anahuacan healers – one an herbalist and the other a *temescalero* (sweat lodge leader) and therapist. In circle with these jefxs, I was beginning to learn about the concept of *Ometeotl*. Though it almost impossible to fully translate or describe this concept in words only, the closest translation could be “the sacred dualistic energy of cosmic creation,” or perhaps “the venerable creative energy of universe that arrives in two.”³⁸ When Dr. Manjir was describing the black hole principle and the properties that become visible once we shift our perceptions of what a black hole actually is, the connection became crystal clear. This Western-trained physician turned New Age punk astrophysicist was describing *Ometeotl*! She was providing the other side of a cosmological bridge over which I could cross – bridging the epistemic chasm between Western and Anahuacan worldviews.

A large part of this synchronicity lies in the context for my even being present at this workshop and conference in the first place. I had recently withdrawn from my doctoral program – due to deep stress triggering increasingly frequent flare-ups of chronic pain and illness – and was determined to find another path besides the academic one. A few months before the conference I was contacted by one of my

³⁸ See also Chapter 0: “*Ometeotl*.”

dearest mentors, Belvie Rooks, with a proposal. The way I've been taught, when an elder calls on you to do some healing work, don't ask questions, just show up and be of service. With no background or detailed information, Belvie instructed me to drive down to Southern California, passing through the Los Angeles area to pick up a young father and his son, and then continue on to Palm Desert to a hotel where this conference was taking place. When we arrived, we were taken directly into a workshop space, and told we were co-facilitating an "inter-generational dialogue" (Fieldnotes, Summer 2013). Here *inter-generational* referred to there being children, young adults, mature adults, elders, ancestors and future descendants in the room together. This is something that ceremony makes possible.

This circle was, to my surprise, a profoundly new experience. Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian-American, European, European-American and mixed-race peoples and medicines were sitting in community and in ceremony together. One of the elders facilitating the space, Diane Longboat (Mohawk), shared that this was a reflection of the teaching of the medicine wheel of her nation – the balance that becomes possible when red, black, white and yellow medicines are in right relationship (Fieldnotes, Summer 2013). These colors refer to corn, to elements, and also to human beings, as those who carry medicine from the four corners of the world. Diane also shared that she had recently been invited and traveled to Ireland to meet with communities that had maintained their Celtic and Galic traditions and knowledge. In ceremony on those lands, she put down tobacco, asking for the descendants of that place who had become settlers in Abya Yala (the Americas) to "come home." In this context this meant to come back to their roots, for Irish Americans who have been de-territorialized for centuries to return to their traditional, land-based ways of knowing. She described this work as being fundamental to our shared need to coming back to harmony within a larger, global medicine wheel. Making this prayer as an Indigenous woman whose lands had been colonized and continue to be occupied by Europeans settlers is a radical act of spiritual resistance.

I tell these stories because these ceremonies remain the clearest point of origin I can find for the work I have eventually taken up through this study. I left the university,³⁹ seeking ways of knowing and being that brought about healing and wholeness. After three more circles with these elders, I continued to witness the possibilities of continuing to build and strengthen these bridges between different ways of knowing – between Western and Indigenous sciences in particular. Many of the central problems, questions and concerns of this study were planted in those inter-cultural and inter-generational ceremonies. Honoring each of the cultural specificities and ecological groundings of these terms, in their own languages and communities, helps build this medicine wheel in a good way. The continuity that can be traced across these systems through respectful and careful dialogue can foment a

³⁹ Though I have since returned, to teach and now finish this dissertation.

species-wide healing process – something I see as one of the loftiest goals of a project such as Ethnic Studies.

The concept of harmony and balance that is embedded in Diane Longboat's explanation of the medicine wheel is something I have since come to know through similar Anahuacan technologies of *nauhcampa* (four directions) or the *quincunx* (the square in the circle). In an Anahuacan context, this could be understood as a sort of spectrum, as a circular field of energy that finds balance in the middle of four quadrants – a cross in a square in a circle (Fieldnotes, Atekpatzin, Spring 2020). The point in the middle – the crossroads – is *nepantla* (the space in-between), is the *xictli* (the belly button center), is the axis on which we can try and maintain balance as a dynamic and living process over time and in place. This is a place of *radical coexistence*.

To be sure, IONS as an organization, and these conference spaces, are full of the problems of that permeate New Age spiritual communities – such as the violence of cultural appropriation (Huhndorf 2001), of oppressive happiness (BAVH 2013), normalized white and upper-class privilege, and spiritual bypassing (Sherrell and Simmer-Brown 2017). But this problematic cultural context ended up only adding to the significance of this personal experience, and therefore shaped the path that led me to this work. Despite this incredibly fraught cultural landscape, I was able to feel and experience an inter-cultural circle of ceremony that felt genuinely *in right relation*, and therefore healing. This was my first time being in ceremony with white people in particular who had a concrete connection to their ancestral medicines – in this case, Celtic. Furthermore, many of these attendees, about 1/3 of those who came to these particular circles, were elder, retired scientists – as IONS was founded in 1973 by Apollo 14 astronaut Dr. Edgar Mitchell after he had a “noetic experience” returning to Earth from the moon (Mitchell 2008).

The clearest message I received through these ceremonies was that *interculturality* was possible. The spaces were far from perfect, and required profound cultural work and critique, but it was possible. Witnessing such radically different ways of knowing and being coexisting in a circle that remained respectful and focused – due to each quadrant and the center being held in a good and intentional way – this was a window into a world that needed to be re-membered, a way of living that must re-emerge for us to have a shared future as a responsible species on this planet. This is the significance of the connections that I was making while learning from Dr. Manjir Samanta-Laughton about black holes and the perception horizon. What happens when we work to shift not only our own individual perceptions, but when the perceptions of our collective, shared and interconnected consciousness are transformed? In other words, what is it that happens when black holes meet? When – in this case – Western, Anahuacan, Yoruban, Celtic, and Buddhist ways of knowing all ask, what is it that sits at the center of the universe?

What is it
that happens
when Black Holes
meet?

A Paradigm Shifts
In other words
This is a love story
In other words
This is a prayer
In other words
This is a poem
In other words
This is medicine
In other words
This is alive
In other words
This is one version
In other words
Of a larger version

Old Paradigm 1
(Light is bent so much it cannot escape)

The stereo is left on
Playing songs to the emptiness
While a crystalline lamp flickers darkness
More than light

Towels stay wet
As they dry

Appointments get cancelled
And doorknobs fall off

The cranes in the port of Oakland
Crook up their crooked steel necks
In protest

They turn to each other
They organize
An industrial strike

All the world's mariachis
Let out
One final grito
Before being sucked into oblivion
Death
And regurgitation

And the world stands still to enjoy the sound

New Paradigm 7

Energy
Is a consequence
Of fundamental movement

It takes on the shape of
A grandmother jaguar
Ronroñando
Purring as the pattern of her fur coat drips
Dances
And constantly changes shape

Energy
Is a consequence
Of fundamental movement

Old Paradigm 2

A hard-wooden body is curled up onto itself
It begins to weep
Saltwater tears from its hard-wooden face
His exposed pores become saturated
The wood softens
Warps
And peels open once again

New Paradigm 2

A mother's heart
is
Infinite light

Old Paradigm 3

Time is linear

Space is finite
Men are lost
And life is a drag

The way to Know is to See
And to un-Know is to Fear

New Paradigm 1

The new paradigm
Is not new
She is an old paradigm
In reverse

She is not concerned with her new-ness
She is without an iPhone
She relies
on telepathy
to connect

New Paradigm 6

Original instructions
Are cutting edges
That slice through dimensions
Leaving a hole
Where the ancestors come in

A cutting
that heals wounds

The future re-members
She is the past
In reverse

She is standing still
Sending medicine in all 7 directions

New Paradigm 3

Ancestors revisit
Re-member
Their descendants

New Paradigm 4

An atecocolli heart
Is brought to the surface
By a dark-skinned mermaid

She sounds a call
A song
for the seahorse

Saltwater spouts from the center
Of her sacred conch shell
strings of lighting pour out
with spirals of stars
and darkness

New Paradigm 0

What is it
 that happens
 when Black Holes
 meet?

When light is beyond light?
Dark beyond dark?
Love beyond love?

...

God re-members
To turn out
The lights
(Fieldnotes, Summer 2013)

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on contemporary danza in greater Anahuac (Central/North America). Contemporary is periodized in this study as post-1970s – when transnational migrations and intercultural cross-pollinations transformed danza in significant ways (Luna 2011; Aguilar 2009). While this study honors and recognizes the *Conchero* tradition as indispensable to contemporary danza, I do not provide an in-depth study of *La Tradición Conchera* as such. For these ends, I point the reader to the work of Yototl González Torres (2005), Gabriel Hernández Ramos (2018), Jenny Luna (2013), Cristina Córdova Ugalde (2010; 2019), Martha Stone (1975), Gertrude

Prokosch Kurath (1946), and Susanna Rostas (2009). Danza as I define it⁴⁰ is inclusive of Concheros, but is also distinct in important ways. I am writing and thinking from danza primarily along a *Mexicayotl-Toltecatoytl* lineage and epistemology. Therefore, I focus this study on danza as *Danza Mexica* (Luna 2011), *Danza Azteca* (Aguilar 2009), *Danza Tolteca-Chichimeca* (Fieldnotes, Manuel Chimalli, Summer 2016), “*la danza cósmica anahuaca*” (Stivalet in Gónzalez Torres 2005) or *Mitotiliztli*, *Macehualiztli* (Colín 2014) and *Chitontequiza* (Gónzalez Torres 2005).

These lineages within danza have been influenced by many 20th century social, political and cultural movements. The Mexicayotl movement, or *Movimiento de la Mexicanidad*, has its roots in the late 1950s Mexican political movement known as the *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador del Anáhuac*, or MCRA (Colín 18). MCRA itself was a re-articulation of earlier political formations that began during the later part of Mexican Revolution (Ortíz 63). Interfaces existed between the early Mexicayotl movement and existing *danzas de la tradición*, though the founding in 1977 of *Grupo de Zemanauak Tlamachtilyan* by Miguel Ángel Mendoza “Kuauhkoatl,” Dr. Ignacio Romerovargas Yturbide and many others represents the clearest articulation of a Mexicayotl ideology through the practice of danza itself (Colín 19). While these cultural moves were taking place within México, danza would also migrate North, “returning to Aztlan” during the height of the Chicano movement (Aguilar 2009). Though there are likely many other danzantes who participated in the bringing of danza to territories North of the U.S./Mexico settler border, Capitán Andrés Segura and Maestro Florencio Yescas are the most recognized jefes who began teaching danza in the United States in 1973 and 1974 respectively (Colín 19; Aguilar 2009).

Danza as I have learned it here in Ohlone territory with Calpulli Huey Papalotl is a direct result of these lineages (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2015). Central aspects of this approach to danza evolved from intercultural exchanges with northern Indigenous nations as danza circles emerged in what is now known as the U.S. Southwest in particular (Luna 2011; Colín 2014; Cordova 2019). In fact, Capitán Andrés Segura first visited the United States after being invited by Akwesasne (Mohawk) elders through the “White Roots of Peace” movements in 1973 (Aguilar 140). The interface of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Chicax Movement in particular created an important convergence that is obvious in the ways in which danza has taken shape in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as in greater Anahuac (Aguilar 2009; Luna 2011). Mexicayotl danza scholars point to the significant ways in which danza emerged precisely from these intersections of Third World and Indigenous Liberation movements (Aguilar 2009; Luna 2011). These interconnections continue to be exemplified by the presence of danzantes in transnational Indigenous movement spaces such as the Peace and Dignity Journeys (Hernández 2005), Inter-tribal Powwows (Gutierrez Macini 2018), Zapatista Encuentros (Luna 2011; Aguilar 2009) and Standing Rock (Fieldnotes, Fall 2016).

⁴⁰ And as I have been encouraged to understand it by my maestrxs.

Though, my own study does not explore these histories and lineages themselves in depth, I include this genealogy where it is relevant. For a more extensive history and geography of the migrations, exchanges and styles of danza in Anahuac I recommend the work of Ernesto Colín (2014) and Kristina Nielsen (2017), in addition to Luna (2011) and Aguilar (2009).

These danza lineages intersect in important ways to inform *Chicanx* and *Xicana Indígena* spiritual, political and cultural identity movements (Luna 2011). These decolonial movements continue to develop and shape *Xicana Indígena* as something that is “still in process; it is not a finished project, but, rather, constantly in flux. *Xicana/o Indígena* becomes more than an identity or label, but rather a social plan to combat on-going colonialism” (Luna 341). *Xicana Indígena* scholar and danzante Jenny Luna (2011) dedicates a portion of her research to this relationship between *Xicanismx* and danza. She writes:

Ultimately, the history of identity is both parallel and overlapping with the history of Danza. Danza represents a resistance against ‘US and Hispanic hegemonies’ (Maestas, n.d.: 97). For *Xicanos*, Danza was a coming home; it was a way to facilitate the reconstruction of identity and notions of nation, land and Indigeneity. It became advantageous to call ourselves *Xicana Indígena* on the international level and it was also important at the most localized level in the community, for it was within Danza circles that human dignity could be restored (342).

Furthermore, as a non-Mexican danzante-scholar, my research emerges from a particular historical moment and relationship with both *Xicanismo* and danza. As Luna (2011) argues, “While it cannot be denied that *Xicanas/os* possess a particular historical context with a ‘Mexican’ identified population (thus the term *MeXicana*), the process/goal of reunification of all Indigenous peoples throughout this hemisphere has led to the ideological transformation of the word *Xicana*” (321). Emerging in response to colonizing, Euro-centered, white supremacist, settler, and heteropatriarchal notions of *mestizaje* that define Hispanic or Latinx identities – and in relation to transnational, decolonial and intercultural Indigenous social movements – *Xicanx Indigeneity* centers the experiences of displaced, detribalized and de-territorialized peoples of many nations. As Luna (2011) describes,

Xicanas are the descendants of Indigenous people that were forced to migrate out of their homelands due to economic and/or social repression. Those descendants born and/or raised in the United States experience a particular context, experience, and lived reality that is common and shared, not just by Mexicans, but by all those that come from other repressed locations throughout the continent, be it Central or South America. *Xicana Indígena* refers to diaspora—the experience of

displacement and economic disparity. 'Xicana' describes our urban/historical experience and has functioned as a doorway to multiple understandings and epistemologies (322).

Furthermore, one of the effects of the close relationship between danza and these understandings of Xicanx Indigeneity is that "danza has been broadened to encompass not only 'Mexicas' or Mexicans, but also those that identify as Indigenous and choose to embrace Danza as a way of life" (164).

In this way, thinking *from and about* danza as an Indigenous, Anahuacan theoretico-praxis embeds my study in a broader debate that is currently underway regarding the definition and nature of Xicanx Indigeneity and Indigeneity at large. Hemispheric, comparative and critical approaches to Indigenous Studies (Santoro and Langer 2018; Barrenechea and Moertl 2013; Castellanos, Gutiérrez Nájera, and Aldama 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2016) provide some preliminary space for this work, though a deeper dive into these contentious and important conversations remains a future direction.

Chapter Overview and Structure

The first goal of this work is to theorize danza as a way of knowing. This goal guides the trajectory of Chapter One (danza as ceremony, embodiment and consciousness), Two (danza as cultural memory), Three (danza as cosmovisión), and Four (danza as epistemology). I apply these theoretical frameworks to the last three body chapters, tracing how danza becomes a way of knowing *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* ("Science," Chapter Five), *tlacuiloliztli* ("Art," Chapter Six) and *xochiyaoyotl* ("Spirituality," Chapter Seven). Each of these concepts are interconnected and interwoven into each other through the complex system/matrix of an Anahuacan cosmovisión. Therefore, each chapter serves as another way of understanding the whole – what could be termed a holistic approach.⁴¹ In a folding and unfolding universe, this dissertation seeks to move in this way, as a folding and unfolding *amoxitli* (codex). Knowledge is not a linear path, but a *xicalcolihqui*, ascending/descending spirals of expansion and contraction, a weaving together of different levels of patterns that form larger patterns, that then become smaller patterns of still larger ones. In Western math and physics this concept is described as the fractal⁴² – an enfolded order where each part contains the whole, and each whole

⁴¹ I borrow the term "holistic" from physicist David Bohm (1980), who theorizes the holistic in relation to the "explicate and implicate orders." He writes: "It will be useful in such an exploration to consider some further examples of enfolded or implicate order. Thus, in a television broadcast, the visual image is translated into a time order, which is 'carried' by the radio wave. Points that are near each other in the visual image are not necessarily 'near' in the order of the radio signal. Thus, the radio wave carries the visual image in an implicate order. The function of the receiver is then to explicate this order, i.e., to 'unfold' it in the form of a new visual image" (188).

⁴² "A curve or geometric figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole. Fractals are useful in modeling structures (such as eroded coastlines or snowflakes) in which similar patterns recur at progressively smaller

is only one part. In this way, this dissertation is a sort of decolonial fractal – one small, enfolded offering in a larger universe of decolonization.

Following these considerations of how danza functions as a way of knowing, I then turn to different fields of applied knowledge to evidence what happens when danza is understood as such. For example, Chapter Five will reimagine the sciences through danza. Chapter Six will visit the museum, tattoo art, basalt sculptures and written texts – where each is understood as a way of seeing writing as dancing, dancing as writing. Chapter Seven traces how political activism and Indigenous ethics are embedded and embodied through danza movements and ceremonial protocol. The organization of these chapters is guided by the ancestral architecture and urban planning of the ceremonial/educational center of 16th-century Mexico-Tenochtitlan – a design which is itself also guided by danza as a way of knowing. In this way, each chapter represents a virtual visit to physical and epistemic structures of Anahuacan knowledge and education.

We will begin (and remain) in ceremony, knowing-learning through *in xochitl, in cuicatl* (the flower, the song). We will then enter *Calmecac* (Anahuacan higher education) where *tlamacazqueh* (spiritual authorities) and *tlamatinimeh* (elder poet-philosopher-scientists) teach-learn Anahuacan arts, sciences and spirituality – rooted in Olmec, Toltec, Maya and other ancestral cosmovisiones. This is where I will explore danza as a way of knowing astronomy, mathematics, geometry, and ecology in Chapter Five. Next we will arrive to the heart of the study – both physically as the very center of this dissertation, and also as the heart-center of an Anahuacan cosmovisión and mitotiani epistemology – the *Cuicacalli* (“House of Song” – place of musical, poetic, dance, theater education). This is where we will learn of poetry, music, dance, and plastic arts (Chapter Four and Six). Significantly, in the educational system of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, all students were required to attend, if nothing else, the Cuicacalli (López Austen 1985). After spending their first years of life in homeschooling through the huehuetlahtolli (the words of the ancestors, the oral tradition), each student (who was not going directly to work or apprentice in a trade) was sent to either Calmecac or *Tepochcalli* (“House of the Youth,” the place of training young warriors). However, regardless of one’s trajectory or lifework in Anahuac, to be an educated person was to be a *danzante* – versed in song, dance, poetry and music. These arts were the basis for understanding all else, including the art of war. In Tepochcalli, students received a rigorous physical, technical and strategic training in Anahuacan martial arts. Students were taught the ethics of discipline, impeccability, and humility – values that continue to guide the training of contemporary *danzantes* today (Chapter Seven). This matrix of *Mexica-Tenochca* (from Mexico-Tenochtitlan) education then provides one way of understanding an Anahuacan cosmovisión – witnessing an epistemology and worldview where danza sits at the heart of knowledge. This epistemic journey forms the scaffolding for the organization and order of each chapter in this study.

scales, and in describing partly random or chaotic phenomena such as crystal growth, fluid turbulence, and galaxy formation” (“Fractal”).

Critical and Comparative Ethnic Studies⁴³

As a doctoral dissertation in Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, this project has been made possible by the 1969, 1999 and subsequent student strikes led by the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). As an inter-communal liberation project, the TWLF was initiated by the Afro-American Student Union (AASU) at San Francisco State University (SFSU) in 1968 (Epstein and Stringer 2020). TWLF student organizers, led by the AASU, brought together the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC), the Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), the Native American Students Union (Native American Student Association at UC Berkeley), and the Asian American Political Alliance at SFSU and UC Berkeley. This united front of Black, Indigenous and people of color communities led the longest student strike in the history of California – winning the first College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU and a Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, both in March of 1969 (Bañales and Lee-Oliver 7). Grounded in the guiding principles of solidarity, self-determination, transdisciplinarity and an education that is relevant to the needs of Black, Indigenous and communities of color, the TWLF radically reimagined the Eurocentric, settler colonial, and imperial foundations of the modern public university.

These original visions – born in clouds of tear gas and in the face of the National Guard – have shaped the contours of contemporary Black, Indigenous and Ethnic Studies. In the words of Shoshone-Bannock historian and TWLF veteran Dr. LaNada War Jack (2019),

The Third World Liberation Front Strike at Berkeley in 1969 was the most expensive of the Berkeley campus riots because the university had to assemble the largest force of Berkeley police and National Guard soldiers ever. They marched on to campus with their unsheathed bayonets and fogged the campus with pepper gas. Every class on campus was interrupted and stopped. All of the Third World Liberation Front's leadership was arrested during the strike for various alleged charges. I was also arrested. After the gas cleared away, I was one of the coalition leaders on the four-man negotiation team representing Natives for our Third World College. We arose victorious with our own Department of Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies, which consisted of all four departments

⁴³ I will write of Black Studies, Indigenous Studies and Ethnic Studies at large as interconnected yet distinct knowledge projects. Ethnic Studies is the largest umbrella term, which includes engagements with Indigenous and Black Studies, in coalition with Asian American and Latinx/Chicanx Studies. Recently there have also been movements to create spaces and programs specific to Arab American, Central American, Philipinx, and Pacific Islanders Studies and communities.

– Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American Studies Programs – within the university system, the very first in the UC campus state system, which was then replicated throughout the entire UC system in California (136).

As the first and only intellectual field created through student struggle, Ethnic Studies must continue to serve as a bridge between the academy and grassroots social movements. These commitments must guide the curricula, research and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies scholar/activists. However, the institutionalizing of revolutionary struggle presents important contradictions in practice. In the case of Native American/Indigenous Studies, for example, Dr. War Jack (2019) laments:

Afterwards, I felt bad about the university's decision to allow non-Natives to teach Native classes because they had tenure. This was not the intent, and it is a continuation of perpetuating stereotypes, lies about our history, and mockery of our people. Non-Natives do not have the experience as a Native person, although we have also had [problems] from those Natives who did assimilate and who were products of the system with degrees for high-level universities. The intent was to create a level of truth in history, experience, and understanding of the natural world. We did not want the product of brainwashing to continue that legacy (138).

Fellow TWLF *veterano* Ysidro Macias (2013) has also been critical of the institutionalizing process of Ethnic Studies since its inception. As soon as the strike was won, Macias describes the role of opportunistic scholars of color seeking to appropriate the work of frontline TWLF activists. In some of his reflections on the strike, he writes of Latinx, Chicax and Mexican Americans "*moscas*":

The 'moscas' were obviously a derogatory name for the Raza who wanted a job, or money, or something, from an accomplishment that other Raza had paid in sacrifice, loss and sometimes blood, in order to achieve. Like their English namesakes, these "flies" were attracted to the instant smell of opportunity and came to offer their services, even though they had never once previously offered their support or help in any fashion whatsoever while the battle was raging. Once the spoils were on the table, however, the 'moscas' were buzzing around the table, demanding entrance (289).

Ever since these original moments of institutionalization – through struggle – the projects of Black, Indigenous and Ethnic Studies have had to grapple with this precarious and troubled positionality of being "in but not of" the university. It was

W.E.B. Du Bois, as the first Black PhD from Harvard (75 years before the TWLF), who reflected that “I am in Harvard, but not of it” (DuBois quoted in Almore 2011). DuBois famously went on to theorize a notion of “double consciousness” to describe the experience of being split and fragmented as a black subject in a white world (Du Bois 2008). Extending this notion from the subjective to the collective, I position Black, Indigenous and Ethnic Studies in the university as racialized, gendered and classed knowledge projects within a white, male, capitalist institution. As such, Ethnic Studies exists in this precarious place of fragmentation and splitting, of being “in but not of” the university. This goes for individual scholars as well as for relationships within programs and between Ethnic Studies departments and the larger university.

As an insurgent seed planted within the settler colonial, modern research university, Ethnic Studies continues to exist fifty years later thanks only to the protracted material struggles of generations of radical student activists of color. Every decade since 1969, Ethnic Studies students and allies have had to initiate strikes to protest the ongoing defunding and marginalization of these programs – often having to resist outside administrators as well as their own faculty and colleagues to protect the original mandate of the TWLF. In her study of the history and ongoing struggles of the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, Dr. Ziza Delgado (2016) concludes:

The legacy of the TWLF is complicated when analyzing their ability to secure ‘spaces of representation’ (Mitchell, 1995; Smith, 1992) or ‘counter-spaces’ (Lefebvre, 1991) where the interests of the historically marginalized are institutionally validated and empowered. In a literal sense, the very existence of the department means that they did achieve a ‘space of representation,’ where the histories of people of color are taught and legitimated in academia. Yet, a more critical examination of power and self-determination reflect the limitations of trying to create a decolonial space within a colonial institution. Without a shift in the dominant ideology of the university, the Ethnic Studies Department remained in a precarious situation. They relied on the institution for the support and approval of major decisions; and yet, they were trying to act in a manner fundamentally different from those in power (128).

Cultural historian and scholar/activist Robin Kelley (2018) offers further reflections based on 50 years of Black student struggle, sharing “a few observations and speculations about the movement, its self-conception, and its demands” (153). He writes:

I want to draw attention to the contradictory impulses within the movement: the tension between reform and revolution, between desiring to belong and rejecting the university as a cog in the neoliberal

order. I want to think about what it means for black students to seek love from an institution incapable of loving them—of loving anyone, perhaps (Ibid.).

This dissertation has been made possible by these generations of scholar/activists in very concrete ways – such as winning and sustaining these academic programs – but is also indebted theoretically to the work of bridging ways of knowing that exist within, without and despite the university. In other words, the possibility of writing and studying through an Ethnic Studies approach⁴⁴ has been created through a critical confrontation with the political, epistemic, cultural and spiritual foundations of the Eurocentric, imperial and settler colonial university itself. This work therefore is profoundly indebted to these generations of Ethnic Studies warriors – frontline activists who continue to put their bodies on the line for these fields to exist. As abolitionist scholar/activist and UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies PhD, Dylan Rodriguez (2012) writes, asking us to consider the forms of violence that scholars of color often endure and experience when bridging liberation movements and the academy:

The academy is never home: some of us are subject to eviction and evisceration, alongside the surveillance, discipline, and low-intensity punishment that accrues to those of us who try to build modalities of sustenance and reproduction within liberationist genealogies, particularly when we are working and studying in colleges and universities (811).

Writing from within this political and epistemic “liberationist genealogy” I pursue my study of danza as a way of knowing – as a bridge between ceremony, community and Ethnic Studies scholarship. The crux of this work seeks liberation at many levels at once: in the classroom, in the streets, in our communities and homes, and ultimately demands a shift in consciousness in our hearts and minds. As a flower of the radical seeds sown by the TWLF, this study of danza as a way of knowing challenges the intellectual foundations of the modern research university by thinking from within/without and beyond its boundaries. This shift in consciousness and power seeks a regeneration of life and spirit, lifeways that have been disrespected and marginalized by the university for generations. Reconciling these worldviews remains a matter of life and death in this moment of planetary crisis and mass extinction.

The original demands of the 1969 TWLF remain the principal theoretical framework through which this work can be carried out. Now a respected elder, leader and life-long scholar/activist in her community, Dr. LaNada War Jack (2019) provides

⁴⁴ In this case, an in-depth study of danza as a way of knowing.

the scaffolding for the most radical problems I seek to address through a critical and comparative Ethnic Studies lens. She writes:

The difference of ideology between mainstream 'Western thought' and 'Native Indigenous' perspective needs to be understood and recognized. We need to be clear about this because this is a weapon that established Western psychology as the only understanding of life and is used to confuse and end knowledge of the natural laws. This is the reason why the US government forced Native children into the government's brainwashing educational institutions immediately after the genocide and the remaining women and children were forced to live in detainment centers on reservations. Western ideology is based on the physical reality that can be recognized only by the human mind processing the known five senses. This is a very dangerous blindness and ignorance, which does not recognize, support, or respect the Spirit within the intangible nature of all life.

This blind spot disconnects the Western perspective from 'Mother Earth' and does not have a balance of the physical and natural laws. Western thought has evolved to create an ideological foundation that legitimizes greed and corruption through political, scientific, and European-based Christian theories. They made it up over time to legitimize the 'patriarchy.' The Indigenous perspective can see both the realism of physical and spiritual perspectives, whereas the Western perspective can see only half of the vision Indigenous people can see, which is why they can complain that we are not reality based and discount us as 'crazy.' If we don't maintain our spiritual foundation, then we easily become assimilated and acculturated into the colonization process and usurped into the reality of Western society. This happens when the physical reality fills the void in absence of spiritual and cultural wisdom, which is not recognized as legitimate (6).

US Third World Women of Color Feminisms

An important impulse that emerges from within these liberationist genealogies of the late 20th century, and further shapes this study, is the tradition of US Third World Women of Color (US TWWOC) Feminist thought. Organizing and thinking from the intersections of radical feminist, queer, leftist, Indigenous and people of color liberation movements, US TWWOC writers provide invaluable theoretical contributions to the work of decolonizing the heart, mind, body and spirit. Strategizing across many social movements simultaneously, US TWWOC activist thinkers theorize "intersectional" (Crenshaw 1990), "differential" (Sandoval 2000), and "coalitional" (Pérez 2010) ways of dismantling "multiple oppressions" (Lugones

2003). Organizing in coalition⁴⁵ and publishing their writings in multiple groundbreaking collective anthologies,⁴⁶ US TWWOC feminists worked to challenge an “apartheid of academic knowledges” and “theoretical domains” (Sandoval 70).

These theoretical interventions further critiqued and expanded the form, context and content of activist knowledge production and engaged writing praxes. As queer Xicanx scholar/activist Xamuel Bañales points out, “Women of color feminists helped create a literary method that bridged the personal with the political, theoretical, and the spiritual. Along with critical scholarship, the field includes poetry, prose, political analysis, fiction, storytelling, autobiography, and other forms of creative writing that often examine one’s own life” (Bañales 297). Bañales continues by quoting Chicana feminist Laura E. Pérez who “argues that ‘Women of color’s autobiographical writing and locating of self within scholarly texts has often staked a claim to theory and philosophizing itself, but through a consciously different protocol than that imposed by academia or literary canons yet knowingly positioning these as alternative archives of knowing and being” (Pérez quoted in Bañales 297).

For example, in their path breaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, queer Chicana feminist writers Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (1983) develop a “theory in the flesh...where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience” (23). Writing from these embodied and lived experiences, “theories in the flesh” work to deepen and extend the calls for political/epistemic liberation coming from movements such as the TWLF.⁴⁷ Centering TWWOC voices and positionalities, these theories ask us to hold many ways of knowing and being in the world.

Working through these analyses of power, there are no purely defined, static binaries of oppressors and oppressed – only the messy realities of seeking liberation in a complex and interconnected world. In this way, Latinx feminist philosopher María Lugones (2003) writes in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*:

Given the framing of the field of understanding, this writing attempts to unravel, perform, exhibit understandings of ourselves and our activities in resistance to both the interlocking of oppressions and to intermeshed oppressions. Resistance will be understood always in the gerund, a resisting. Oppression will also be understood as ongoing. The tense relation resisting ←→ oppressing is our focus (208).

⁴⁵ Such as the foundational work of the Third World Women’s Alliance (1969) and The Combahee River Collective (1978).

⁴⁶ For example, Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (1982), *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*; Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*; Smith, Barbara (ed.) (1983), *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*; Brant, Beth (ed.) (1984), *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*.

⁴⁷ One interesting intersection in the archive here is that AAPA and TWLF veteran Betty Kano’s art is included in the original 1981 *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

Lugones' notion of resisting ↔ oppressing provides a TWWOC feminist infographic from which to engage the realities of liberation as a living, breathing, moving, and enfolded project.⁴⁸ These approaches to liberatory theory/praxis, or what Lugones (2003) has called the "theoretico-practical...requires a humbling and honing of perception...that is sensorially rich, up close, in the midst of one's contemporaries, people who are historically interrelated" (ix). These ways of knowing and engaging with the world politically, spiritually and through the body guide the foundations of my study of danza. In particular, Lugones' (2003) overlapping concepts of the "theoretico-practical" (ix) and "praxical" (8) provide the foundations through which I understand danza as a form of *theoretico-praxis* – that is, as a radical, liberatory thinking/doing in relationship.

Alongside other TWWOC theorists this study is in direct conversation with the work of queer Chicana feminist writer and ancestor Gloria Anzaldúa in particular. Over years of writing as a form of ceremony, Anzaldúa (2002) developed a critical discourse through which she theorized "*conocimiento*" as a way of knowing. She writes:

Many are witnessing a major cultural shift in their understanding of what knowledge consists of and how we come to know, a shift from the kinds of knowledge valued now to the kinds that will be desired in the twenty-first century, a shift away from knowledge contributing both to military and corporate technologies and the colonization of our lives by TV and the Internet, to the inner exploration of the meaning and purpose of life. You attribute this shift to the feminization of knowledge, one beyond the subject-object divide, a way of knowing and acting on *ese saber* you call *conocimiento*. Skeptical of reason and rationality, *conocimiento* questions conventional knowledge's current categories, classifications, and contents (541).

Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* is "a path," "a journey," emerging from the collective "extension of consciousness, caught in the *remolinos* (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge" (Ibid.). As an enfolded, embodied form of consciousness, *conocimiento* includes "*ese saber*" – the intuitive, the felt, that nagging pain in my hip – into its many ways of knowing. Reflecting on Anzaldúa's work, Dr. Laura Pérez (2012) describes Gloria's writing/thinking/feeling as a "performance of spirituality,"

Gloria's writing was her embodied thinking, and I dare say, her prayer or incantation, her words of power, delivered with intentionality, as

⁴⁸ The literary device of two arrows connecting and animating two terms is borrowed in my own theorizing of *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*, which also serves as the primary title for this dissertation.

performative act. As she pointed out in *Borderlands*, she understood writing as image-making, a calling forth from the imagination that, at its core, was performative, and powerfully so...She sought to restore to consciousness the awareness of psychic power itself as the seedbed of image-making and therefore of thought itself and its omnipresent embeddedness in material reality, beginning with our own bodies: our guts, our genitals, the flickering thoughts escaped from our unconscious recesses. For her, the flesh was also the dwelling place of the unfleshed; the body itself, a borderlands and a nepantla...[Anzaldúa's] language is the language of simultaneity, and of *conocimiento*, drawing its strength on the fuller truths of what we actually are as humans, that is, spiritual and psychic, and what is happening on these levels, as indicated by heart, gut, and desire as sites of spiritual or psychic speech, as it were, and not only by what has been programmed into our brains by culture and through familia as truth or permissible (16-18).

Writing from *ese saber*, "the performance of spirituality" is a way of "fleshing the spirit," (Facio and Lara 2014) of serving as a bridge not only for social movements and ways of knowing, but for dimensions of reality and levels of consciousness. It is the pedagogical space that Chicana theorist of education Laura Rendón (2009) calls "*sentipensante*," combining "the *sentir* of intuition, introspection, and the inner life and the *pensar* of intellectual development and the outer life of action and service" (5).

As a *danzante*/scholar/activist, I am guided along my path of *conocimiento* by these radical TWWOC feminists and their theories of knowledge, the body and spirituality – and also by their commitments to the power of *love* as a revolutionary force. Chicana feminist theorist Chela Sandoval (2000) maps many of these impulses through her foundational text *Methodology of the Oppressed*. As a major work of theoretical synthesis and engagement with US TWWOC feminists – especially in conversation with (white) post-structuralist, feminist, queer and critical theorists – Sandoval develops a dynamic set of discursive terms through which to engage US TWWOC thought. She theorizes various forms of consciousness that US TWWOC feminists produce as they are doing the work of thinking/feeling/doing. One of these forms, what Sandoval (2000) describes as "differential consciousness," is a creative way of knowing through loving. She writes:

The differential mode of social movement relies on what I have called a 'cyber' consciousness, a 'differential' consciousness that operates as process and shifting location. Differential consciousness is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void – some no-place

– to claim their due. This mode of consciousness...functions outside speech, outside academic criticism, in spite of all attempts to pursue and identify its place and origin (139-140).

Thinking from a place of love, I advance this study grounded in heart-centered and embodied ways of knowing that are accessed through forms of creative expression such as dance and ceremony. After all, “it is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘movidas’ – revolutionary maneuvers towards decolonizing being” (Sandoval 141). In a world where social relationships are mediated and perverted through the structural wounds of colonialism and genocide, love becomes a decolonial act. For Sandoval (2000), “love is redefined as a mode of social and psychic activism” (189). The struggle for “love in a postmodern world” (137) is a journey towards self-love, intimate partner love, familial love, and revolutionary social love – love in all our relations – grounded in truth, justice and integrity.

Building upon these Anzaldúan-Sandovalian foundations, Chicana feminist philosopher of love and liberation Laura Pérez (2019) proposes in her most recent work that:

Sandoval’s theories of differential consciousness and the methodologies of the oppressed, gleaned from the creative, theoretical, and everyday tactics for negotiating existence of women of color in the U.S., remind us that they/we have survived fragmenting, postmodern-like conditions through the colonial and neocolonial ordeals with *facultades*, spiritual and embodied knowing, or *conocimientos*, with integrity (20).

Theorizing a “social physics of love,” (Ibid.) Pérez (2019) and Sandoval (2000) remember *amor en Aztlán* as “the day-to-day practices in this invisible collective zone” (Pérez quoted in Sandoval 205). Building loving relations – within ourselves and with others – amidst a dehumanizing “world on fire” (Moraga in Moraga and Anzaldúa i), is a ceremony of “decolonial love” (Sandoval 142). “This form of love is not the narrative of love encoded in the West: it is another kind of love, a synchronic process that punctures through traditional, older narratives of love, that ruptures every day being” (142). These are acts of love that *re-member right relations*, since “those who practice Anahuacan cosmic dance on a daily or regular basis, always remain in total harmony. By dancing, one remains conscious of their integration with the whole” (Stivalet quoted in González Torres 191). This is because:

The social body is love, in its stories of successful social relations. Ultimately, social love is the same element or energy or embodied practice as the love we hold for our lovers, and those who have been good to us. Love and human relationality, eros, is essential, abiding,

unifying, the 'glue' of interdependence, of a world of differences constantly crossing, meeting, embracing, transforming (Pérez 2019: 10).

This study of danza as a way of knowing is profoundly indebted to US TWWOC feminist thinkers, writers, artists, lovers and “lesbian, mother, warrior, poets” such as Audre Lorde (“Audre Lorde”). Knowing as feeling as thinking as loving, “we are related to all that lives” (Hernández-Ávila 2002: 532). Re-membering these relationships amidst coloniality as heteropatriarchy and genocide is a way of “loving in the war years” (Moraga 1983). Dancing/thinking with these theorists “in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983), I advance this study of “the transcendence of the Anahuacan cosmic dance: maintaining ourselves in permanent cosmic harmony” (Stivalet in González Torres 191). Towards these ends, I pay particular attention to how this harmony is maintained in a disharmonious, fragmented, and complex “world on fire” (Moraga in Moraga and Anzaldúa i). Dancing along this path of *conocimiento* – in ceremony and in community – I fall in decolonial love with the cosmos, re-membering right relations by any means necessary.

The Decolonization of Knowledge and Power – Decoloniality

While Ethnic Studies and US Third World Women of Color theory create the possibilities and conditions for studying danza as a way of knowing, I now turn to the *decolonial* itself as a key concept that shapes this project and guides its analysis. Decolonization has been a topic of theoretical and political debate since the first colonizer arrived on the shores of Cemanahuac. Though decolonial resistance efforts can be traced back to these very first moments of colonial intrusion, an explicit discourse and global project of decolonization as such emerged most cohesively from the particular historical conditions of post-WWII “independence” movements in the Global South. National liberation fronts, such as those that inspired the TWLF and TWWOC activist thinkers, worked to organize a transnational struggle to end European colonial occupation worldwide. These movements converged to articulate the project of the “Third World,” or the “non-aligned movement” in gatherings such as the Bandung Conference of 1955 (Prashad 2008). Strategizing ways to overcome ongoing European colonial domination and exploitation – resisting both capitalist and communist colonialities – a global movement was born to reconsider the possibilities of a decolonial future from below. These movements envisioned and worked towards a world rooted in self-determination, mutual respect and global solidarity.

As theorists grappled with these times and the realities they presented, discourses of post-colonialism and post-modernism also emerged as intellectual projects to try and make sense of this historical conjuncture. In this discursive and political landscape, decolonization persisted as a radical critique from below – in conversation and in relation, but also skeptical of bourgeois political and theoretical formations. When it comes to post-modernism, for example, Indigenous and

decolonial activist thinkers have problematized this position as a “Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism” (Grosfoguel 2011: 2) – pointing to the profound erasures and recolonizing power of postmodern analyses (Sandoval 2000). Or as Maori scholar/activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has clarified, “Our colonial experience traps us in the project of modernity. There can be no ‘postmodern’ for us until we have settled some business of the modern. This does not mean that we do not understand or employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways, or exercise power ourselves in multiple ways. It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice” (34).

Post-colonialism as such is similarly problematic. Again, I turn to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), when she writes:

Naming the world as ‘post-colonial’ is, from indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business. In Bobby Sykes’s cryptic comment post-colonial can only mean one thing: the colonizers have left. There is rather compelling evidence that in fact this has not occurred. And, even when they have left formally, the institutions and legacy of colonialism have remained. Decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power (98).

The “cryptic comment” of Aboriginal activist leader Bobby Sykes that Smith is referring to here is the poignant question: “What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?” (Sykes quoted in Smith 1999: 24).

Perhaps the most central figure from these conversations, for the sake of my own formulations of decolonization and the decolonial, is the work of revolutionary Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon. As a Western-trained physician and decolonial freedom fighter, Fanon’s writings serve as the root node for an interconnected network of activist/theorist interlocutors: including Chela Sandoval (2000), Sylvia Wynter (1995; 2003), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Enrique Dussel (1985), and Lewis Gordon (2015). Perhaps the most central contribution of the Fanonian tradition to my research are his explorations of the interiority of de/colonization and the interconnections these embodied, psychic and felt experiences say about larger social and cultural structures of colonialism – both in terms of resistance and their durability. Fanon (2008) wrote of this approach as “sociogeny” (13) – what Afro-Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter (1999) has taken up and theorized at length as a “new science” of the human (32). She discusses “the sociogenic principle” as follows:

The proposal here is that Fanon's thesis, that besides phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny, reveals that the cultural construction of specific 'qualitative mental states' (such as the aversive reaction of white Europeans and of blacks ourselves to our skin color and physiognomy), are states specific to the modes of subjective experience defining what it is like to be human within the terms of our present culture's conception of what it is to be human; and, in the terms of its sociogenic principle, like the bat's subjective experience of what it is like to be a bat, they are states defining what it is to be the lived expression of a species-specific genomic principle (46).

Wynter's (1995) reading of sociogeny problematizes how colonial binaries of nature/culture,⁴⁹ human/non-human, and being/nonbeing divide homo sapien sapien as a species – disassembling the human family's genomic kinship and interrupting proper cohabitation with other species and our shared planet. Sociogeny is the science of reading these relationships as such – reading the body, the human, the community, the modern/colonial matrix of power – as relational interconnections in one living, chaotic system (Wynter 1999). These theorizings of power *in relation* are embedded throughout my readings, experiences and understandings of danza as a way of knowing, providing the tangled web in which we dance as human beings.

The intersection of the “sociogenic principle” with radical TWWOC thought and Ethnic Studies provides a more robust analysis of *lo cotidiano*, the enfolded and lived ways that de/colonization permeates our everyday lives. Decolonial philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) writes of this Fanonian concept as:

...one of the most fundamental lessons...that in the colonial context what happens at the level of the private and the intimate is fundamentally linked to social structures and to colonial cultural formations and forms of value...Ordinary life is infected by the colonial virus. Communication, loving relationships, and even the proper recognition of the self are distorted by a social system and by cultural forms that take blackness and other forms of sub-alterity as markers of the absence of values...This is what the colonial configuration intends and what makes it so powerful: instead of taking anything in particular away from colonized subjects, it attempts to rob them of any notion of self-worth and, ultimately, of the very idea of having any rights (127).

⁴⁹ Feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway's “natureculture” does this work as well and helps further clarify the stakes of sociogeny. Following Haraway, Malone and Ovendon (2016) define: “Natureculture is a synthesis of nature and culture that recognizes their inseparability in ecological relationships that are both biophysically and socially formed (Fuentes 2010; Haraway 2003). Natureculture is a concept that emerges from the scholarly interrogation of dualisms that are deeply embedded within the intellectual traditions of the sciences and humanities (e.g., human/animal; nature/culture). The pronounced boundaries and divisions produced within and between scholarly fields have tended to dissociate humans and nature, sometimes to the point of exempting humans from basic physical properties and laws of nature” (1).

Rooted in this genealogy of liberation and decolonization, theorists developed an analysis of the “coloniality of power” (Quijano 1992), thinking from the “underside of modernity” (Dussel quoted in Maldonado-Torres 2008). Through a formal working group taking shape in 1996, *the Modernity/Coloniality Group* began as collaborations among disparate social scientists, humanists, and other scholar/activists seeking to expand a critique of modernity that included a centralizing of the *coloniality* inherent in such a process. *The Coloniality Working Group* at SUNY-Binghamton became a space to engage the growing body of literature that had been emerging since the late 80s, with a particular decolonial surge emerging from the 1992 movements that were critically rethinking 1492 and the conquest of the Americas (Castro-Gomez and Grosfoguel 2007). Over the next few decades, and continuing into the present, these theorists developed ideas such as *transmodernity* (Dussel 1995), *modernity/coloniality* (Mignolo 2000), and the *coloniality of power* approach itself (Quijano 2000).

This group of thinkers began publishing collectively in various existing scholarly outlets such as *Cultural Studies* (2007), as well as a journal built primarily from these collaborations entitled *Nepantla: Views from the South* (2000). Through these late-20th and early-21st century writings, scholars constructed a theoretical framework that included the historical assembly of a decolonial archive. In this way decolonial theory rereads and re-visits historical texts that have remained obscured by the coloniality of knowledge and power of the imperial university. For example, Aimé Césaire’s (2001)⁵⁰ *Discourse on Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon’s (2008)⁵¹ *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera* became integrated as required reading for building pedagogies of liberation as decolonization and decoloniality.

A primary tenet of these theoretical postures is the following: while formal/administrative *colonialism* as an historical world system has been radically transformed, *coloniality* persists. In the words of decolonial sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel (2003):

...our use of the word ‘colonial’ does not refer only to ‘classical colonialism’ or ‘internal colonialism,’ nor is it reduced to the presence of a “colonial administration.” A colonial situation of exploitation and domination, formed by centuries of European colonialism, can persist in the present without the existence of a ‘colonial administration.’ Instead, we use the word ‘colonialism’ to refer to ‘colonial situations’ enforced by the presence of a colonial administration such as the period of classical colonialism, and, following Quijano, we use ‘coloniality’ to address ‘colonial situations’ in the present period in which colonial

⁵⁰ Originally published 1950.

⁵¹ Originally published 1952.

administrations have almost been eradicated from the capitalist world-system. By 'colonial situations' we mean the cultural, political, and economic oppression of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations (146).

Furthermore, this conceptual lexicon often conjoins modernity and coloniality as *modernity/coloniality* – as a radical critique and reminder that, as Walter D. Mignolo (2005) posits, “there is no modernity without coloniality; because coloniality is constitutive of modernity” (xiii). In this view, coloniality is “the darker side of modernity,” or it’s “underside” (5).

Emphasizing the continuity of colonial situations and power adds a critical and generative dimension to Ethnic Studies scholarship – as an analytic that foments the decolonial. This epistemic/political move demands an always-expanded *temporality* and *spatiality* that centralizes 1492 as a point of departure for a “modern/colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo 2014) – an interlocking, entangled web of domination and resistance. In this light, for example, the 1992 uprisings in Los Angeles are re-imagined – as a response not only to the Rodney King verdict itself and related injustices of the prison industrial complex, but to the foundational formation of a settler colonial nation-state built upon internally colonized peoples who are subject to invisibilized and normalized levels of everyday violence. These decolonial analytics include Grosfoguel’s (2003) call for an analysis that moves “beyond the nation-state to a global scale...a ‘global coloniality’” (156). This expansion of a spatial unit of analysis visibilizes historical relations of power beyond settler boundaries of, for example, the U.S. nation-state – forces that most certainly influence lived experiences of coloniality within the United States. Decolonial analysis therefore is equipped with a temporality that remembers 1492 as if it were yesterday and a global spatiality that articulates “local histories/global designs” (Mignolo 2000).

Through these decolonial analytics, theorists of decolonization locate and evidence historical and contemporary dynamics of de/coloniality through fields and methodologies such as literary studies (Saldívar 2012), aesthetics, spirituality and art practice (Pérez 2007), cultural studies and critical theory (Mignolo 2000; Sandoval 2000), feminist and queer critique (Pérez 2010; Lugones 2003; Alexander 2006), sociology, geography and history (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel 2003; Emma Pérez 1999). Thinking from these transdisciplinary intersections of Black, Indigenous, Feminist, Queer and Ethnic Studies, decolonial theorists seek to “shift the geopolitics and body politics of power and knowledge” (Mignolo 2005). As Mignolo (2005) argues:

The geo-politics of knowledge (the local historical grounding of knowledge) goes hand in hand with the body politics of knowledge (i.e. the personal and collective biographical grounding of understanding).

The view of events and the conception of the world provided by a Spanish Jesuit or soldier (or later on, by a French or British traveler or philosopher) were geo- and bio-graphically grounded in languages, memories, and histories not shared in the views and conceptions of the world experienced by Aymara- or Nahuatl-speaking intellectuals whose geo- and bio-graphies were grounded in other memories and histories (10).

This epistemic project includes the work of “situating knowledges,” (Haraway 1988) making visible the Euro, male, white, hetero, settler body and imaginary that has been universalized and normalized through dominant, colonial thought.

Through these decolonial analyses, Mignolo (2005) revisits narratives of settler colonial encounter to theorize two more key concepts in decoloniality: *border thinking* and *the colonial difference*. He writes:

There is a *difference* in this apparent symmetry: the Spanish missionary and the French philosopher did not have to incorporate Indigenous languages and experiences into their theological or ecological frame of thinking. The Aymara or Nahuatl intellectuals of what are now Bolivia, Mexico, and Central America had no choice, because Spanish and French institutions were set up in their territory, on top of and around their dwelling places. For that material reason, border thinking is the consequence of the power differential under modern/colonial conditions, a power differential that constitutes the *colonial difference* (10, emphasis in original).

In other words, the material conditions of settler colonialism and genocide create a social and political world in which the possibility of neutrality, interculturality, or right relations are radically interrupted. The settler and the Native are not just different, they are *colonially different*. “Border thinking,” (Mignolo 2005) a concept Mignolo borrows from Gloria Anzaldúa, is the epistemic work of thinking from this meeting place – that is, the borderlands, the colonial wound itself. In this way, “decolonial thought and practice seeks to understand, move beyond, in a word, to heal, the wounding caused by the dehumanizing, fragmenting effects of the racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, patriarchy, and human centrism that we inherit through the his-tories of colonization of the Americas, as elsewhere in the ‘Third World’” (Pérez 2019: xvii).

Part of this healing process must include a rematriation⁵² of land, resources and sovereignty to Indigenous peoples, as Unanga’s scholar Eve Tuck and Ethnic Studies scholar/activist K Wayne Yang (2012) argue in “Decolonization is Not a

⁵² Rematriation is a discourse developed and advanced by Indigenous women-led organization *Sogorea Te Land Trust*, working to protect sacred sites in occupied Chochenyo, Karkin, Lisjan, Ohlone lands.

Metaphor.” Through this important intervention into the decolonial dialogue, they write:

Our goal in this article is to remind readers what is unsettling about decolonization. Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. The easy adoption of decolonizing discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to ‘decolonize our schools,’ or use ‘decolonizing methods,’ or, ‘decolonize student thinking,’ turns decolonization into a metaphor. As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization. Because settler colonialism is built upon an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave, the decolonial desires of white, non-white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism. The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or ‘settler moves to innocence,’ that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity (1).

In other words, decoloniality must interrupt *settler colonialism* as such. For Tuck and Yang (2012), decoloniality alone, while important, is not enough. This is made clear by their definitions of the specificities of settler colonialism:

Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain. Thus, relying solely on postcolonial literatures or theories of coloniality that ignore settler colonialism will not help to envision the shape that decolonization must take in settler colonial contexts. Within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth (land, for shorthand). Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation. This is why Patrick Wolfe (1999) emphasizes that settler colonialism is a structure and not an event. In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human

relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage (5).

The decolonial, without these commitments to dismantling settlerism in concrete ways, runs the risk of reproducing coloniality as it intellectually obfuscates and politically rearticulates settler colonial futurity. If we are thinking (as I am) from a territory to which we are not Native, neither decolonization nor decoloniality remove us from this responsibility to right relationship to the land and the Indigenous peoples on whose lands we live, work, think, and dance. Decoloniality must be accountable to the many generations and peoples who have stewarded and maintained the lands upon which we exist.

Settler colonialism and genocide continue to structure the institutions and everyday lives of us all. As we envision and work towards ways of living beyond, outside, and after colonialism, let us not convince ourselves that these efforts somehow remove us from the material realities of settler colonialism and genocide in which we operate. The recent popularity of land acknowledgments has been similarly problematized, as empty gestures if they are not paired with actual redistributive and rematriative action. As Tuck and Yang (2012) continue:

Decolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation. In reality, the tracks walk all over land/people in settler contexts. Though the details are not fixed or agreed upon, in our view, decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically. This is precisely why decolonization is necessarily unsettling, especially across lines of solidarity. 'Decolonization never takes place unnoticed' (Fanon, 1963, p. 36). Settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone (7).

While acknowledging the land and its people has come into fashion in many settler institutional environments, including the university, Indigenous ceremonial protocol has always carried this ethic. This is one of the ways in which ceremonial ways of knowing can serve to anchor decolonial project in a commitment to right relations and Indigenous futurity. Especially when understood as an everyday practice, as a way of life, ceremony can radically interrupt settler futurity through decolonial love – understood here as a love that is unsettling.

Energies Not Gods

Mesoamerican Studies is permeated with a discourse of Aztec gods, goddesses, and myths. This language, and its attendant discourse, is deeply problematic when considering the question of Anahuacan tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli (knowledge). To impose a Greco-Roman and/or Christian religious discourse onto these concepts is a Eurocentric and epistemicidal (Grosfoguel 2013) move. Concepts of gods and goddesses may be relevant to Greek, Roman and other European traditions, but the notion of a pantheon of gods, when it is hastily universalized, or applied bluntly to non-Western cosmovisiones it may end up obscuring more than it illuminates, it may erase more than it enlightens.

When giving public presentations on danza, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl will often point out this problem. She will ask, “is gravity a god? Do you call oxygen a god” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2018)? For Chicueyi Coatl, danza is astronomy, is mathematics, is a creative-spiritual way of understanding and doing science. But to superimpose these notions of gods and goddesses – or related concepts of the Devil, demons, lords and ladies – onto an Anahuacan knowledge system, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl argues that “these are the true illegal aliens” here in Anahuac (Ibid.). She often also adds “sin,” “trash” and other concepts as foreign, colonial introductions into Indigenous lands and worldviews. She asks us to consider how these concepts themselves must be understood as a form of colonial invasion and ongoing occupation (Ibid.).

Following Chicueyi Coatl, this study of Anahuacan tlamachiliztli (knowledge) takes into consideration that much of the archive – which includes thousands if not hundreds of thousands of studies – is distorted and otherwise disrupted by this Eurocentric impulse, this colonial worldview and perspective. When we shift, discursively, epistemologically, and cosmologically – from *gods to energies* – a fundamental change in perception occurs. This shift is necessary to studying danza as “a complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity” (Battiste and Youngblood 20). This work also extends from the teachings of Capitán Andrés Segura. Maestro Andrés Segura urged his students to re-think the colonial perspectives through which the Mexica have conventionally often been read. As one of his apprentices, Ysidro Macias (2013), writes:

The maestro explained that the Spanish Catholic friars were responsible for the misinterpretation of the energy into ‘gods;’ most likely in a deliberate attempt to make our antepasados appear to be heathens with many competing gods, some with repulsive ceremonies...by proclaiming these energies as ‘gods,’ the Spanish justified the friars efforts, including beatings and threats, to force native conversions to the Catholic faith. The maestro scoffed at ‘historian accounts,’ or should I say ‘snorted,’ when they were mentioned (144).

Shifting the geo- and body politics of knowledge, thinking *from* the cosmovisión in which concepts emerge, on their own terms, and in their own way, is a powerful way to interrupt the coloniality of power and knowledge that has been normalized for centuries in the Westernized imperial university. This is another way I seek to participate in a broader decolonization of knowledge process. Decolonization here means to resist the tendency to colonize knowledge through a process of misinterpretation – problematizing hasty, non-consensual Eurocentric sleights-of-mind. Viewed from this position – as energies and not gods – we may begin to unpack an Anahuacan approach to the arts and sciences that is altogether different. This epistemic maneuver is fundamental to this study of danza as a way of knowing.

These politics of translation go well beyond benign misinterpretation. In his work *Queer Ancient Ways: A Decolonial Exploration*, artist-theorist Zairong Xiang (2018) theorizes this as a “coloniality of translation” (222). While considering Ometeotl’s “gender trouble” when viewed through Western eyes as a “God,” he writes:

This imposition of not only one’s linguistic habits but also cosmological truths *and* problems onto the other in the process of translation, especially from an imperialist language to an indigenous one, is what I call the coloniality of translation...The coloniality of translation operates on different levels, including the linguistic and the epistemic. On the linguistic level, the problem is already quite difficult to solve. In English, one might use ‘it,’ as when we refer to maize or an animal. The English ‘it,’ however, connotes a lack of full agency and ‘life’ itself. As a divine being, Ometeotl is not an ‘it,’ not because Ometeotl might not be maize or an animal (in fact, Ometeotl as Tonacatecuhtli-Tonacacihuatl who sustain life, is maize), but because within the cosmology of the English language and its linguistic habits, the agentless and lifeless English ‘it’ can hardly do justice to the divine Ometeotl. With Spanish, into which many Nahuatl texts were translated, the issue is even more complicated. Since compulsory masculine or feminine gendering is a grammatical feature of Spanish and many other European languages, Ometeotl has been coercively translated as ‘dios de la dualidad,’ the *male* god of duality (222, emphasis in original).

This misnaming and misunderstanding of concepts due to a Eurocentric and colonial mindset – where energies become gods, “theys” become “its” – is an extension of colonial violence and genocide into the epistemological and cosmological realms. Some translations are worse than others. For example, when Maestra Chicueyi Coatl teaches danza communities how to read and interact with the sacred *amoxtin* (codices), she must begin by decolonizing the terms of engagement explicitly. Of the thousands of sacred amoxtin that lived in the *amoxcaltin* (libraries) of Mexico-

Tenochtitlan, only fifteen have survived. Of those only a handful are known to be Pre-Invasion, that is, a primary document created before the arrival of Europeans. Chicueyi Coatl makes clear, that amoxtin are their own sovereign pre-Cuauhtemic form – they are not a book, nor a codex. They are read and written through their own protocol, which includes a profound commitment to ceremony and community-based praxis. To call them a codex, or a book, is incorrect, and profoundly reductive. They are not constructed, nor written, nor read as books nor codices. Codices are a Roman form that emerged in the West during the early Roman Empire and came to define an entire epoch of the early, Latin Christian written tradition.⁵³

Yet this seemingly small semantic shift – from gods to energies, from codex to amoxtli – is fundamental to a decolonization of knowledge and power. In other words, calling things (and more than things) by their true names must be an integral part of the decolonization process. A decolonial perspective views these mistranslations in the light of genocide/epistemicide. Ramón Grosfoguel (2013) articulates this as part of his theorizing of “Epistemic Racism/Sexism, Westernized Universities and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long Sixteenth Century.” He traces the ways in which projects of genocide, seeking to eliminate a people – to expropriate lands and resources – entails colonizers also targeting ways of knowing, ways of being in relationship. This could also be called a form of cultural genocide. Genocide/epistemicide is most explicit in the burning of amoxcaltin (libraries), but also undergirds the processes by which sacred amoxtin are renamed “Codex Vaticanus” (after the Vatican) or the “Dresden Codex” – after the German city where it remains in a colonial museum collection. To drive this point home, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl likens the naming amoxtin after European aristocrats, such as “Borbonicus” or “Borgia”, to renaming the sacred Jewish text of the Torah as “The Book of Hitler” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2019). These are *epistemicidal* moves – rooted in genocidal desires to eliminate and rename, to destroy to replace (Wolfe 2006).

Furthermore, the few sacred texts that survived colonial plunder remain captive in the collections of settler/imperial institutions such as the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the aforementioned Vaticanus and Dresden. This has led to precarious archives full of fraught translations, creating a dearth of reliable information. Through this coloniality of translation, the *Huey Cuauxicalli* or *Tonalmachiotl* becomes the “Aztec Calendar” – it is not Aztec nor a calendar. The *Huey Teocalli* becomes a “Templo Mayor” (Great Temple) and so on. In this context, I carry out my study of danza as a way of knowing carefully, strategically, respectfully, and mindful/conscious of these existing problems and distortions. My translations ask us to shift our perceptions radically, and to respect that we will never fully understand other ways of being and knowing without doing some deeply cosmological, political and epistemic decolonial work.

⁵³ See also, Chapter Six.

Eurocentrism and colonial worldviews also intersect with racist “controlling images” (Collins 1991) of Indigenous peoples as un-civilized, that is un-reasonable, un-modern peoples. An Anahuacan cosmovisión in particular exists in relation to a colonial imaginary dominated by racist and anti-Indigenous obsessions with “Aztecs” as bloodthirsty savages. When thinking and discussing something such as Aztec science, art or philosophy (though I don’t use that specific terminology), the mainstream modern archaeologist, or modern educated person may think: what kind of science can come from such “barbarians?” How can we compare the philosophical and artistic achievements of the Greeks and Romans to such savages? Their entire cultural imaginary is dominated by notions of ritual sacrifice, of blood, hearts being ripped out in graphic detail (Wade 2018). Some will go as far as to say that Mexica had no concept of the heart beyond its utility in sacrifice, part of their wild cosmology of a sun god and superstitious belief systems (Discovery Civilization 2011).

This is colonialism as epistemic racism. What I find interesting, and erased in this culturally racist move, is that the same questions will rarely be asked to problematize how Western science has undoubtedly been part and parcel of genocidal projects whose massacres number in the hundreds of millions of people, and whose colonials incursions have arguably sparked the current, sixth mass extinction. Colonialism remains unproblematic for the Western mind, for the Western self-image of artistic, philosophical and scientific achievement.

These decolonial discursive, analytical, and cosmological shifts are necessary for studying danza as a way of knowing – where one might ask, a way of knowing what? One answer I provide is that danza is a way of knowing *energy*. As Maestro Andrés Segura teaches, one dances to connect “*con la esencia de la cosas*” (Macias 136). Placing these interactions with energy at the center of an analysis of danza, we enter into a different type of conversation – one that might engage more readily with, for example, Western subfields of “new sciences” – such as string theory, epigenetics, evolutionary neurobiology, and complexity science. However, since this knowledge is encoded within practices such as danza and an Anahuacan cosmovisión that is racialized as “primitive” – this intersection is not apparent unless work has been done to create a shared space of thinking together about energy as such. Yet, as many Western philosophies of science move in a “post-materialist” direction (Beauregard et al. 2014) – studying *energy* as the fundamental building block and animator of all *matter* in the universe (including dark matter and energy) – the need to acknowledge and engage with Indigenous perspectives and knowledge on these matters must be reconciled. This epistemic reconciliation must include a recognition that Indigenous peoples have held this kind of knowledge in Other ways for thousands of years – that fields such as New Materialisms are “new” only for the West.

This is not a call for Indigenous knowledge to be included nor somehow legitimized through existing paradigms of Western, modern/colonial thought. Instead this is an invitation to decolonize the arts and sciences through a process of interculturality (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) and epistemic humility (Maduro 2012). In

the broadest (and most optimistic) terms, intercultural arts and sciences (plural) carry the possibilities of working together to address some of the most urgent problems of our time – such as climate change and food in/security. This “decolonial option” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) also opens up the possibility of asking much more interesting questions, including some that address many of the biggest “mysteries” in the West – such as the nature of consciousness, spacetime, dark matter, the origins of life and the limits of human knowledge (Mukerjee 2018). Thinking from danza – as an Other way of knowing energy, not gods – asks us to make this radical, discursive/epistemic shift. This process cannot be rushed nor oversimplified. Instead, I follow the reflections of Standing Rock Sioux scholar-activist Vine DeLoria, Jr. (1999) who, when considering similar questions, concludes: “substitute ‘energy’ for ‘spirit’ [God]...and we have a modern theory of energy/matter. But the similarity, although profound, hides a deeper truth that we must examine” (43). That deeper truth is the colonial difference (Mignolo 2005), that these different ways of knowing reach “their conclusions in entirely different ways, using data that are completely incompatible if placed together” (DeLoria 43). DeLoria (1999) argues this is because the *purpose of knowledge* in Western vis-à-vis Indigenous knowledge systems is radically different. That in the view of “old Indians...all knowledge, if it is to be useful, was directed toward...finding the proper moral and ethical road upon which human beings should walk” (Ibid.).

Critical Dance and Performance Studies

The final theoretical texts that I will review to inform my study of danza emerge from the interdisciplinary fields of critical Dance and Performance Studies. Performance Studies⁵⁴ (PS) is a critical, visionary, interdisciplinary and dialogically alive intellectual project. Now part of a contemporary global conversation, PS runs parallel, and at times intersects historically, with the other theories I have already discussed above (Ethnic Studies, U.S. Third World Women of Color feminisms and Decoloniality). PS in particular is rooted in a set of key cross-pollinations that took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s U.S. academy. PS is itself always already a set of linkages, a locus of inter-connections, a diverse and lively meeting place of people and projects. It is a space where scholars and practitioners convene to critically engage questions across existing disciplines – of art practice, history, theory, language arts, and the social sciences to name a few. One can enter into PS from countless locations – both geographically and epistemologically – in theory and praxis. Nearly every existing disciplinary project can find a way to engage and integrate the analytics of performance in some way. This is because the broadest theoretical assumptions and concerns of PS are located in an infinitely deep and vast set of analytical questions

⁵⁴ I will focus this theoretical review on specific texts that emerge from Performance Studies literature and intersect most directly with critical and comparative Ethnic Studies. I will refer to Performance Studies in the broadest sense as PS, mindful that Dance Studies, Theater Studies and related projects inform but also depart from this more general term “performance.”

– treating all things in the universe as participating in this thing we call *performance*. That is, anything that moves, that shifts, that changes, that *does*, can be engaged, and studied through the analytics of performance (Taylor 2016).

Academically, PS emerged as a cross-disciplinary conversation between theater, anthropology, critical theory, feminist studies, rhetoric and linguistics – with two particular institutional spaces serving as important sites of originary dialogue: New York University’s Drama/Performance Studies Department and Northwestern University’s School of Communications. Many of the key performance texts that have informed my study have come from this dynamic group of scholars and debates, including the work of Richard Schechner (2010), Peggy Phelan (2003), Victor Turner (1974), Dwight Conquergood (2013), and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998). These academic formulations of PS were also developed in conversation with experimental and performance art practice – inspired by contemporary artists such as Chris Burden, Yves Klein, and Yoko Ono who were pushing the boundaries of creative expression at the time. Working from within a Euro-centered, dominant art paradigm, these artists challenged the Western art world to (re)consider the performativity of art itself – experimenting with media, embodied experiences and aesthetic traditions within and beyond the museum.

The historical trajectory of PS as an academic field of inquiry has helped shape a dynamic intellectual approach to studies of culture, power, knowledge, history and the body. In this way, Diana Taylor’s (2003) *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural History in the Americas* persists as an important contribution to the terms of these debates. Written and formulated from the intersection of Latinx (Hemispheric) Studies and Performance Studies, the concept of “the archive and the repertoire” (Taylor 2003) presents a critical intervention into Western paradigms of knowledge production, asking us to re-think the “rift...between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (19). Critical of the archive’s promises of containing definitive sources of knowledge – a mythology of fixed truths and objective facts – the repertoire of embodied theory/practice enacts cultural memory through living, breathing, and dynamic epistemologies. Taylor (2003) argues that looking through the lens of the repertoire requires a “remapping of the Americas, this time by following the traditions of embodied practice” (20). This formulation resists binary reductions of the archive vis-à-vis the repertoire. They are in dialogue, in dialectical relationship, transforming and mobilizing knowledge/power in many different directions, from and through many different bodies – individual and collective, liberatory, oppressive and otherwise. The space between the archive and repertoire is, in other words, a site of struggle. This epistemic maneuver destabilizes thought regimes based on the equation of “writing = memory/knowledge...that is central to Western epistemology” (26). Instead, Taylor (2003) asks us to consider what kind of re-mapping would happen if we shifted the geo- and body- politics of knowledge (to borrow the phrase

again from decolonial thinker Walter D. Mignolo) from the archive (written, concrete, tangible) to the repertoire (ephemeral, living/dying). Would we be able to even see political nation-state borders from this perspective, or would the porousness of lived migrations and cultural exchanges actually move under, over and around these archival edifices? With the repertoire performing alongside and in living relation to the archive, logocentric ways of knowing are disrupted – making more visible the ways in which embodied and enacted knowledge systems have been devalued and disempowered in the history of Western thought.

Pivoting towards and thinking from an Anahuacan cosmovisión, my own study intervenes in these debates by centering danza as a ceremonial, communal and embodied way of knowing. Engaging with PS theories and methods as a critical and comparative Ethnic Studies scholar-activist and danzante, I seek to dance in some of the decolonial cracks (Walsh 2014) that have been opened by performance scholars. While PS frameworks are helpful in tracing the contours of some existing epistemic problems in the West, some of these approaches remain limited in their ability to actually allow me to think *from* ceremony. By this I mean to point to the ways in which some of the embedded assumptions and unconscious presuppositions of PS remain Eurocentric – that while PS is an important intervention that emerged from the intersections of the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, these challenges nonetheless extend from a persistently Western tradition of both scholarship and art practice (Magnat 2016). For starters, the idea of knowledge being alive and embodied is not a novel concept for many non-Western epistemologies. It is important to mention here that some works of PS have tried to acknowledge these aspects of “performance” as having existed within, without, and underneath the Euro-centered university for millennia (Schechner 2010; Turner 1974). Nonetheless, an emerging conversation between PS and theories of decoloniality may provide some helpful tools to enact this epistemic shift more radically and concretely.

In this way, non-binary researcher and theorist of embodied practice Ben Spatz (2019) points to the ways in which performance theory could stand to decolonize some of its approaches to embodied knowledge. They argue:

As I understand it, the division that must be broken down in order to develop the concept of embodied arts in a decolonial way is not between theatre and dance, or between these and music, but between performing arts—defined by the presence of a spectator figured as external to the ‘work’ of the event—and all those embodied arts that do not involve performance in this sense. To think embodied arts, we need to go beyond the dissolution of disciplinary divisions that structure western performing arts and recognize the blending and overlapping of performing arts with martial arts, healing arts, ritual arts, and sexual arts, etc.—all the fields of artistry and knowledge in which the affordances of embodiment itself are foregrounded (12-13).

Understanding the inseparability of Anahuacan thought and embodied ceremonial practices such as danza – an epistemic and cultural cohesion that itself has survived genocide/epistemicide (Grosfoguel 2013) – it becomes clear that my study of danza as a way of knowing must engage strategically and intentionally with existing theories of embodied knowledge. In other words – and as I will unpack at length in chapter one of this study – we must problematize what we even mean by “embodiment”, and therefore “the body.” Furthermore, we must also engage and build upon PS’ own definition of performance – critically de-linking (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) performance from overly Westernized conceptions of the term. As Spatz (2019) also argues:

This has everything to do with the limitations of performance as a concept, insofar as it posits a spectatorial position in relation to which the meaning of the event takes place—a position which easily becomes synonymous with that of the theorist or critic. We therefore cannot avoid asking whether and how embodiment itself might be decolonized in a field where the body is absolutely central and yet still not recognized (15).

Thinking from the Anahuacan body,⁵⁵ in ceremony, the performative aspects of an Anahuacan epistemology may not need be conceptualized as such. Instead, I consider forms of “performativity that might be employed to explore the enduring power and efficacy of traditional performance practices linked to ancestral forms of embodied knowledge. From such a perspective, performing might be associated with a longing for the invigorating sense of immediacy pertaining to cultural practices linked to ancient ways of life and cognition” (Magnat 2016: 147).

Danza as a way of knowing, in this way, is precisely about ceremonial dance as an embodied way of activating ancestral knowledge and re-memorizing right relations. Resistant epistemologies that have been passed down in subversive and creative ways such as danza could also be understood in these terms – as part of a transgenerational and intercultural decolonial struggle to remain intact as individual, collective and epistemic bodies. Dancing/thinking with performance scholars and theories, I seek to dance upon this epistemic bridge towards harmonic ways of being in relationship once more.

Method/ology

There are two methodological voices that shape this dissertation. The *ethnographic* is a descriptive, observational, participatory, and engaged voice. It is my

⁵⁵ See also “The Anahuacan Body” in Chapter One of this study.

voice as a *danzante* with eyes wide open, opening peripheral vision to try and see the bigger picture. It is the voice that reflects on and recalls conversations with other *danzantes*, teachers and elders. It is a voice that describes the milieu, the context, the history and geography of the landscape of *danza*. The other voice is *philosophical* or perhaps, *phenomenological*. It is the inward, introspective, embodied voice of being a *danzante* in ceremony. It is writing as thinking as dancing. It is a voice that writes directly from the bones, the flesh, the heart. It is thinking with the whole body in motion, a body that is always in relation with other bodies. It is a voice that writes ceremonially.

Writing from ceremony through these voices is itself a way of seeking balance between masculine and feminine ways of knowing, what I term *epistemic harmony*. It is a way of looking within and without at once. It is an *Ometeotl* state of mind. It honors “inner work/public acts” as forms of “spiritual activism” (Anzaldúa 2002). It is what leading jazz saxophonist and band leader Kamasi Washington (2017) channeled through his recent record *Harmony of Difference*. Thinking from the space between the university and ceremony, working as a *mitotiani* scholar requires “border thinking” (Mignolo 2005) – an epistemic process that dances with the conflicting and oppositional energies that meet in the middle. I think from the spaces and times that contain the possibility of decoloniality as epistemic harmony. Epistemic harmony is also synonymous with “mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldúa 2002), “double consciousness” (DuBois 2008), “border thinking” (Mignolo 2005) and “spiritual activism” (Anzaldúa 2002). It is related and in conversation with “the *Mi’kmaw* concept of Two-Eyed Seeing as the synthesis of Indigenous methodology and participatory action research situated within an Indigenous paradigm of relevant, reciprocal, respectful, and responsible research” (Peltier 2018).

Thinking/dancing in *nepantla*, a place of abundant temporality (Maffie 2014), I seek knowledge in reciprocity and collaboration – in relationship. These relationships – between the scholar, the *danzante*, the activist – institutionally and internally, like all relationships, are alive. They have their own stories and are relationships that must be attended to and actively nourished in order to stay rooted in embodied dynamics of respect, permission and reciprocity. In a landscape where settler colonialism and genocide persist as structures of violence in everyday life, a coloniality of power – “a colonial difference” (Mignolo 2005) – must be problematized, visibilized, and consistently dismantled. If coloniality creates a matrix of power and difference where binaries define vertical relationships of domination and exploitation – race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, education, language – all aspects of daily life are touched and colored by this colonial/imperial deathworld. This is thinking/working from a space of confluence and historical violence – from the “*limen*” (Lugones 59) itself. As Latina feminist philosopher María Lugones (2003) writes,

...one may also inhabit the limen, the place in between realities, a gap 'between and betwixt' universes of sense that construe social life and persons differently, an interstice from where one can most clearly stand critically toward different structures (59).

There can be no neutrality, no appeals to objectivity – only commitments to “world-traveling” (Lugones 77) with balance, responsibility and accountability. As Lugones (2003) advances, “the critical understanding is made possible, in part, by going into the limen when one ‘travels’ to the other worlds. The limen is the place where one becomes most fully aware of one’s multiplicity” (59). This is something akin to Fanon/Wynter’s (1999) “sociogenic principle.”⁵⁶ Methodologically, *danzando en nepantla* is a *cosmogenic* way of knowing.

I pursue this work in conversation with Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson’s (2008) articulation of an “Indigenous research paradigm” (13), where *Research is Ceremony*. Where “Indigenous epistemology and ontology are based upon relationality...axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability” (Wilson 11). In this paradigm, ceremonial ethics guide the relationships between the researcher and all their relations. As Wilson (2008) writes, “The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world” (11). Thinking from this ceremonial positionality and point of view, the *purpose of the study*, as it were, is to bring us towards the healing and restoration of our relationships. As danzantes, thinkers, writers, readers, artists, and human beings, “let us be the healing of the wound” (Anzaldúa 2009: 303).

On Performance Ethnography

In general terms I understand ethnography as the “study of the world through social relations” (“What is Ethnography?”). In this way, I engage “Performance Ethnography” in conversation with performance scholar and ancestor Dwight Conquergood (2013) whose own method/ologies build upon the foundational work of anthropologist of performance Victor Turner (1974). These performance studies approaches to ethnography interrogate research itself as an embodied practice – designing critical cultural methodologies that account for our roles as scholars and practitioners at once. Through this framework, scholars have developed community performances as ethnographic encounters and spaces of cultural dialogue – where inter-communal research becomes a means through which cultural knowledge can be transmitted and exchanged. Similarly, performance ethnography also offers a way for scholars to think from the mind of a practitioner, that is, moving from the

⁵⁶ See “Theoretical Frameworks,” p. 37 of this study.

conventional participant observation to “observant participation” (Conquergood 2013). These approaches have been developed in mindful dialogue with the disciplinary and methodological baggage of anthropology and ethnography as colonial endeavors.

My own considerations of this methodological tradition are guided by the words of my Maestra Chicueyi Coatl when she argued, “anthropologists don’t dance” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2015). I understand Maestra Chicueyi Coatl’s statement here as multidimensional. In one way, “anthropologists don’t dance” reminds us that ceremony is not something to be observed, but a space and time of participation and presence. If a would-be anthropologist were to dance, they trouble their detached anthropological existence, in the sense that they are now an embodied participant, and therefore a compromised objective researcher. In another way, “anthropologists don’t dance” signals an Indigenous (Anahuacan) refusal to be studied colonially. It signals to outsider scholars that there is a consciousness of the problematic history of anthropology (and related projects) that have made research a “dirty word for Indigenous communities” (Smith 1999: 1). Any ethnographic study that includes a discussion of ceremony must problematize this fraught history of anthropological fetishization of Native ritual and especially ceremonial dance – finding ways to interrupt these sorts of neocolonial tropes.⁵⁷

Finally, at the heart of this assertion - that “anthropologists don’t dance” - is that danza transforms our relationship to how and what we know. The quintessential anthropologist – “in the jungle” with their ethnographic notepad and camera ready to capture visual and physical data – is looking for knowledge in all the wrong places. The methodological lenses have been so historically dirtied, sullied and distorted through a coloniality of power and knowledge that what they focus on is often incomplete, out of context, or downright incorrect. These studies are spaces of knowledge production for and by the Westernized observer and academic. The Native, as “savage” Other, as “primitive,” un-Rational object is reduced to a mirror – reflecting back, the European, “civilized,” Rational Man.⁵⁸

As a critical engagement with ethnography, the closest methodological resonances I have found for my study have come from Virginie Magnat’s (2012) “Can Research Become Ceremony?: Performance Ethnography and Indigenous

⁵⁷ In her book *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, Jacqueline Shea Murphy (2007) shares the following exhaustive list of anthropological texts that have studied ceremonial dance: “James Mooney, *The Ghost - Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1896; repr. 1991); James H. Howard and Victoria Lindsay Levine, *Choctaw Music and Dance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); John Q. Bourke, *Snake Dance of the Moquis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1884; repr. 1994). William K. Powers, *War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990); Alexander Lesser, *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game: Ghost Dance Revival and Ethnic Identity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1933; repr. 1996); Michael Grummett, *Sundance: The 50th Anniversary Crow Indian Sun Dance* (Helena: Falcon Press, 1993); Fred W. Voget, *The Shoshoni - Crow Sun Dance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984); Charlotte J. Frisbie, ed., *Southwestern Indian Ritual Drama* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980); Clyde Holler, *Black Elk’s Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995). Jill D. Sweet, *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1985).

⁵⁸ A methodological problem related to Said’s (1978) notion of “Orientalism.”

Epistemologies.” From this intersection of “Performance Ethnography” and “Indigenous Epistemologies,” Magnat (2012) asks: “can performance ethnography become a way of engaging in research that contributes not only to our survival, as members of the performing species, but to the survival of all living species and of the natural world which we co-inhabit” (30)? To develop this methodology – an Indigenous-centered performance ethnography – Magnat (2012) engages Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood’s performance methodologies that critique how “epistemologies grounded in process, practice, and place, have been discredited through the systematic institutionalization of print-culture” (32). She emphasizes these critical interventions’ ability to unpack “performance as experiential, reflexive and intersubjective” (30) in ways that “legitimize embodied ways of knowing” (32).

To bridge Performance and Indigenous Studies, she argues that “it is urgent to consider ways in which performance ethnography can become informed and possibly transformed by Indigenous perspectives” (Magnat 2012: 33). Rooted in the foundational decolonial work of Maori intellectual Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Native Hawaiian scholar/elder Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008), Magnat (2012) articulates a “conception of indigeneity” that is “grounded in a place-specific understanding of universality predicated on the interrelation of land and self, experience and spirituality, and embodiment and knowledge” (34). Magnat turns to Meyer’s work on Halemakua ways of knowing through chant and ceremony to provide a case for intersections of “performance” and Indigenous knowledge systems. Quoted by Magnat (2012), Myers writes “at one time, we all came from a place familiar with our evolution and storied with our experiences. At one time, we all had a rhythmic understanding of time and potent experiences of harmony in space” (34). Magnat then closes by engaging Wilson’s (2008) notion of “research as ceremony”. Returning to her original question, “Can Research Become Ceremony?”, she concludes: “Decolonizing performance ethnography necessarily entails redefining both ethnographic research, shaped by the discipline of anthropology, and performance practice, informed by Western theatre...performance ethnography informed by Indigenous perspectives can teach us how research may become ceremony” (34).

On Performance Philosophy: Epistemology (and Phenomenology?)

Thinking from danza – with a primary training and methodological grounding in critical and comparative Ethnic Studies – this dissertation seeks to serve as an exploration of the transdisciplinary question of research and/as ceremony. My research integrates notions of decolonial or Indigenous performance ethnography, with a similar intervention into performance’s engagement with philosophy. As a nascent field, “performance philosophy” (Maoilearca 2015), seeks to bridge post-structuralist and critical theory with the work of “performance.” As performance philosopher Tess Denman-Cleaver (2018) writes:

Performance philosophy can be understood as a disciplinary relative to performance studies, which Schechner described as ‘the avant-garde’s academic partner’ (Schechner, 2010, p. 903). Schechner observed that many performance studies scholars, including himself, ‘are also practicing artists working in the avant-garde, in community-based performance, and elsewhere’ (ibid.). Like performance studies, in performance philosophy ‘the relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral’ (ibid.) to the nature of the field...Esa Kirkkopelto suggests that the aim of performance philosophy is ‘to recognise the genuine nature, in other words the philosophical bearing, of the questions practitioners present to their artistic and academic communities as well as to a wider society’ (Kirkkopelto, 2015, p. 5). Recognition of the philosophical work that performance does and examination of how performance does philosophy defines this field of study...Tony Fisher described performance philosophy as an attempt to ‘think through the possibility that performance is itself a kind of philosophical endeavour, that performance “thinks”’ (Fisher, 2015, p. 176). (26-27).

My engagement with performance philosophy builds on decolonial critiques that seek to expand performance (Magnat 2016; Spatz 2019) to include other ways of knowing beyond practices recognized in the West as performative. Though these theorizations of performance, like Denman-Cleaver’s (2018), most commonly rely on Western traditions of the performing arts – theater, dance, and music in particular – I aim to explore and expand, in similar terms, how danza thinks.

Decolonizing Method/ologies

“...a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies.” (Fanon 2008: 2)

Towards these ends, as a practitioner/scholar, I aim to develop a research and writing methodology that gives voice to the things I have come to know through dancing and thinking in ceremony. This is the primary means through which the content of each body chapter has come to be. With these gut/heart feelings in mind, I ask my teachers and elders for guidance, I visit the archive, I read, I sing, I pay attention to my dreams.

Methodologically there are some overlaps with these approaches and what Western philosophy considers the “phenomenological” – insofar as there are shared questions and concerns with the nature of consciousness, intentionality, and inter/subjectivity. Furthermore, phenomenology’s attendance to embodiment, language and worldview provide further bridges to understanding different ways of knowing. The concerns of scholars seeking to link phenomenology and performance

extend this notion to consider questions of cognition, perception and sensorium, directly centered in corporeality and somatic experience (Grant, McNeilly-Renaudie, Wagner 2019).

To be sure, however, I am not seeking to enact the phenomenological method as it was developed in the West by philosophers such as Husserl or Heidegger. I am not a Western trained philosopher, much less a phenomenologist. Instead, my aim is to develop, in practice, a *danzante epistemology and methodology*: a way of knowing that includes dancing, playing music, singing, listening, sweating, crying, bleeding, healing, paying attention, breathing, dreaming, reading symbols, drawing, dialoguing with elders and maestrxs, meditation, as well as reading and writing in the more conventional academic senses of the terms.

Through danza as a theory and praxis – as a theoretico-praxis – I argue that Indigenous ceremonial movement and sound asks us to radically rethink questions of consciousness, subjectivity, social relations, language, and knowledge. From an Anahuacan perspective, these questions are not only human problems – they are cosmic questions. By this I mean that consciousness, cognition, sociality, culture, even performance, must be studied relationally, and not anthropocentrically. The implication here is that if we are conscious, performing, cultural, social, thinking beings in relation to the cosmos, why aren't all our relations given the same respect and "subjectivity?" What does knowledge, and knowing, look like when we consider that the universe itself knows?

Therefore, my approach to this study enters into dialogue, as a human – a humble *macehualli* – in relation to other humans, as well as the more than human. My questions are posed in a landscape that is always already understood to be interdependent (Cajete 2000), interconnected and interbeing (Hanh 2001). If these considerations contribute to methodological debates happening within Westernized traditions of anthropology and philosophy this is would be a secondary effect, a byproduct of the central concerns of my study. The center of this work remains in ceremony.

Danza Literature Review

By way of review of the extant literature on danza I will begin by surveying the field of *Mesoamerican Studies* as such, insofar as these scholars provide important background information and secondary studies of Anahuacan dance, ceremony and cosmovisión. From there I will pivot to a thorough review of existing scholarship on danza itself – articulating an emerging field of *Danza Studies*.

Mesoamerican Studies

Mesoamerican Studies is a lively transnational and interdisciplinary field – populated by a diverse group of scholars trained in archaeology, anthropology,

archeoastronomy, ethnomathematics, philosophy, cultural theory, linguistics, art history and architecture. Their shared interests are interpreting Indigenous knowledge systems from Central and North America through their respective methodologies and tools of inquiry. Varying degrees of Eurocentricity limit how these non-Native scholars engage with Indigenous ways of knowing, given their reliance on Westernized archives, institutions, disciplinary trainings and attendant epistemic presuppositions embedded in their approaches and worldview.

The work of Ángel María Garibay K. (1964; 1971), Alfredo López Austin (1985; 2004; 2016), Miguel León-Portilla (1963; 1980), and Patrick Johansson (1994) among others form an important tradition in Mesoamerican Studies as a field. Their work – centered in many ways in the *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) – connects academic fields of archaeology, anthropology, philosophy, and linguistics to advance the study in Indigenous knowledge systems in Mexico in particular, but also in the Americas at large. Garibay (1964) and León-Portilla (1963) provide a foundational approach to the study of Nahuatl language, thought and culture. Their work provides some of the most commonly cited translations of primary texts, with extensive analysis of common themes and emergent philosophies embedded in the colonial archive.

It is significant to note that the archive from which many of these scholars are working is a colonial one. That is, aside from a handful of *pre-Cuauhtemic*⁵⁹ *amoxtin* (codices) that survived the mass burnings of *amoxcaltin* (libraries), most of the accounts these scholars rely on are told through the ethnographic work of these early Spanish records of the conquest itself. The archive of this field in many ways begins during the Spanish colonial project, insofar as we are thinking of the archive in its conventional terms. 16th century friar, missionary and ethnographer Bernardino de Sahagún is an omnipresent and foundational thinker here, with nearly all his works being translated to Spanish, from Nahuatl, and his *obras* (works) being considered the model for modern Mexican anthropology. León-Portilla (2002) wrote a book-length study on Sahagún as the *First Anthropologist*. Sahagún's work does provide important archival resources for the study of the colonial moment in Anahuac, many times recording the words of his "informants" at length and without much of his own interjections or analyses. After learning and mastering Nahuatl, he transcribed hundreds of pieces of the oral tradition as they were carried and spoken to him in the 15th century.

Nonetheless, these scholars' trainings and approaches are, for all intents and purposes, Western and colonial. They are trained in the methodological approaches

⁵⁹ In this study I will use the term *pre-Cuauhtemic*, after Maestra Chicueyi-Coatl's development of the term, an Anahuacan alternative to *Pre-Columbian*, *Pre-Hispanic* or *Pre-Cortesian*. These more conventional, that is, Eurocentric terms privilege the arrival of European colonizers to Anahuac as a point of origin. Instead, *pre-Cuauhtemic* centers the figure of historic Mexica leader, *Huey Tlahtoani Cuauhtemotzin*, the last Huey Tlahtoani, or Great Speaker, the last head of the Triple Alliance of Anahuac, the young *yaocuauhtli yaocelotl*, eagle-jaguar warrior. Cuauhtemoc, who presided and led the people of Anahuac as Mexico-Tenochtitlan was being invaded by Spanish colonial and their allied armies in 1521. Centering Cuauhtemoc privileges Anahuacan experiences and perspectives of colonial invasion. Cuauhtemoc's "last mandate" (see Chapter Two of this study) serves as the crux of this temporality, of survivance as existence as resistance.

of their respective disciplinary fields. Nonetheless, they remain and will continue to serve as the foundational literature from which Mesoamerican Studies is based. The term *Mesoamerica* itself – from the Greek, “middle America” – is a non-Native concept, attributed to a German ethnologist Paul Kirchhoff (1952). In many ways, these thinkers were trying to open up a conversation between Anahuacan cosmovisiones and other “civilizations” recognized as such in the West – namely Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian, and Modern Europe. For example, Miguel León-Portilla (1963) committed many works to convincing the Mexican academy that the *Mexica* practiced “philosophy” as such. This intervention was interrupting a dominant discourse of the Mexica as being reduced always already to a study of human sacrifice and “savage” violence. Framed in a nationalist discourse, this generation of Mesoamericanists sought to reintroduce Mexico to its “heritage,” and their responsibility, as Mexicans to continue these knowledge projects of their ancestral past.

Mexican poet and scholar Iliana Godoy was the lead researcher and organizer for a landmark digital humanities project within Mesoamerican Studies, the *Museo Virtual Precolombino*, through the Faculty of Architecture at UNAM. This transdisciplinary research project provided profound insight for my research into primary and secondary sources on Anahuacan geometry, mathematics, history, poetics, art and architecture – building exciting bridges between Mesoamerican Studies and “new paradigms” such as quantum physics, holography, fractal geometry, and astro-numerology. Godoy’s (2004) work on *Coatlicue* and *Coyolxauhqui*, for example, as ways to understand David Bohm’s (1980) theories of the *holomovement* and *implicate order*⁶⁰ was formative for my own desire to link danza and fields such as quantum physics. I am indebted to her extensive work and grieve her recent passing to the ancestors.

For the purposes of studying and practicing danza outside the Westernized academy, Mesoamericanists do serve as common *fuentes* (sources) from which many *danzantes estudiosos* (danzante-scholars) pursue deeper study of Anahuacan science and philosophy. These works are cited and mobilized within danza circles regularly as a means of engaging primary sources. Anecdotally, upon meeting a danzante in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, one of her first questions to me was: “have you read León-Portilla” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2018)? I said I have. She replied, “well I have it in .pdf if you would like,” I accepted and distributed the link among my calpulli as a resource (Fieldnotes, Summer 2018). Also, during my first visit to danzar in the sacred Toltec city of Teotihuacan, Jefe Ixtliocelotl Pedro Díaz of Xolalpan Teopanacazco Teotihuacan sat me down and shared an extensive list (from memory) of where to start my studies of this archive. This literature review in many ways began that day in his living room in San Juan de Teotihuacan (Fieldnotes, Fall 2017).

While many works from Mesoamerican Studies serve as important references for this dissertation, I must always place this work in relation to what Roberto “Dr.

⁶⁰ Bohm’s interpretations of quantum physics that posit the wholeness of the universe, and the study of the implicate/explicate orders as relationships between matter and energy that are fluid and always already interconnected.

Cintli” Rodríguez (2014) calls an “elder epistemology” (10). For the question of ceremony, the archive helps to understand a background of the problem, but the substance of these teachings are not found in books, nor in universities. The oral tradition – whether spoken, danced, sung or expressed another way – remains at the heart of ceremonial knowledge. Therefore, while I outline Mesoamerican Studies here in its own right for its valuable contributions to the literature, this discourse will appear implicitly as background for my study. The primary discourse will remain committed to centering and fore-fronting an Anahuacan cosmovisión and ceremonial theoretic-praxis.

Danza Studies

In order to situate and inspire this dissertation, I must trace the contours of the emerging transdisciplinary subfield of *Danza Studies*. From the intersection of many existing disciplines and approaches, scholars and practitioners demonstrate a profound commitment to the historical and contemporary study of danza. Reading and engaging these danza scholars allows me to situate more clearly my own aims to contribution to the conversations and further develop a *mitotiani methodology* and *epistemology*.

This review is not comprehensive. Instead, it focuses on the key sources that I have relied on most extensively in order to complete this dissertation. Most of these studies were published over the past 50 years, with Chicana scholars in particular writing and publishing since the 2000s. I have chosen to engage most directly with danza scholars who write explicitly from their lived experiences as danzantes as well. These works resonate most deeply with my own desires to study danza a way of knowing and knowing as a way of dancing – and have helped build the scholar-practitioner theories and methodologies I seek to develop in this study. Of course, scholars who are not danzantes themselves also inform my project, but their contributions are, as it were, secondary. This is not meant to over-valorize the scholar-practitioner approach in general, although this positionality is important to consider in studies of embodied and experiential ways of knowing in particular. Danzante-scholars approach to the subject is markedly different, in that the main communities to which they/we are accountable includes danza elders and fellow danzantes in the movement. The university is understood as an important site of inquiry but is not the only space through which knowledge is engaged and understood. This in-between experience is part and parcel of the epistemology I seek to trace in this study – of the *danzante en nepantla*, crossing borders and ways of being and knowing in ways that remain balanced, graceful and whole. There are also many shared questions across these danzante studies: including, for example, what it means to be a danzante in the 21st century, what does it mean to work as a calpulli, how can we conduct research as ceremony, how does danza serve as a means of community empowerment, and how can our study serve to deepen theory and praxis at once? In

this way, my project of tracing how danza transforms our relationship to knowledge is already evidenced in the central texts that inspire and ground this research.

In his study of *Indigenous Education Through Dance and Ceremony: A Mexica Palimpsest*, education scholar and danzante Ernesto Colín (2014) theorizes danza as a space of community praxis and decolonial pedagogy. He structures his study through the notion of a “Mexica Palimpsest” (Colín 2014). The palimpsest here is deployed at many levels, as a “dynamic, plastic and versatile term...to describe group activity, cultural traditions, history, and personal identity in a Mexica dance circle” (180). With the *tonalamatl*⁶¹ in mind as a metaphor, Colín traces how the praxis of danza participates in this process of layering, of accumulating memory through a palimpsestic process of writing and re-writing. For example, he applies this framework to each weekly *ensayo* (practice) and danza ceremony, whereby ceremonial space and time is opened and an Other time and place is invoked. For Colín, working in urban San Jose with *Calpulli Tonalhuequeh*, ceremony is “a location of palimpsest...a modern reiteration of an ancient tradition” (135). The text provides one of the few full-length academic studies of danza in print in English, published as a book through Palgrave MacMillan’s “Postcolonial Studies in Education” series. Through education ethnography, Colín describes how this calpulli, in relation to a “danza landscape” (1) comprised of other *círculos* (ceremonial circles) and complex lineages, sustains and re-members an Indigenous knowledge system through danza ceremonies and the many community practices that are necessary to maintain a functioning calpulli structure in modern-day Anahuac. I rely on this text in many ways for my own study, as an inspiration and also as a cross-reference for how danza operates in modern California, and in the San Francisco Bay Area in particular.

While not in print as published academic books, there are a group of other scholar-danzante texts that have opened the *camino* (path) for danza scholarship through their doctoral dissertations and master’s theses. Dr. Jennie Luna’s (2011) dissertation project “Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance” serves as a foundational resource for decolonial mitotiani scholarship. As an interdisciplinary study guided by the Department of Native American Studies at UC Davis, this text provides a thorough, authoritative and poignant overview of the historical and geographical trajectories of danza. Through interviews, focus groups and many years of active participation in the danza movement, Luna constructs an important archive of lineages, migrations, and iterations of the danza tradition. Her extensive archival and ethnographic research creates a strong foundation for danza scholars to engage and build upon. While Colín’s work might be thought of as an extended dialogue with Maestro Ocelocoatl (amongst many others), Luna’s dissertation pays particular homage to the lifework of Señora Angelbertha Cobb, a

⁶¹ Could be translated literally as “energy scroll,” also called a “book of destiny,” refers to the Anahuacan traditional cosmic energy and identity chart that is calculated by an elder and presented in ceremony to children in their first years of life, for families to understand the astronomical and cosmic phenomena that protect and guide the child, is also presented to adults who have not yet received theirs in ceremony.

respected danza elder whom Luna describes as a “living codex” (218). Similarly, Luna is also thinking and writing in conversation with Maestro Juan Esteva⁶² and the calpulli they helped *sembrar* (found) in New York in 1999, Cetiliztli Nauhcampa Quetzacoatl in Ixachitlan. Working with this community, Luna provides a zoomed-in perspective into the development of protocol, organizational structures and *costumbres* (customs) for a Mexicayotl calpulli. In this way, Luna’s observations and loci expand and contract – from a hemispheric overview of the *longue durée*⁶³ of danza, to the embodied and collective everyday practices of contemporary danzantes living and working in Anahuac.

Another danzante-scholar who has opened this *camino* is Capitán Mario Aguilar. His dissertation, “The Rituals of Kindness: The Influence of the Danza Azteca Tradition of Central Mexico on Chicano-Mexcoehuani Identity and Sacred Space” (2009), is a landmark study from a *Capitán General* in the danza tradition. Aguilar completed his doctoral training at SDSU and Claremont Graduate University in Education and has worked as an academic counselor at UCSD for over 33 years. In 1987, he helped co-found the *Mexic’ayotl Indio Cultural Center* in San Diego and has been a danzante for over 45 years – now serving as Capitán General with Danza Mexic’ayotl. By many accounts, Aguilar was the first Chicano to be given *palabra* (authority) from the original *mesas* (Conchero leadership councils) in Mexico. This is a huge accomplishment and significant moment in the history of danza, in that it helped bridge the settler border between the U.S. and Mexico, facilitating a remembering process for those who descend from peoples who have historically migrated throughout this continent. Aguilar was central to this moment in danza history that is now understood as a “return” of danza to the North, to the spiritual territory of Aztlan – the mythical place from which the Azteca receive their name (Poveda 1981). To give a name to this larger *pueblo* (people), Aguilar develops the term “Mexcoehuani” as “a unified cultural, political, and spiritual identity that encompasses all of the Mexican origin communities of Aztlan” (5). This term includes Mexicanxs, Chicaxs, and Mexican-Americans, as the Nahuatl term for “a person whose ancestors arose, were born, or came from Mexico” (9). Capitán Aguilar also specifies that he focuses on “Mexcoehuani who seek membership in the indigenous heritage of Mexico, and that seek a spiritual path based on that heritage” (Ibid.).

Aguilar’s (2009) study traces the agricultural, military and religious roots of danza. Throughout this study, Aguilar treats Danza Azteca always as a mixture of Native American/Meso-American and Spanish Catholic roots. This provides an important mapping of the trajectory of “syncretism” and how it has shaped the Conchero tradition, and in danza in general. His research and writing provide an important perspective in the complex history of danza – one that resonates and serves as another node from which to cross-reference other sources that trace these same lineages (Concheros, pre-Conquest, return to U.S. territories). In particular,

⁶² Founder and *palabra* (leader) of *Danza In Xochitl, In Cuicatl* at UC Berkeley.

⁶³ The protracted formulation of cultural change over centuries.

Aguilar returns throughout his dissertation to an analytic emphasis on space, spatialization and the creation of sacred space. This relation between space and identity is at the heart of his study. Through auto-ethnography, *auto-historia*,⁶⁴ interviews/narratives, and online surveys, Aguilar collects data to illustrate many different perspectives of danza and its impact on Mexcoehuani and related communities. I rely on Aguilar's study for many important historical references and also as a poetic engagement with the symbolic structures and ceremonial protocols of danza. His writing style is accessible and creative. His own auto-ethnography, as such a crucial figure in the history of danza in the United States, is also invaluable.

Another important danzante-scholar thesis project that has informed my own research is Zotero Citlalcoatl's (2010) "Amoxthli Yaoxochimeh." This thesis was submitted for an M.S. in Mexican American and Raza Studies at the University of Arizona, at a time when the struggle for Mexican American Studies (MAS) in AZ was in full swing. Just that year, the state had banned Tucson Unified School District's influential and impactful MAS program. Danza – as part of a larger "red road," militant, spiritual activist Xicanismo – was very present in this struggle over whose knowledge is valid and valued. In his thesis project, Citlalcoatl provides a powerful overview of many of the ancestral values and structures that have been defended and practiced through danza, focusing on how danza has helped encode Indigenous cosmologies and knowledge systems over the past 500 years of colonial occupation. He develops notions of an "Anahuacayotl epistemology" (8) and "Quetzalcoatl methodology" (16) as ways in which "Nican Tlahcah" ("those people who are present", i.e. Native peoples) can continue practicing ancestral ways of knowing and being in community with each other and the land. *Nican Tlahcah* is a Mexicayotl identity formation that is in conversation with Aguilar's "Mexcoehuani" and Luna's and Colin's notion of what it means to be "Xicana Indígena" or "Mexica" – that is, a descendent of the original peoples of these lands – from what is now known as Central and North America. These variable terminologies point to the ways in which the development of an Indigenous Xicanx identity amidst processes of "detrribalization" and "deracination" remains a central concern of many danzante scholars. This is an active debate that has also become a lively discussion in relation to other Indigenous communities and identities, raising questions of what it means to be Indigenous (Arellano 2017; Alberto 2016; Young 2012).

For Citlalcoatl (2010), the calpulli structure (what he writes as "calpolli") is at the heart of this question. It is significant to note that calpultin are the principal organizing system through which Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl danza functions today. Citlalcoatl argues this "traditional governance structure" (75) helps Nican Tlahcah heal historical trauma and continue to practice an Indigenous way of being in community. A novel contribution of Citalcoatl's work to the literature is how he reads 19th and 20th century liberation movements – Magonismo and Zapatismo in particular – as re-

⁶⁴ Self-history, oral history style research with danzantes.

articulations of a Nican Tlach, calpulli project. He reclaims these anti-imperial social movements – including other guerrilla movements such as Guevarismo – as important Indigenous uprisings for self-determination and decolonization. Another piece that stands out from Citlalcoatl’s writings is his connection between danza and permaculture practices. Other danzante-authors mention this as well. For example, Colín (2014) and Aguilar (2009) both point to the ways in which “tequio” (collective work) and the agricultural roots of danza are alive and practiced by contemporary danzantes. Reclaiming seeds and decolonizing the diet is seen as a concrete praxis that can sustain danzantes (literally) and their/our ways of knowing. Citlacoatl’s ethic is clearly guided by a strong commitment to this work being relevant and rooted in his own calpulli. As a danzante-scholar, Citlalcoatl provides an inspiring and grounding amoxtli from which to build – a sacred text to engage and read with the heart, in a poetic/scientific/spiritual conversation across calpultin and lineages.

Verónica Valadez’ (2012) MA Thesis, “Dancing Amoxtli: Danza Azteca and Indigenous Body Art as Forms of Resistance,” provides another important example of danzante scholarship. Valadez’ work is rooted in interdisciplinary approaches to Chicana Studies, receiving her graduate training through the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at CSU Northridge. She unpacks questions of Chicana Indigeneity through a particular focus on embodied practices of danza and tattoo/piercing. For Valadez, embodying Indigenous knowledge through these practices is an important mode of cultural resistance for Chicana communities – providing a concrete way to shed Euro-centric notions of beauty and self-worth. Instead, danza becomes a way of re-remembering, of coming back to one’s self despite a distorted and fragmented *mestizx* subjectivity. She weaves together the work of Dra. Lúara Perez (2007), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Frantz Fanon (1963) and danza scholars Elisa Huerta (2009) and Susanna Rostas (2012) to guide her own research. Methodologically, Valadez combines ethnographic work with interviews and secondary research into the existing literature. She also includes a personal narrative to ground her own path as a danzante into her study. As a practicing visual artist, Valadez (2012) also includes a collection of her own paintings and reflections on them as part of her research. She includes these paintings in order to “articulate my research in a visual and metaphorical manner, as my ancestors did” (8). Valadez’ attention to the power of embodiment as symbolic and metaphorical knowledge provides a rich study from which to draw inspiration. Furthermore, her tracing of “the difference between a symbol and a metaphor” is instructive, as she states “a symbol can be an image or an object that associates two things and can have both literal and figurative meanings that can suggest something deeper; while metaphors are comparisons between two ostensibly different things” (110). Her close attention to a Cuauhtemoc ceremony and the process of *in xochitl*, *in cuicatl* as important concepts in danza also resonates with my own engagements with these key texts. In the end, Valadez provides another inspiring example of danzante scholarship and praxis – contributing to the available

literature in important ways and providing another voice in the growing circle of danza studies research.

Another important *abrecaminos* (path-maker) in Danza Studies is Capitana Inés Hernández-Ávila. Her article “La Mesa del Santo Niño de Atocha and the Conchero Dance Tradition of Mexico-Tenochtitlán: Religious Healing in Urban Mexico and the United States” (2004) is a graceful and heartfelt example of danzante scholarship. Based on interviews and research conducted as a danzante over many years (since the early 1980s), Capitana Hernández-Ávila weaves together an important history of La Mesa del Santo Niño de Atocha as an important bridge between many different Indigenous communities seeking to maintain their traditions in Anahuac/Turtle Island (Central and North America). She describes the protocols and structures of danza with clarity and respect for the profound work it has taken to maintain these ways despite centuries of genocide and colonialism. She attends to the ways in which danza has served as an important bridge between Native communities in the 21st century, with the *intercambios* (exchanges) between Concheros and the White Roots of Peace movement serving as a primary example. Maestra Hernández-Ávila is careful to place this hemispheric recovery in the context of displacement, mestizaje, and other intergenerational effects of colonialism/genocide. Similar to other danzante scholars, she includes a brief auto-ethnography and situates herself in a particular lineage of danza, citing and honoring her teachers (many of whom are now ancestors, and important *ánimas conquistadoras* [spirits] that continue to guide danza today). I am indebted to her writings on the history and protocols of danza – focusing on the role of discipline, self-mastery and survivance in the tradition. She closes with an eloquent reading of the massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968, as a palimpsestic moment. Through reading Roberto López Moreno’s 1986 poem “Motivos para la danza,” Hernández-Ávila provides another way of seeing this massacre – as a reiteration of the massacre of *Toxcatl*, as a flesh offering to *Xipe Totec* (the guardian energy of Tlatelolco), as a place of collective grieving, re-membering and honoring those who gave their lives so that we could continue these ways in the present.

Thanks in many ways to the existence of these prior works of danzante scholarship – and their systematic study of the oral and archival records that trace how danza has migrated and with whom – I am able to focus this study on the philosophical, scientific and creative underpinnings of danza. I approach this endeavor with humility, as a scholar and practitioner – as an Ethnic Studies scholar/activist and danzante. This study is based on ten years of ceremonial apprenticeship, including six years as a danzante and *huehueterx* (drummer), and twelve years of academic training in Comparative Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley. The weaving of these trainings and praxes allows me to engage danza at a few different levels at once – in the body, in community, in history, in the world and in the cosmos. I am limited by the ways in which my own path has exposed me to a particular trajectory and lineage within danza. I integrate this into my consciousness, as I claim

to only speak from my own *camino* – as a reflection of the teachings, sources and teachers with whom I have studied. *Tlazocamati huel miac temastianimeh*, in gratitude to all these teachers and danza scholars who have come before, *y una disculpa de antemano si cometo algún error*.

Chapter 0
Ometeotl

Before the first flower, *antes de la primera flor*, during the time before Time, the space before Space, there is a quiet song – emerging from the darkness beyond darkness.

Necesito oh gran Ometeotl, necesito que escuches mi voz.
Necesito oh gran Ometeotl, necesito que escuches mi voz.

Hear my prayers Ometeotl, Creator of the universe, creative dual energies, *la dualidad creadora: Ometecuhtli, Omecihuatl* – masculine feminine energies *danzando en una armonía constante*, dancing in constant harmony. Reflective mirrors of each other's polished hearts. Cosmological twins, conjoined to each other, and to the expanding and contracting dance of Creation/Destruction. You, at the beginning, who made this place in this way, designed the patterns of the cosmos through a “Law of Duality” (Macias 134), a principle of harmony. Embodying one of the fundamental principles of existence, that we are all related, that we inter-are (Hanh 2001), that we are only reflections. In this case, the mirror is the means by which darkness is reflected, and refracted, and from which is born, light. *Itzcuahtli*, the eagle flying in the nothingness of an obsidian darkness. This moment of self-reflection, is the first moment, that there is. This is *agonistic inamic unity*, “the continual and continuous cyclical struggle (*agon*) of paired opposites, polarities, or dualities...a brute fact about the nature of teotl and hence a brute fact about the nature of reality per se. . . . Teotl's ceaseless self-becoming, self-presenting, and self-unfolding, and therefore its ceaseless generating and regenerating of the cosmos” (Maffie 137). We offer songs to these energies, carried by the wind, perfumed by sweet and cleansing clouds of copal, her sacred smoke sending our songs, through *inpopoxcomitl*, across dimensions of spacetime. The warmth of breath giving shape and melody to the visions of our hearts.

Wy yay yay yay yay yay Wy yay yay yay yay yay Huey Ometeotl
Wy yay yay yay yay yay Wy yay yay yay yay yay Huey Ometeotl
Huey Oh Huey Oh Ometeotl Ometeotl
Huey Oh Huey Oh Ometeotl Ometeotl

Then, we stand. We raise our voices to the sky. Figure eight, infinity formations are drawn, are written, with our feet, ankles, and knees, lubricating and preparing the hips with grace. A light stomp to wake up the earth with our *chachayotes* (seed rattle anklets), as the balls of our feet are also awakened in mutual massage. We connect the energy of the xictli, the bellybutton, *in tlalticpac* – to the sky, *ilhuicaminah*, to the cosmos, the stars, the celestial sky beings with whom we dance.

As always, first with the left, then the right. The body always must dance led by the heart, the right side dances to follow, to maintain harmony in duality. This precept

of harmonic relationship is embedded at every level of the danza, the song. In our bodies as *mitotianimeh* (danzantes), this duality begins spinning, first to the left, then the right, and then three times to the left. Again, to the right, this sequence is mirrored – one turn to the right, one turn to the left, three turns to the right. Up until now the only sounds have been quiet, our voices singing softly with the breeze, our *ayacaxtin* (ceremonial rattles), sacred bundles of dried rattle seeds, giving a low driving rhythm – like the sounds of beach pebbles being rolled against each other, washed back and forth by the tides of the seashore.

Ce-Xochitl

When suddenly there is a break, a booming crash of thunderous lightning, the beautiful cacophony of *huehuetzotzonqueh* (drummers) beginning their bombastic synchronicity of heart-beating grandfather drums. From their skins and hearts, the familiar and forward driving rhythm of *Tezcatlipoca* roars into the circle – signaling their presence in this cosmic process – in concert with our now frantically spinning bodies; moving faster, in a frenetic orbit of limbs, maintaining our balance through a single focal point – the *momoztli*, the bellybutton center. We spin elliptically, in the formation of a soft curve, a quarter moon to the left, a quarter moon to the right. These are the first times there have ever been a left and a right, this is the first left, and the first right.

Base

A swivel of the knees, to the left, to the right, and then we spin, this time, always to the left. The rhythm now expressing a marked 1, 2, 3, 4 – accents that signal the identity of this particular danza. For each stage of creation, there is this return to movement, to spinning, to a state of temporary disequilibrium. Embodying the state of temporality itself, the passage of time marked by many moving bodies.

Ome-Xochitl

Raising our left knee, pronating back with see-sawed arms, we step towards the *momoztli*, the center, before respectfully turning around to honor the space behind our bodies, the energies that join our danza from outside to circle, the away. These movements signal the first dimensions of towards and away being established, created for the first time, as our bodies, as the universe, are feeling out our newfound mobility and creativity. This line in space/time is the second line we form, and the second dimension from which we are born.

Base

Three turns to the left, an unsettling dizziness, a desire for steadiness and balance to be restored.

Yei-Xochitl

Here we are *amarrando*, tying up and securing the meeting place of the left/right, towards/away axes that have formed a four-pointed cosmic cross on the surface of Mother Earth. At their interaction, their intersection, we wrap *malinalli* motion-change (Maffie 261), weaving crooked grass with our feet, repeating the hip-opening figure eights that came from the time before Time. We tie one way, and then the other, for the strongest knots are tied in duality.

Nahui-Xochitl

Exposing our left side to the momoztli, we raise and let fall, our extended left legs, right feet planted to the earth, our arms reaching out to opposite corners of the universe. Two grazes of the earth with each foot, and then a rapid turn to each side, honoring this moment of creative duality. We wrap up this dimension, in *tlalticpac* (the surface of the earth), honoring the above and the below that now bring us towards three dimensions of space – a world in which we can now dance with time. We lift up and celebrate all that the Creator has given us, giving thanks for these fundamental building blocks upon which everything came from nothing.

Macuil-Xochitl

The first Tezcatlipoca is born, the black warrior, the first child of space, the first born first born – emerging from this meeting place, of left/right; towards/away; above/below, space/time. They emerge from the darkness with their brooding obsidian mirror upon their chest, their crown and back are darkly and elegantly feathered. At the end of one leg lies not a foot, but an exposed stump of flesh and bone, an exit wound adorned with another smoking mirror of obsidian, the scar of their journey, from the underworld, to *tlalticpac*. Upon this wounded stump we dance, first to the left, and then to the right, clearing the way for their three siblings to be born.

Chicuace-Xochitl

The *huehuemeh*, grandfather drums, quiet their song, now only clicking on the sides of their hard-wooden bodies. *Danzantes*, *mitotianimeh* Anahuacah, sound our *chachas* (ankle rattles) *con ganas*, *con chikawa* (with vigor, with the force of life), with the energy of the strength of our blood. We dance in mutual massage with Mother Earth, honoring the falling flesh of the seeds, the energy of *Xipe Totecuhtzin*, beloved flayed energy of serpentine shedding flesh, bursting with the life of spring, from the cold darkness of nothing, the warmth of our muscles and moisture of our sweat, fertilize the soil as an offering. We plant these seeds all around us, rushing towards and away, from the flowered momoztli center.

Chicome-Xochitl

Here begin flapping the fluttering wings of *Huitzilopochtli*, they who fly on the left-hand side, *el colibri zurdo*, *colibri guerrero*, small but fierce hummingbird warrior.

Emerging from the blue southern skies, energetic and ready for battle – attacking, defending, striking, shielding, a stomping agonistic inamic unity of masculine-feminine warrior power. The untamable spirit of Huitzilopochtli driving us to move, to keep moving forward despite our tiredness and the obstacles in our path.

Chicnahui-Xochitl

And finally, the slithering, flying *Quetzalcoatl*, precious feathered serpent, plunges across the surface of earth and sea. Brilliant, vibrating rainbowed *plumas* (feathers) dance on their weaving body. Close to the earth, yet reaching for the sky; coming from above, yet landing gracefully below. This serpent of knowledge bifurcates, dancing to the left and to the right, as unraveling malinalli, crisscrossed braids of grass. Bringing this first light, Quetzalcoatl in *Tlahuiztlanpa* (the place of light, the East) dances on the left/right, away/towards, above/below dimensions of spacetime. They dance as twin warriors, healers, hunters and seeds.

Base

And then, finally, a turn to the right...

Ometeotl

Ometeotl, the oneness that comes from twoness. The sacred creative duality of the universe. That which gives birth to existence. Respectfully, and humbly, dear reader, I ask that we begin our *camino en ceremonia* (ceremonial path) together here. As an embodied story of how it all began, this danza serves as our point of entry into a study of danza as a way of knowing. The story of how this danza came to be, and how I came to learn its *pasos* (steps) as a young danzante, illustrates an important creative process, one that serves to ground my entire dissertation project in time and space.

In March 2009, Maestro Xavier Quijas Yxayotl, master of Pre-Cuauhtemic musical instruments – along with Jefe Ocelocoatl and apprentices – were offering their *cuicacameh* (songs) through *tlapiztalli* (clay or reed flute), *teponaxtle* (two-toned, wooden percussion instrument), *huehuetl* (tree-trunk grandfather drum), and *xochitlahtolli* (poetic, spoken words). Connecting and playing with the energies of the ceremony, Maestro Yxayotl and the musicians are surrounded by hundreds of danzantes, united in prayer, lightening their steps with songs – celebrating the transition from *9-Tecpatl* to *10-Calli*, during a Mexica New Year Ceremony in San Jose, CA hosted by Calpulli Tonalehqueh. During a particular break in the ceremony, Maestro Yxayotl began singing, this time, a song that had never been sung before. It is not that he had rehearsed a song in private and was just debuting it to the public. No this was something else entirely. This was a song that was new even to the singer as he sang it, a song he didn't know he had until that moment – a gift from the energies of the ceremony that was taking place. Maestro Yxayotl himself has said that this song

was born from his heart in that moment, a simple medicine song that chose that time and place to be born, or maybe to be re-membered (Fieldnotes, Yxayotl, Fall 2019).

This song was an offering, to Ometeotl, to the sacred, creative duality of the universe, the original energy from which all other energies have been born and designed. But this song did not come from nowhere, nor did Maestro Yxayotl simply make it up. This song marks a special moment in a collaborative, creative process that is based on a direct and ongoing dialogue with the spirit of the Creator. Maestro Xavier is not a random person who just happens to open his mouth and a new medicine song emerges. Maestro Xavier Quijas Yxayotl is a life-long *tlacuilo-cuicaticatl* (ceremonial artist/musician) devoted to the path of music, dance and instrument-making as traditional Anahuacan medicine practices. He tours constantly, makes all his own instruments by hand, and has mentored generations of emerging *danzantes* and *músicos* (musicians) from around the world. He has been nominated for six Native American Music Awards, was featured during the 2002 Grammy Awards, and was invited to offer the opening ceremony for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001, honoring the Dalai Lama (“About Maestro Yxayotl”). He has worked for decades to become a finely tuned antenna.

Furthermore, this song did not emerge while Maestro Yxayotl was walking down the street, nor while at home or in the mundane spaces of a day-job. This song emerged precisely in a moment of *ceremony* – in the spacetime of a collective focused intention to honor another cycle of life, another journey through the *xiuhpohualli* (Anahuacan 365.25-day solar calendar). The space had been opened *in a good way*, with medicine, the sacred cleansing smoke of *copal* (tree sap incense),⁶⁵ prayers, *danzas*, *atecocolli* (sacred conch shell, trumpet-like instrument), *huehuetl*, songs, sounds, sweat, blood, tears, fruit, flowers, fire and water – all laid at the foot of the great central altar, the *xictli*, the belly button center of the circle of *danza*. In this place of cosmic, collective interconnection and consciousness, Maestro Yxayotl began singing, and the *Chitontequiza* – the cosmic movement of Anahuacan ceremonial dance-music – was gifted a new song for the ongoing work of collective and inter-generational healing.

Since emerging in this way, on that day, in ceremony, this song has circulated throughout the Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl transnational *danza* movement. I have been in ceremonies throughout the US Southwest and Mexico where this song has been sung. The song is relatively simple and easy to learn, which may be part of its power and ability to disseminate as quickly as it has. Through these circuits of ceremony, this song also arrived to the ears and heart of Maestra Patricia Juárez Chicueyi Coatl of Calpulli Huey Papalotl in Huichin.⁶⁶ Maestra Chicueyi Coatl remembers a young *danzante* offered this medicine song to her after a *práctica* (*danza* practice) she had attended, “recovering from loss and pain...this song was medicine for my heart” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2020)! Years later, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl was offering this song

⁶⁵ From protium *copal* species.

⁶⁶ Sacred Ohlone land currently occupied by the settler government of Berkeley, CA.

to her altar, singing as an ofrenda (an offering), to the ancestors, the energies of that place, that time, when suddenly she realized something was different. The sound, the images, were different. As a Maestra of *temicxoch* (lucid dreaming) she was then able to realize she was in fact lucid dreaming – conscious in a dream state – offering this song in a ceremony that was currently underway in the dream world. As she sung, she felt her body begin to move, to sway slowly with the rhythm and melody. Then the movements became more pronounced, more intentional, as she realized she was not only swaying, but in fact was beginning to dance. Her left leg lifted and began making the symbol of infinity with her hip and foot. Then the right leg. This is when she realized, this song had a dance, that this gift from the cosmos had more to give. This process of receiving a danza from the cosmos, from a song composed by the cosmos, is part of what is meant when danza is called *chitontequiza*, literally meaning, “emerging from the shadows,” from the darkness, a “cosmic movement” (Fieldnotes, Teokalli, Fall 2016).

This process went on for months, with Chicueyi Coatl working on the danza both in the dream world as well as in ceremony during her waking life. At one moment in this process, the *toque* (rhythm of the drum) became clearer and more pronounced, the rhythm of the huehuetl heartbeat, the drum, emerging as a clear 4/4 pattern. From this structure grew nine flowers, nine different movements that express different moments in this story of creation. Workshopping the pasos with the ancestors, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl eventually choreographed and finalized a new danza – *Ometeotl* – and began sharing it with her *calpulli*, the ceremonial dance community she helped found in 2014. Her decision to establish this group was also based on instructions and guidance received from her dream world and the ancestors (Fieldnotes, Fall 2014).

Like Maestro Xavier Quijas Yxayotl, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl was no random person who spontaneously decided to start moving with this danza. She is a seasoned, veteran *danzante*, a Maestra and founder of a *calpulli*, with over 25 years in danza. She is a trained dancer, medicine person, mathematician, and *tonalpohuaqui* (traditional ceremonial reader/counter of Anahuacan spacetime). She teaches workshops on how to read *amoxtin* (codices), how to work with one’s dreams in *temicxoch*, and other technologies of Anahuacan ceremonial science and medicine. Professionally she works as an IT specialist, a systems analyst at UC Berkeley. Through the path of danza, she works to fulfill what she calls her “cosmic mission,” to share and teach *matiliztli Toltecayotl-Anahuacayotl* (sacred Toltec-Anahuacan knowledge). As another finely tuned antenna, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl participated in bringing this new danza into being, serving as a *danzante/creative midwife*, in collaboration with these energies that had also visited the ceremony in San Jose a few years prior.

This danza tells the story of the creation of the universe, the *cuicatl* (song) and *mitotiliztli* (ceremonial dance) that brought us from nothing, to something. Similar to Maestro Yxayotl’s receiving of the rhythm and melody of *Ometeotl*, the movements

that ended up forming this danza are not *inventados* (made up) – they are based on a well-developed repertoire, an embodied ancestral vocabulary within danza. Certain turns, twists, pivots, sways, all of them reference other moments and other energies in other danzas. Ometeotl, as the creation story, re-members, re-minds our bodies that we came from stillness, from darkness, before bursting into light, sound, and motion – always in duality. In each *xochitl*, each flower, or verse, of the song, we embody different creative energies that have been here since the beginning of the beginning; the first, second, third and fourth dimensions of time and space; the four corners of the cosmos, the four Tezcatlipocah warriors that emerge in a cosmic cross to form a structure of balance and harmony. Training as ceremonial danzantes and musicians includes training the spirit, the heart, the mind, as well as the body, to be attuned to these energies, to know intuitively how to move with them, and in fact, become them.

In this way, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl and Maestro Yxayotl are contemporary practitioners of the ancestral creative processes through which danzas come to be – what is known today in the danza movement, that all danzas began as songs. As danzantes and *cuicatiqueh* (singers) they re-membered the original instructions of the Cuicacalli (house of song), the *Mixcoacalli* (house of the cosmos), the spaces where these danzas and songs were originally cultivated and practiced in pre-Cuauhtemic times. From the cosmos, to a song, to a dance that returns to the cosmos – this is the creative process of *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*. This origin story, expressed through Anahuacan ceremonial dance and music, through communally embodied movement and sound, provides the heart, the *yollotl*, the essence of my own “research as ceremony” (Wilson 2008). As cultural texts from 2009 and 2015 respectively, this song and dance are, at once: contemporary and ancestral creations, scientific and artistic modes of inquiry, intuitive and rational processes of knowledge production and transmission. They disrupt linear and binary notions of time and space, art and science, philosophy and spirituality, as they reach across millennia to re-member and embody an Anahuacan cosmovisión – practicing Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing within diasporic urban communities such as San Jose and Berkeley, CA. As a creation/origin story, it is a metaphor, a confluence of embodied symbols that signal a beginning, a birth, an emergence. It is a creative, spiritual, and scientific process that takes place always in ceremony, always in a good way, with respect, humility, patience and reciprocity with the cosmos. It is a long and beautiful meandering path of *conocimiento*, not a destination, but a practiced and embodied everyday state of being. I begin here, where it all begins, so we may begin, again.

Chapter 1

Danza as Mitotiliztli ↔ TeoChitontequiza: Ceremony, Embodiment, Consciousness

The ritual performances associated with the sacred, for example, are fertile occasions to re-create the vast domain of reminiscence given the multiple repertoires of mnemonics, patterns, techniques and residual cultural procedures expressed by the body and through the body, the site of memory for many cultural backgrounds. The rites transmit and institute aesthetic, philosophical, metaphysical, and other forms and modes of knowledge, through their frames, their apparatuses and conventions that shape the performance. In this perspective, the ritual performative act not only alludes to the semantic and symbolic universe of the re-presented action (the ‘twice-behaved behavior’ of Schechner), but also constitutes and builds in, and by it, the action and its means (Martins 175).

What is Ceremony? – Ceremonialities, Ritual, and Protocol

At the heart of this study is the notion of *ceremony*. In early reviews of this research, I was asked by my colleagues to clarify, what do I mean by ceremony? I was reminded of the ways in which this term circulates well beyond the contexts I am writing from and is a concept that comes fully charged with religiosities and other discourses that may in fact distract from my theses. Therefore, in theorizing ceremony, I must clarify what form of *ceremoniality* I am referring to. I am thinking of *ceremonialities* as the different ways in which ceremony is understood and expressed across cultures, worlds and worldviews. Thinking through these differential and comparative ceremonialities, I arrive at how danza enacts a particular form of ceremoni/ality – with danza as the primary theoretico-praxis of a ceremonial spacetime, and as a fundamental aspect of an Anahuacan cosmovisión.

For the purposes of this study, I define ceremony through/as *mitotiliztli teochitontequiza* – an act that seeks a return to harmony. I translate this term from the Nahuatl as “dancing with grace amidst chaos, ascending to the Dual Creative Energy of the Universe, emerging from the shadows, towards harmony with/in the cosmos.” Through ceremony, one *re-members* – activates *oyocoyani*,⁶⁷ renews membership with the cosmos, puts ourselves back together again.⁶⁸ Ceremony is a process of “at-one-ment” (Rostas 4). Ceremony is a spiritual spacetime insofar as it seeks to be *in right relation*. In other words, it is where we go to *re-member how to relate*. Ceremony is a mystic technology, an interstitial, inter-generational state of

⁶⁷ “They who reproduce themselves,” what Maestra Chicueyi Coatl teaches as an Anahuacan theory of DNA.

⁶⁸ The concept of re-membering as a poetic word play that contains these three meanings is something I learned from *temescalero* Tio Samuelin Martínez, something he calls “putting a dash in remember” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2011).

being in the current moment. Ceremony is a focused intention, a cohesive interconnection. Ceremony is an Other time and space, a place of creativity, gratitude and humility. Ceremony is the sacred geometry of finding balance in a world that is in constant motion. In this way I study danza as a way to understand ceremony – as an embodiment of ceremonial consciousness.

Ceremony functions as the matrix for this study. That is, it is the structure and protocol that undergirds and guides a way of relating to knowledge and being that transmutes each question that I ask through danza. Ecology, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, physics, art, dance, music and pedagogy all converge and are transformed as they enter into the spacetime of ceremony. This is another aspect of an Anahuacan ceremoniality – that is, the conscious and intentional ceremonialization of everyday life. Ceremoniality functions as a crux on which we can redefine and rethink existing practices. To be sure, in an Anahuacan world, there would be no need to re-articulate a ceremoniality of being. Life is always already in ceremony, or ceremonial, in an Anahuacan cosmovisión and world. But what I seek to trace here is how 21st century danzantes and danzante communities have protected the ceremoniality of their lives as a way to resist coloniality and genocide.

I choose to write of ceremony, in place of, but in conversation with, the notion of “ritual.” However, I center ceremony for a few reasons. Firstly, and quite concretely, this is the term that circulates most widely within danza itself. Danzantes organize and participate in *ceremonias*, not *ritos*, nor *rituales*, though this discourse at times appears of *estandartes*, or *pantli* (ceremonial flags) in the Conchero tradition. Nonetheless, this discursive move is not to choose one over the other but to intentionally center one in relation to the other. Therefore, we cannot use “ceremony” and “ritual” interchangeably. For the purposes of this study, I embed “ritual” within the container of “ceremony,” instead of opposing them as such.

Dagara Elder Malidoma Somé (1993) writes of “ritual” in the ways I am writing of “ceremony” – where his definition of ceremony refers mainly to the structural protocol of ritual. For Somé (1993), ritual becomes sacred through ceremony, and ceremony becomes ritual only when it is imbued with sacredness. For Somé, “ceremony, perhaps, is the anatomy of a ritual” (50). This is what I refer to in my study as “protocol,” again relying on the terms that are used most often in my experiences in danza. To be clear, ceremony is the most generalized term I will use in this study, with protocol referring to the structures of ceremony. Ceremony happens when protocol resonates with the presence of a harmonious collective intention. Ritual as such will only be referenced as it is appropriate, for example when it is used in an existing text or context – such as Jefe Dr. Mario Aguilar’s (2009) “Rituals of Kindness” or in the guiding quote to this chapter by Leda Martins (2007).

Ceremonial Consciousness

Somé's writings on ritual are written explicitly from the liminal space between Westernized and Indigenous world/views. For Somé (1993), modernity's temporality – with its linearity and also its hurriedness – is problematic. In this context, ceremony (what Somé calls ritual) is therapeutic. Ceremony is the medicine for a rushed way of life. It is the “anti-machine” (35) against the mechanistic worldview of a Newtonian and separated reality. It brings us back to a place of interconnection, of interbeing. Thinking in “spiral time” (Martins 2007), ceremony reminds us – experientially – how we are all “surfing the flux” (Little Bear 2015).

Ceremony is a way of knowing. Opening ceremonial space returns participants to an Other time and place (Huacuja 2013). In this way, ceremony becomes a “temporary autonomous zone”⁶⁹ (Bey 1991). In a modern/colonial context, ceremony can assert a temporal/spatial sovereignty. Ordinary time and space, that is, dominant, imperial spacetime, is subverted, is suspended, is refused, through the power of a collective focused intention. Danzas are organized in concert with the cosmos, according to astronomical rhythms and patterns. Following the stars, the earth, the universe – amidst a fragmented, time-crunched death world of colonialism – is a form of resistance. Dancing, singing, playing, sweating, breathing in this spacetime; “*llegamos con la danza a vivir en el tiempo verdadero, el tiempo nuestro*” (Huacuja 52) “we arrive through danza to live in the true time, in our time” (my translation).

During a *conferencia* (presentation) before ceremony, Maestra Xochitezca Yaocihuatl of Danza Chikawa Conroe shared the teaching that “there are no two ceremonies alike” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2018). Yet, they repeat with each astronomical cycle. This experience of ceremonial rhythms across time – across months, seasons, years, lifetimes – teaches the unconscious mind that time moves in a sort of spiral.⁷⁰ The geometry of life shows the body, in ceremony, this truth. We revisit ceremonies in tlalticpac, on the surface of the earth, as the stars revisit their ceremonies in the sky. This knowing is what structures ancestral protocols – ways of organizing ceremonial space, time and energy – that exist across generations through the oral tradition and each time ceremonial space is opened. Of course, these *costumbres* (customs) shift, move, and live, but nonetheless, there is continuity. In other words, “tradition” is alive. However, tradition must also be respected. These ways of knowing are organized as they are with good reason, that is, the reason of the cosmos.

These are the ways of knowing that shape ceremonial consciousness – a way of knowing through ceremony. It approaches knowledge as “sacred,” though this translation is troublesome in its Westernized sense. Ceremony is not *only* religious or spiritual. In an Anahuacan context, sacred and secular do not exist categorically opposed as they do in Westernized binary thought. But the energy of reverence,

⁶⁹ An anarchist, pirate utopia.

⁷⁰ Echoing Leda Martins' notion that Afro-Diasporic spiritual dance traditions are also “Performances of Spiral Time.”

respect and reciprocity with which we approach the “sacred” – including in the Westernized sense of the term – is an important part of ceremonial consciousness. Something similar can be said about danza as a form of “prayer.” “Prayer” and “sacredness” offer important approximations of ceremonial ethics, but do not fully express the interconnected ways of knowing that are present in ceremony. Therefore, in this study I write using parallel concepts, as used by Maestra Chicueyi Coatl of Calpulli Huey Papalotl – “prayer” is a “focused intention,” and “sacred” denotes that something “deserves the utmost respect” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2015). Melissa Nelson’s notion of respect as “re-spect” also extends this understanding of ceremonial consciousness. Nelson’s wordplay here teaches that “re-spect means to look again” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2010). Ceremonial consciousness is profoundly shaped by this epistemic attitude of mindfulness, cohesion and focus. It entails looking again, working to shift perceptions, and honoring that what we see at first glance is not always as it seems. Maintaining this ceremonial equanimity in danza is a form of “prayer in motion,” or perhaps, meditation in motion. A danzante way of being integrates these ceremonial attitudes into every part of our lives. Danza brings this ceremonial consciousness into the body. The body, as a locus of enunciation, as a place of knowing, is where I turn to next.

The Anahuacan Body

Embodiment is a culturally and cosmologically situated concept. *Body Culture Studies* (Hancock, et al. 2000) exists as a subfield within the Western academy that pursues these sorts of questions, though my work does not emerge from this tradition per se. Here they may ask: what is the body? Whose body? Which body? The intersection of the body as a concept with different realms of culture, sociality, space and time, opens the possibility of thinking of the body, Otherwise. By this I mean, how do differential cosmovisiones imagine and understand the body as a concept? How do these understandings of the body implicate different systems of power and knowledge? When Performance Studies theorizes the body and forms of embodiment, do they problematize and situate *whose* body they are speaking of? Do we think *about* the body or *from* the body?

These questions guide my thinking through *the Anahuacan body*. An analysis of coloniality and embodiment problematizes European conceptualizations of the body as hegemonic and colonially superimposed upon Other bodies. In this way, the Anahuacan body is, in fact, a different body – different especially from the European body, in that it is a body located in a different worldview. Again, this is the power of cosmovisión and perception: where are we thinking from in terms of a “geo- and body politics of knowledge” (Mignolo 2005)? Where on the planet, where in the body, and from which body? We may think that every body thinks the same, but this is not so. How we know the body, and through the body (embodiment), implies how we know at large.

These questions return us to the question of epistemology – where danza is an embodied way of knowing. The Anahuacan body embodies an Anahuacan cosmovisión. The world that is made through the body is made through the worldview. These considerations are critical to understand when discussing danza as an Anahuacan way of knowing. These epistemic postures are non-Western. They resist colonial, imperial knowledge regimes, Western ways of knowing that are embodied by, for example, Rodin’s (1904) *Thinker* – a sitting, tense, pensive body.⁷¹ This concept then works in both ways at once – where danza from an Anahuacan perspective is a holistic way of knowing from the Anahuacan senses and Anahuacan philosophy from a danzante’s perspective, can only truly make sense from an Anahuacan body. This implies that embodied thinking troubles post-Enlightenment understandings of the body as identity, or the body as an indicator of human individuality. The Anahuacan body dances because the world is dancing. In other words, an Anahuacan body is a dancing body, because Anahuac, as the cosmos, in talticpac, in *nican axcan*, this current moment in space and time, the here and now, is dancing.

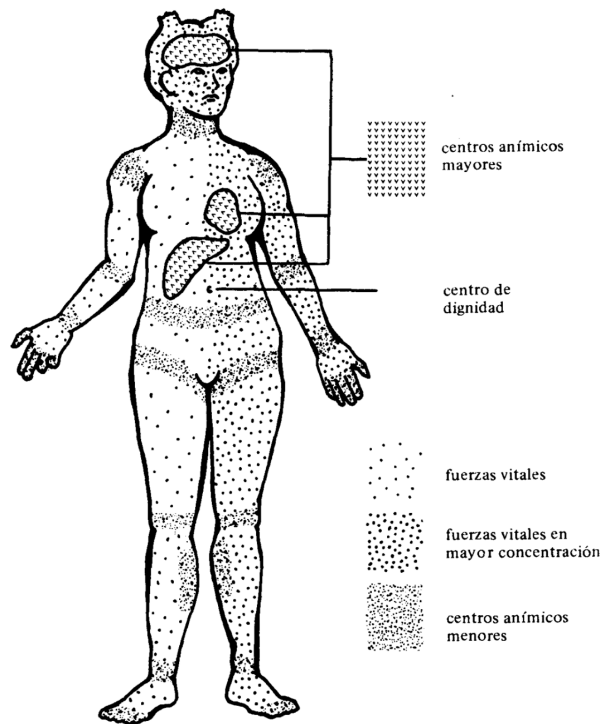


Figure 1: Anahuacan energetic bodies and the human body
 Source: Alfredo López Austin, *Cuerpo Humano E Ideología*, 2004, p. 219

⁷¹ A body that is also naked, alone, Western European, cis-gendered male, and with a muscular physique.

Tonacayotzin – in nacayotl, tonacayotl

Though it is difficult to find direct translations from English (which relies on a Western worldview) to Nahuatl (an Indigenous, Anahuacan worldview) for a concept such as “the body” – the notion of *in nacayotl*⁷² can provide a starting point. In modern Nahuatl, if one were to learn “parts of the body,” one would be studying “in nacayotl.” The notion of “the human body” would be “tonacayotl” – “our body.” “Tonacayotl” is also translated as “our sustenance,” “our food,” which is, significantly, another way of saying “corn” (Rodríguez 2014). In this way, the body is the land – the body is the relationship one has with the land. One’s flesh is made of corn. If our flesh is made of corn, our body is an extension of the land. The body as we know it, is made possible by corn (Rodríguez 2014). This is one level at which we can see that the Anahuacan body is distinct from the Westernized Enlightenment (disem-)body. The body as a concept is not an anthropocentric notion in an Anahuacan worldview.

Another level of the Anahuacan body is Calmecac Nexticpac’s (2016) notion of *tonacayotzin* – what could be translated as “that which contains our beloved essence in flesh.” Each of these terms rely on similar root words/concepts: *yotl* (essence, heart, similar to the suffix -ity in English), *nacatl* (flesh, meat), *to* (our). Literally, then *tonacayotzin* refers not to the body as an object, but as a state of being. It is not simply “the body” but “bodidity,” or perhaps “corporeality,” all that is contained within the flesh. What these translations suggest is that the material Anahuacan body is understood as a container of energy. The body itself is the result of *tonalcayotl*, of essential universal energy made flesh. In other words, the Anahuacan body is an energetic body. It is not only a physiological entity, but an enfleshed vessel for energetic phenomena.

The Body in Ceremony

“Para los danzantes el cielo comienza en la planta de los pies.”

[“For danzantes, heaven begins in the soles of the feet.”]

Maestro Federico Sánchez Ventura (1963), quoted in (Colín 14)

Tomitotiliztlinacayotl, danzando in an Anahuacan body, *estamos marcando nuestros pasos*, articulating and enunciating our steps. We offer *Tonantzin*, our venerable Mother Earth, a well-deserved massage. We offer her our steps, *bien marcados*, well-marked and well-defined – so that those who are following,⁷³ those with whom we are speaking, can feel us loud and clear. We caress, brush, paint with our feet, our connection to the skin and heart of the earth, terrestrial vibrations that wake up the *ánimas* (spirits, souls of the dead), call on the ancestors, let them know

⁷² In Nahuatl, *in* is one way of saying “the.”

⁷³ Both literally in the circle of ceremony and metaphorically referring to those who come after us historically in the trajectory of the danza tradition.

we are here, continuing their work, acknowledging their presence, as they join us from below. This ancestor/earth energy moves up from the soles of our feet to the ankles. *El tobillo es una puerta*, the ankles are open doors, to the cosmos, to Other ways of knowing. The ankles remind us to be careful, to watch our step, to stand strong, to remain balanced, assured, rooted. Protected and activated by our chachayotes, the splattering heart seeds that we sow as we dance. Planting seeds is a radical act, an act of decolonial love.

The ankles know, as one of thirteen major joints in the human body. The structure of the body knows, as a perfect and complete ratio of relationships. The skeleton is a mathematical instrument, a matrix of power, it is a perfect design. That is to say, all bodies are perfect, just as they are. As part of the structure, the skeleton is the framework. The number thirteen is one complete body, a bundle of energies: two ankles, two knees, two hips, two shoulders, two elbows, two wrists, one neck. Thirteen are also the sub-digits, metatarsals, each hand and foot containing another perfect bundle. Twenty are the digits, counting feet and toes. Ten fingers on two hands, ten toes on two feet = 10×2 or $5 \times 4 = 20$, the number of energies that come from each direction in the universe, masculine/feminine, elder/youth forces of nature that multiply along these outstretched arm paths. The countings of time are in the body – 20 digits x 13 joints is 260 days, the average gestation period for a human fetus. All together the human body contains 360 joints, or one *xiuhpohualli*, one solar count of time. The math of the cosmos is the math of the body.

Moving up this dancing body we arrive at the knees, another place of articulation, of pivoting. Maestra Chicueyi Coatl teaches that if the knees hurt, it is because we are saying one thing and doing another – we are not moving in harmony. We seek to turn left but some part of us keeps turning right. Moving up the femur we arrive to the hips, one *nauhcampa* of body, a four cornered place of balance in the center. In the folding and unfolding universe of the Anahuacan body – 1 is 2 is 4 is 5 is 20 is 5 is 4 is 2 is 1. Four points provide stability, a quincunx structure of balance. This design is repeated throughout the Anahuacan body – the four corners of the hips, the four limbs from the torso, the four cornered *pantli* (rectangular ceremonial flag) of the hips and shoulders. The design of the cosmos is found in the body, for the body is *un cuerpo cósmico* (a cosmic body). The hips connect the lower and upper halves. The above with the below. The body is a vehicle, a vessel, an antenna. The hips make an infinity symbol when they move, they open, they close, they protect, they make vulnerable. They carry the weight of so much, of balancing. The pelvis is a *papalotl*, the mother butterfly from which a string of *papalotzimeh*, beloved butterfly patterns fly up as the vertebrae of our spine. The hips hold this center. Arriving to the waistline, this ancestor/earth energy has vined up our legs as an *oliluhqui* (purple morning glory) that reaches its tendrils towards the sun. These vines give the body roots, a connection to *tepeyolohtli* – *Corazón de la Tierra*, molten lava heart center of the earth.

With the waist as the primary fold of the body, the halfway point, this is a place of transition, from the *Corazón de la Tierra* (Heart of the Earth), hacia *el Corazón del*

Cielo (Heart of the Sky) – *para el danzante el cielo comienza en la planta de los pies*. This is a transition, from earth to sky, from below to above. The belly button, the xictli is part of this transition in the Anahuacan body. The xictli is the connection to the mother. Our ombligo center. Our connection with feminine creative power, the unconscious, the *nahualli* – the shadow self, “the implicate order” (Bohm 1980), the place where the body can connect with dark matter, with the unseen, that which is unseeable through senses that rely on light. This is where we wear a *faja*, a ceremonial belt, that does much more than just hold up your pants, *in xictlimecatl*, that which activates and protects the xictli. The shoulders, hold the weight of the ancestors, provide the momentum for spinning, are like our second hips, or our hips are like our second shoulders. Another *nauhcampa*. The box of the torso. The shoulder, main root joint of the arm, sends energy down to elbows, and wrists, major sites of expression, especially for drumming. The arms expand and contract to increase centrifugal motions as we spin. They hold shields, rattles, swords, *paliacameh* (bandanas) and other *armas de guerra* (ceremonial instruments). The neck allows us to see what's around us, behind us, expands peripheral vision. Allows us to spot as we spin on our axes as atomic nuclei. Stacking these joints, aligning them in the Anahuacan body, allows us to be centered, to walk correctly, to be in the correct position to dance, to breathe in a good way. This design is already perfect, but must be maintained. *Danza* keeps the joints lubricated with movement and electrostatic energy. These joints are what can move in the body, are sites of *ollin* (movement) as potential energy, wrapped in nerves, ligaments, sinews, muscles, water and flesh.

Beyond this en fleshed, en boned body as one systemic, cohesive whole, the Anahuacan body contains four more bodies. These are invisible, energetic, sensory bodies. Traditional Anahuacan medicine includes *remedios* (remedies) to help balance each of these bodies in relation, including the “physical body, tonal, nahuall, *ihiyotl*, and the *teyolia*” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014: 38). These bodies live in the physical body, but also beyond it. They are the “vitalizing and animating energies in the cosmos” that are “present in humans, animals, and plants as well as mountains, wind, rivers, and towns” (Maffie 190). These “vital forces” suffuse the entire human body but are concentrated in different parts of the physical body. *Tonalli* in the head, *nahualli* in the belly, *ihiyotl* in the liver and *teyolia* in the heart (Chicueyi Coatl 2014: 38).

The tonal “is located in the head,”⁷⁴ but refers to “our mind when we are awake” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014: 39). It is a place of solar energy in the body, “thus it is ruled by the light” (Ibid.). The *tonal* is the concentration of *tonalli* in the body, which can be translated as warmth, sun or light, and is related etymologically and philosophically to *Tonatiuh*, a concept which literally means “our father,” but also means they “who carries the energy,” and is one of the principal names given to the sun (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). *Itonalli* is “sweat,” the secretions of the warm, internal solar energy of the

⁷⁴ Possibly in what the West calls the pineal gland?

body. Tonal in Nahuatl also refers to the day, and to one's cosmic identity in terms of a traditional, ceremonial name – the day on which someone is born, for example, 5-*Ollin*, is also their tonal, their daytime energy that accompanies them in their journey of life. It is also translated as “irradiation,” anything with tonal is radiating heat and light (López Austin 2004: 223). The health of the human tonal “can be healed with words, psychoanalytic therapy, good advice, meditation and hypnosis” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014: 39). A person's tonalli functions as their “inner vigor, power, energy, and character” (Maffie 271). Therefore, the Anahuacan body includes tonalli, in the tonal itself, which permeates the physical body, but is also the media through which the body is linked to other bodies in the cosmos. This is another way to understand how the Anahuacan body is a cosmic body, how an individual human body is also a universal, celestial body. This body, dancing in ceremony, under the warm, vibrant sun, fills the body with tonalli, turn the *danzante* body into a vessel that is tonalli-rich.

In dual relation with the tonalli is the *nahualli*, and as a body, the *nahual*. The *nahual* refers to “the energetic body we will use at the moment of death and that we also use when we are sleeping. This energetic body interacts with all that surrounds our navel when we are awake. It is governed by the Moon, thus it is ruled by the darkness. It is dark inside of us” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014: 39). Maestra Chicueyi Coatl (2014) argues “its language is a symbolic language; the symbols move this body, which in turn can move the other four bodies” (39). This powerful body “can be influenced, moved and healed with symbols” that “can go into the unconscious body” (Ibid.). This notion of an *unconscious body* is another way of saying the *nahual*. Though this question is in need of further study, I have come to relate *nahualli* to what Western astrophysicists' study as dark matter and dark energy. This is due, in part, to Don Miguel Ruiz' (1997) theorizing of the stars as tonal and “the light between the stars the *nagual* (sic)” (xvi). *Nahualismo*, which is often translated through the charged anthropological notion of “shamanism,”⁷⁵ refers to the art of manifesting one's *nahual*, of transfiguration, form-changing and shapeshifting (Maffie 39). Unfortunately, *nahualismo* has also been particularly demonized by Catholic and other Eurocentric worldviews as “*brujería*,” as “witchcraft” or “black magic” (López Austin 2004: 425). Instead, I wish to honor the presence of the *nahual* in the Anahuacan body as an important way of knowing that is unlocked through *danza*, ceremony and relationships with symbols. As a deep, dark, unconscious power in the body and in the cosmos, the *nahual* is concentrated in the belly button center of the body, and at the belly button center of all bodies in the cosmos.

Moving further within the Anahuacan body, lives the *ihiyotl*, the breath-body. According to Chicueyi Coatl (2014), the *ihiyotl* “is like a shadow and it can roam in *tlatipac* after death” (39). She locates the *ihiyotl* “in the liver and it goes from the liver to the legs” (Ibid.). Energetically, “the *ihiyotl* hosts the passions, the life, the vigor, the

⁷⁵ A discourse I reject as imprecise. A shaman is a Manchu-Tungus word for “wise person” or healer but has been deployed hastily to stand in for all non-Western medicine people. Shamanism as such has also been a vehicle for problematic and spiritually violent forms of cultural appropriation by New Age communities.

emotions, and the feelings” (Ibid.). It is considered one of the cosmic energies that can remain in *tlalticpac*, on the surface of the earth, after one’s physical body dies. The physical body is a container of breath, but when this breath leaves the body for good it returns to the unified totality that is the *ihiyotl*. One of the most common translations of *ihiyotl* is “sopla” or “breath” (López Austin 2004: 219). The breath of life, concentrated in the *ihiyotl*, expressed through the *ixtli* (gaze) of the *danzante*, dances in ceremony with the *ánimas* (spirits), that is, the *ihiyotl* of the ancestors.

The fourth energetic body in the Anahuacan body is the *teyolia*, the *yollotl*, the heart-body. The *teyolia* “goes from the heart to the left side. It expresses the vitality, the knowledge, the affections, the memory, the habits, the sense of action” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014: 39). *Teyolia* has been also been translated into Spanish as “ánima” (López Austin 2004: 259). This is significant in that “ánima” circulates in *danza* as a way to refer to the ancestors, or “spirits” that arrive while in ceremony. Like *tonalli*, *nahualli*, and *ihiyotl*, *teyolia* refers to a whole network of vital energy that permeates and is concentrated in certain parts of the physical human body. As another body within the Anahuacan body, *teyolia* is directly connected to ancestral bodies. The *teyolia* of the ancestors – all who have come before us, human and non-human, on the surface of the earth – the *teyolia* has been, is, and will always be their life energy as well. The *teyolia* is the center of “interiority, sensibility and thought” (López Austin 2004: 254). Etymologically, *teyolia* is *te-yol-lia*, our-life-source, our collective heart. Every heart is a site of *teyolia* – the heart of the *calpulli* (the community), the *tepetl* (the hill), of the *altepetl* (the city), the people, the nation. This is how the *teyolia* is also used to refer to “memory” (Ibid.).

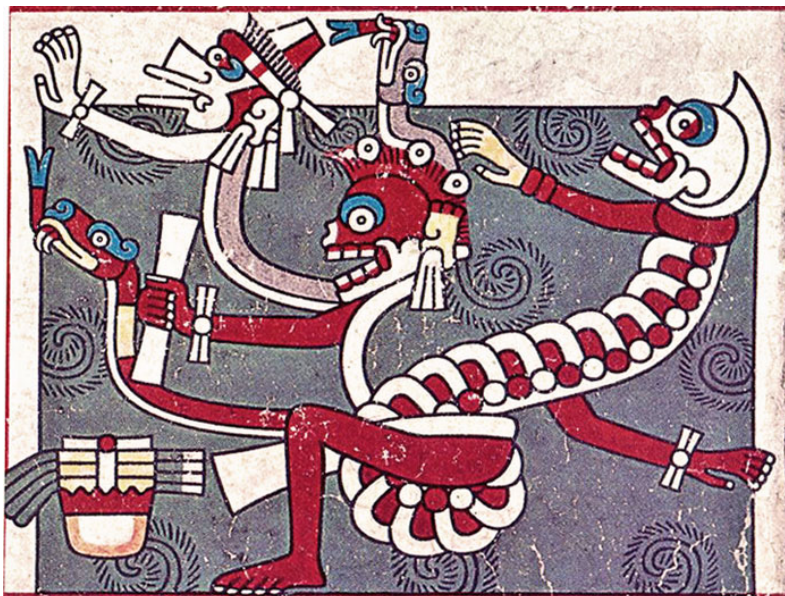


Figure 2:

The Anahuacan body upon physical death: the *ihiyotl*, *teyolia* and *tonalli* escape from the body as snakes (symbols of earthly transformation) and breath/wind (breath of life). The death of the physical body is a sort of breaking open of a clay pot, or the popping open of a bag of air, all that was contained in the body returns to the larger field of *tonalli*, *teyolia*, and *ihiyotl*. (Source: *MS. Laud Misc. 678*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

The Anahuacan body in ceremony is a thinking/knowing body, insofar as thinking/knowing is feeling and perceiving with all these bodies at once: the physical, the energetic, the spiritual, the breath, the visual, the aural (López Austin 2004: 220). The *danzante* must train all these sense bodies. Danza as a way of knowing takes place in this Anahuacan body, a body that contains many bodies and dances in relation to all bodies in ceremony, and in the universe. The gestural and repeated language of embodied cosmic belonging is at once a communal ethic of reciprocity and dialogue with the universe – of critical relationality – as it is also another metaphor for how danza embodies an Anahuacan cosmovisión. It is layered, it is multivalent, pluriversal, always in motion, cyclical, repeating. The basis for all Anahuacan cosmovisión is this notion of reciprocity, of harmony, of expansion-contraction, left-right, masculine-feminine. This cosmovisión is re-membered, re-populated, continually brought into being through the ceremonial, dancing body. In community, ceremony is a catalyst through which vortices of knowing are opened and perceived. Mobilizing the embodied technologies of danza provides an expansion of the physical body and includes other sensory bodies. Danza therefore, serves as a collective, embodied way of extending the senses.

From Dance as a Way of Knowing to Danza as a Way of Knowing

The primary aim of this study is to think from danza. This entails first moving through *how* danza is a way of knowing, before pivoting to consider *what* happens when danza is understood in this way. In conversation with the field of Dance Studies, I am also pursuing questions of dance, philosophy and discourse. However, I must also maintain a decolonial skepticism of the Eurocentric perspectives that may be naturalized in Dance Studies as such. I seek to enter these debates as a *danzante* and critical Ethnic Studies scholar-activist. The discursive shift from “dance” to “danza” is profound in that these terms refer to *colonially different* ways of understanding structured movements in the body.⁷⁶ In this study, “danza” is an abbreviation for “mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza.” Thus, a “*danzante*” is not simply a “dancer” but a *mitotiani teochitontequi*. Therefore, danza as a way of knowing represents a radical shift in relation to dance as such. Here I will begin by considering dance and knowledge in the Westernized senses of the terms, before pivoting and expanding to danza per se as a way of knowing.

Dance scholar and poet Celeste Snowber (2012) argues, “Dance as a way of knowing investigates dance as a form ‘beyond the steps’ yet includes steps. These steps are not so much left and right, back and forth, stage center, but the steps of recovering a visceral language that has the capacity to connect body, mind, heart, soul, and imaginative thinking” (54). For Snowber, dance is a “gestural language,” a

⁷⁶ Or as was just argued in the previous section, we may not even be talking about the same *body* in the first place.

“kinesthetic knowing (Ibid.)” As an educator, Snowber reflects on dance as a form of “somatic learning,” (Ibid.) as a pedagogical tool that expands what counts as knowledge beyond conventional notions of reason and science. This epistemic posture is in conversation with the “performative turn” (Marino 2017) that continues to critically challenge Western epistemes from within its own institutions and knowledge projects. However, as John Monaghan (1994) argues in his work “The Text in the Body, the Body in the Text: The Embodied Sign in Mixtec Writing”: “Dance is, first of all, a Western category. When applied to ‘human movement systems’ in other societies; it can obscure important indigenous categories” (89).

Mitotiliztli ↔ Teochitontequiza

With Snowber’s (2012) and Monaghan’s (1994) important contributions as points of departure, I think from danza as an Anahuacan *human movement system* that contains, produces and transmits knowledge “with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity” (Battiste and Youngblood 20). Thinking from Nahuatl, the primary spoken language of danza, I theorize danza as *mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza* – a term that itself is in motion, is ascending and descending, turning left and turning right, dancing on the page and off our lips at it is spoken into vibration. I chose to represent danza as *mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza* to emphasize the inter-dimensional and always already moving processes that define an Anahuacan cosmovisión – “a world in motion” (Maffie 2014) that is embodied through danza. This key term/infographic also serves as a reminder of how human movements become cosmic movements that shape important *noetic*⁷⁷ experiences for the danzante as a mitotiani teochitontequi. This term, as a set of terms, points to the important ways in which ceremonial movement and sound become technologies through which one accesses and transforms consciousness. These ascending-descending, collective, embodied sounds and movements produce what I term *ceremonial consciousness* – a process-oriented way of knowing that brings danzantes from material embodiment towards spiritual embodiment and back.

To structure this concept, I rely on the research of Yolotl González Torres (2005) and the final chapters of her seminal work *Danza Tu Palabra* that trace the beginnings of what we now know as the Mexicayotl, Toltecayotl, Movimiento Cósmico, Chitontequiza. Two of her interviews provide the scaffolding through which I theorize danza as a way of knowing, as a way of producing ceremonial consciousness. The concepts that substantiate *mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza* were articulated by Jefxs Velásquez Romo and Estrada García (in González Torres 2005), when they described danza as having a four-tiered structure: Mitotiliztli, Macehualiztli, Chitontequiza, and TeoChitontequiza. To introduce these engagements with danza as such, González Torres (2005) writes:

⁷⁷ Pertaining to the nature of consciousness.

Los grupos de la mexicayotl han designado a la danza como “danza solar azteca-chichimeca,” chitontequiza, que como se dijo, significa “salir de la oscuridad” o “salir del silencio,”...Según Velasquez Romo y Estrada Garcia...del Centro cultural (sic) Tepetlixayotl y Ollin Mexicayotl Tlahuizacalpan, la danza tiene cuatro niveles...

[Mexicayotl groups have designated danza as “Azteca-Chichimeca solar dance,” chitontequiza, which they say means “to emerge from the darkness” or “to emerge from the silence,”...According to Velasquez Romo and Estrada Garcia of the Cultural Center Tepetlixayotl and Ollin Mexicayotl Tlahuizacalpan, danza has four levels...] (190, my translation)

In the following section, I will unpack each of these levels of danza at length, in order to develop mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza as a complex, cross-dimensional, and trans-corporeal way of knowing. Snowber’s (2012) notion of “dance as a way of knowing” helps to begin this journey, by thinking from aspects of the first level of danza, that is, mitotiliztli. This is a physical realm of communication, joy and inter-relation in community. At this level, mitotiliztli is a way to understand the use of symbolic gestures, embodied metaphors, and pattern recognition in the physical movements of the body and ceremonial protocol. These are some of the key pedagogical and epistemic elements that I trace through danza. However, beyond this first level – as we move towards second, third, and fourth dimensions – these terms must be re-imagined, or transcended altogether. This is the *trans-corporeal* element of danza where one is moving within, yet beyond, the (physical) body. However, in the Anahuacan body there are no separations made between these levels or bodies. The physical body is the result of energetic bodies – higher dimensions that manifest in lower frequencies as matter. Therefore, dancing in mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza, the physical body re-members, returns to source, from in tlalticpac (the surface of the earth), nican axcan (here and now), traveling with integrity and through harmony, across dimensions and worlds. We will now dance through each of these levels, again, substantiating their contours through the literature and embodied oral tradition of danza as a way of knowing.



Figure 3:
A visualization of mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza.
Source: Drawing from Author's notebook (2019)

Mitotiliztli

Mitotiliztli o areito, fiesta, gozo, algarabía y alegría humana. En este nivel se manifiesta la danza y el danzante como una relación humana entre el y sus compañeros y todos quienes contemplan y admiran los movimientos y gozan con ellos...Esta comunicación a través del movimiento del cuerpo logra una interrelación humana en donde el Tlakachitonequi y su dualidad, la Cihuachitontequi son el centro y motivo principal de la danza.

[Mitotiliztli or ceremonial dance, festive dance, pleasure, jubilation and human joy. At this level the danza and danzante manifest as a human relation between themselves and their fellow danzantes and all who watch and admire the movements and enjoy with them...This communication through the movement of the body achieves a human interrelation in which the masculine danzante and his duality the feminine danzante are the center and main reason for the danza.] (Romo and García, quoted in González Torres 190, my translation)

Mitotiliztli can be broken down in Nahuatl etymologically, to its syntax morphology of: *mo* + *itotia* + *iliztli*. *Itotia* is “to express, to say, to speak” (including, for example, birdsong), *iliztli* is “an act, in action, through movement”, *mo-* is the second person, “thy” in Classical Nahuatl (Calmecac Nexticpac 2016). Therefore, some translations could be “expressing thyself/yourself through movement”, or “speaking with actions.”⁷⁸ *Mitotia*, however, has other concepts enfolded within it that also serve our theorizing here. *Mitotia* can also mean “your expression, thy art speaking.” This aspect of *mitotia* continues to circulate in contemporary Mexican popular discourse as a state of being in *el mitote*. In this context, the concept of *mitote* is colored through a colonial lens of Nativeness as savagery, where *el mitote* is used to refer to the “party” as a state of chaos, a sense of wildness, something akin to a “quilombo” – another racialized Latinx term, which originally referred to slave rebellions, but now means “riot.” A related modern *Mexicanismo*, *mitote* can also refer to “gossip” or getting lost in the “rumor mill” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2019).

If *el mitote* is a state of chaos, it is not the racialized notion of “incivility” but the chaos of Westernized mathematics’ *chaos theory* – that is, the complex, emergent and apparently random systems that challenge linear causality models. Chaos theory, according to Tewa author and Native scientist Gregory Cajete (2000), serves as an important bridge between Western and Native science paradigms (16). This notion of the chaos of the universe – that is systemic yet unpredictable due to complexity – is fundamental to my translation of *mitotiliztli*. In this way, *el mitote* is the inherent movement of all things in a living, breathing universe. It is the incomprehensible dynamism and interconnected systemic motion of the cosmos at all scales. *Danza* as *mitotiliztli* then is the art of moving in harmony with these chaotic systems, at the human level of embodied collective and individual felt perception. I translate this concept from the Nahuatl as “a graceful way of moving amidst chaos.” Yet, chaos here is another word for creativity, for the creative process of the universe, which is, of course, non-linear – in other words, is chaotic.

Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) offers a relevant philosophical interpretation of *el mitote*. In the opening chapter, “Domestication and the Dream of the Planet,” in his best-selling book *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz (1997) describes how:

Your whole mind is a fog which the Toltecs called a *mitote*. Your mind is a dream where a thousand peoples talk at the same time, and nobody understands each other. This is the condition of the human mind – a big *mitote*, and with that big *mitote* you cannot see what you really are... (It also) means illusion. It is the personality’s notion of ‘I am.’ Everything you believe about yourself and the world, all the concepts and programming you have in your mind, are all the *mitote*. We cannot see who we truly are; we cannot see that we are not free (16).

⁷⁸ See also “Dancing the Word” in “Introduction.”

Here Ruiz (1997) is offering an understanding of el mitote as an effect of the ego, as one aspect of the “smokey mirror” (xv) – the Anahuacan concept of Tezcatlipoca (*poca*: smoke/fog + *tezcatl*: mirror). Ruiz’ re-telling of the story of Tezcatlipoca posits that “matter is a mirror and the smoke in-between is what keeps us from knowing what we are. (Tezcatlipoca) said, ‘I am the Smokey Mirror, because I am looking at myself in all of you, but we don’t recognize each other because of the smoke in-between us. That smoke is the Dream, and the mirror is you, the dreamer’” (xix).

Mitotiliztli is dancing in this world of smoke and mirrors – dancing with the ego, with the thousand voices that do not understand each other. Danza as mitotiliztli is expressing oneself with movement amidst the chaos of the mind, “the dream of the planet” (Ruiz 1). It is the beginning of an Anahuacan embodiment experience – seeking harmony and grace with the moving body/mind/cosmos. As anthropologist of performance Susanna Rostas (2009) argues: “What the dance offers is the opportunity to re-member the body: to attain anew, by means of the ‘body-as-experiencer,’ another kind of embodied state. It enables dancers to achieve a sense of connectedness and of intersubjectivity by means of a reawakening of all the senses, numbed by the doings of everyday life, and a rejoining (or re-ligio) with the earth by means of the feet: a form of unmediated experience” (4). Yet, this stage is only the beginning.

Macehualiztli

Un segundo nivel es el Macehualiztli. En esta etapa el danzante se desprende de esa imagen de areito y algarabía para pasar a la de autosacrificio por medio de la abstinencia y el desprendimiento de lo externo. Aquí ya no será lo más importante la imagen a través del gozo, sino se reemplazará por un ofrecimiento consciente del danzante a través del cansancio, el sudor y, en algunas ocasiones, de la sangre que emana de los pies de los danzantes. Es un merecimiento ante las fuerzas que dan vida de por medio del cuerpo en movimiento, en beneficio de todos.

[A second level is Macehualiztli. In this stage the danzante detaches themselves from that image of festive or jubilant dance and goes to self-sacrifice through abstinence and detachment from the external. Here the experience of joy will no longer be the most important thing, rather it will be replaced by a conscious offering of the danzante through exhaustion, sweat and, on some occasions, the blood that emanates from the feet of the danzantes. This is an offering before the forces that give life, through the moving body, for the benefit of all.] (Romo and García, quoted in González Torres 190, my translation)

Macehualiztli is a spacetime of ofrenda (offering). It is an attitude of *entrega total* (complete surrender). What else can we offer as humble *macehualtin* (human beings) but our blood, sweat, and tears? We receive so much from you Mother Earth, Father Cosmos – this is the least that we can offer in return. To you we present our best work, our most impeccable ofrendas, expressions of our gratitude for *todo que nos das* (everything you give us). This is a moment in ceremonial consciousness when our own small self-importance “evaporates” (Rostas 138). Education scholar and danzante of Calpulli Tonalehqueh, Ernesto Colín (2014) describes danza through this notion of macehualiztli, he writes:

Macehualiztli means the art of deserving and generally speaks to a worldview embedded in Danza (in ancient times and now). Macehualiztli is about more than bodies in motion; there is a focus on fostering humility through dance. The word reference signifies humankind’s position in the world. In anthropocentric cultures, humans are given dominion over nature, or humans are the measure of all things. On the other hand, some cultures, like that of indigenous (sic) Mexica, held a worldview where humans are integrated with or connected to all living beings. The ancient Mexica acknowledged that without all the elements of the universe, including the sun, rain, plants, and animals, one could not live. The ancient Mexica worldview equated human life to a gift from Creation, a debt that must be paid through human productions. Two requirements are central to this worldview: gratitude and reciprocity. Danza was a vehicle to offer gratitude and gifts in return for precious gifts received. If people received energy and sustenance from the universe, what precious things could they give in return? The answer was total effort, prayer, and energy (in the form of dance), and in the most beautiful things that people could gather or create – things like poetry, works of art, flowers, incense, jewels, food, and so on (98).

The “word reference” (98) Colín (2014) is discussing here is the root word/concept that is woven into the notion of danza as macehualiztli – that is, *macehualli*, meaning “human being” (fieldnotes Fall 2015). In modern Nahuatl, however, “macehualli” not only means “human being,” but refers to being an *Indigenous* human being (fieldnotes Fall 2017). Considering these definitions in relation – macehualli as “human being” as Indigenous and macehualiztli as the “art of deserving” – it is evident that being human in an Anahuacan cosmovisión is an *active practice*. Or, in the words of decolonial humanist Sylvia Wynter, via Black feminist philosopher Katherine McKittrick (2015), being human is a “praxis.” In particular, being human requires actively cultivating humility and gratitude towards all our relations, enacting this recognition through the practice of making offerings. In this way, danza serves as a powerful way to try and repay the cosmos for everything they

have given us so freely and abundantly. Put another way, being human, and staying human, requires that we dance. For Jéfxs Romo and García, macehualiztli describes entering the stage of ceremony where we may feel pain, discomfort, aches, in the body. We may begin to bleed, sweat, cry. We may feel uncomfortably hot while dancing in the sun, or cold while dancing in the rain. While in the spacetime of ceremony, however, these are nothing more than the embodied experiences of being human. Macehualiztli, as a ceremonial state of mind, views these sensations as part of gift of being alive, giving thanks for the opportunity to *feel* anything at all. This is one way we can become an embodied ofrenda, offering nothing but love after having received so much. Great Cosmos, you who give us the gift of life, so generously, so freely – may we not squander these precious ways of knowing. May we shed our personal suffering and self-importance. May we embody even one small fraction of this abundant, generous universe.

Chitontequiza

El tercer nivel es el de la Chitontequiza, acto de girar y desprenderse al cosmos a través del movimiento de la danza. Es por medio de estos movimientos cósmicos que realiza el danzante de manera consciente, que logra su integración a las fuerzas de la naturaleza y el cosmos. El cuerpo en movimiento pasa a formar parte de un todo armonioso.

[The third level is that of Chitontequiza, the act of transforming and giving yourself over to the cosmos through the movements of danza. It is through these cosmic movements that consciousness is realized for the danzante, that they achieve integration with the forces of nature and the cosmos. The body in movement becomes part of a harmonious whole.] (Romo and García, quoted in González Torres 190, my translation)

Sí, sí. Nuestra Chitontequiza es nuestra danza, como llaman ustedes. Es lo que nosotros hacemos. Aquí, a través de la Chitontequiza recuperamos nuestra identidad y nuestra alegría. Aquí nos quitamos lo que nos estorba, lo alejamos de nuestros cuerpos con el humo del copal. Aquí nos movemos al ritmo del cosmos. Volvemos a formar parte del universo, lo que nos rodea. Llegamos con la danza a vivir en el tiempo verdadero, el tiempo nuestro.

[Yes, yes. Our Chitontequiza is our danza, as you call it. It is what we do. Here, through Chitontequiza we recover our identity and our joy. Here we shed what no longer serves us, we extract it from our bodies with the smoke of the copal. Here we move to the rhythm of the cosmos. We

become part of the universe again, that which surrounds us. Through danza we come to live in the true time, in our time.] (Huacuja 2013, my translation)

Danza as chitontequiza is a return to “el tiempo verdadero, el tiempo nuestro,” “true time, our time” (Huacuja 2013). Here danza is a human movement system that is a cosmic movement system. The dancing body has evaporated to another level of consciousness. Chitontequiza has been translated as “to emerge from silence” (Luna and Galeana 23) or “salir de la oscuridad” (“to emerge from darkness”) (González Torres 190). However, this term is also translated in danza as “movimiento cósmico,” “cosmic movement” (Fieldnotes, Teokalli, Summer 2015). Looking again at the syntax morphology of the term in Nahuatl: *Chiton-te-quiza*. *Chiton-* is “when sparks fly,” “telling a story in an animated manner,” (Karttunen 53), while *quiza*, related to *hualquiza*, is “to emerge, to leave, to come out, to turn up” (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). This emergence is most often in reference to depths, of water, or darkness, such as “hualquiza in Tonatiuh” as the sun rising from the darkness of night (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). Another translation here then could be, “to emerge from the darkness in an animated way,” “to leave the depths as sparks fly.” Luna (2011) offers a similar literal translation, “a jump made hastily that you will lead; and/or for chips or sparks to fly” (5).

These images are what might bring us closer to the notion of chitontequiza as “cosmic movement” – leaving darkness with sparks of light. In the context of danza, and as a level of consciousness one reaches through ceremony, this may also refer to a state of awakening. Put another way, rising as the sun, this is a moment of “leaving the dream” in the sense of Don Miguel Ruiz’s (1997) “dream of the planet” (1). If the world is a dream, where a “smokey mirror” (Tezcatlipoca) obscures our ability to see the true nature of reality – of our interconnection and radical one-ness – the dancer here is a *tacachitontequi/cihuachitontequi*, masculine/feminine warriors who are in the process of emergence from this world of illusion. However, as Romo and García (2005) teach, this emergence from dream is also a re-integration process – “con las fuerzas de la naturaleza y el cosmos,” “with the forces of nature and the cosmos” (190). It is a state of becoming part of el “todo armonioso,” “the harmonious whole” (Ibid.).

In cultural historian and theologian Thomas Berry’s and mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme’s (1994) *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, the authors emphasize the power of cosmological stories that remind us of this radical interconnection and primordial one-ness. They write of the importance of telling stories that place ourselves into these larger cosmic narratives. Taking on the question of cosmology from Westernized traditions of mathematics and eco-philosophy, Berry and Swimme (1994) write:

Originating power brought forth a universe. All the energy that would ever exist in the entire course of time erupted as a single quantum--a singular gift--existence. If in the future, stars would blaze and lizards would blink in their light, these actions would be powered by the same numinous energy that flared forth at the dawn of time...The birth of the universe was not an event in time. Time begins simultaneously with the birth of existence. The realm or power that brings forth the universe is not itself an event in time, nor a position in space, but is rather the very matrix out of which the conditions arise that enable temporal events to occur in space. Though the originating power gave birth to the universe fifteen billion years ago, this realm of power is not simply located there at that point of time, but is rather a condition of every moment of the universe, past, present, and to come (7).

I bring Berry and Swimme (1994) here to consider how chitontequiza embodies this return to cosmic time, through cosmic movement. If danza is a modality through which we “return to our time, to true time,” (Huacuja 2013) it is also a means by which we re-member our place in *The Universe Story* (1994). It is an embodied (beyond only the human body at this point) way of experiencing the truth of time. In this way, Berry and Swimme (1994) argue: “The vitality of a dolphin as it squiggles high in the summer sun, then, is directly dependent upon the elegance of the dynamics at the beginning of time. We cannot regard the dolphin and the first Flaring Forth as entirely separate events. The universe is a coherent whole, a seamless multileveled creative event. The graceful expansion of the original body is the life blood of all future bodies in the universe” (8).

Danzantes as *tlacachitontequimeh/cihuachitontequimeh* – cosmic dancers, telling the universe story in an animated matter – are in a state of re-integrated cosmic consciousness, are re-membering this universal truth. They are emerging from silence, beyond or without words, breaking the original silence of the time before Time, as sparks fly. This is not an experience of transcendental consciousness that somehow escapes our commitments and responsibilities as corporeal, material beings. On the contrary, guided by the danzante ethic of the circle, that teaches “*no somos más ni menos que nadie*,” “we are no better nor worse” than our relatives, this is a spacetime of profound cosmic humility. Feeling as big and old as the universe is, at once, an experience of being tiny and gigantic. Through this consciousness, the danzante sheds their own self-importance, to achieve a higher, cosmic perspective of reality. In ceremony, one is reminded of these truths, so that in the ceremonies of everyday life, we re-member who we truly are.

Teochitontequiza

El cuarto nivel es el de TeoChitontequiza, movimiento cósmico de energía creadora. El ejecutante de la danza solar logra su mayor expresión cósmica en una íntima y colectiva interrelación del ser con la fuerza suprema o gran espíritu generador de vida llamado por los antiguos anahuacas Ometeotl (esencia dual de Omecihuatl y Ometecuhtli). Los movimientos dancísticos logran una comunicación espiritual con las fuerzas generadoras de vida y el danzante se convierte en su vínculo entre Teotl, la energía Creadora y la humanidad...La TeoChitontequiza es la expresión mas elaborada de lo que un danzante puede lograr con su dedicación, esmero, disciplina y autosacrificio.

[The fourth level is that of TeoChitontequiza, the cosmic movement of creative energy. The practitioner of solar danza achieves this greatest cosmic expression in an intimate and collective interrelation of being with the supreme force or great spirit that generates life known by the Anahuacan ancestors as Ometeotl (dual essence of Omecihuatl and Ometecuhtli). The movements of danza achieve a spiritual communication with the forces that generate life and the danzante becomes the link between Teotl, the energy of the Creator, and humanity...TeoChitontequiza is the most elaborate expression of what a danzante can achieve through their dedication, care, discipline, and self-sacrifice.] (Romo and García, quoted in González Torres 190, my translation)

From this experience of cosmic emergence, integration with a state of universal consciousness, we arrive at the highest level of danza – teochitontequiza. The addition of *teo-* as a prefix profoundly changes the meaning of this term – since *teo-* is *teotl*. *Teotl* is another mostly untranslatable concept, not only across worldviews, but as something that can be described at all. Nonetheless, scholars provide some archival understandings for us to begin to unpack a small part of the depth of *teotl*. According to metaphysicist James Maffie (2014), “*Teotl* is not the ‘creator’ ex nihilo of the cosmos in a theistic sense but rather the immanent engenderer of the cosmos. *Teotl* is not a minded or intentional agent, being, or deity. The history of the cosmos is nothing more than the self-unfolding and self-presenting of *teotl*. This single, all-inclusive unity is sacred because *teotl* is sacred” (12-13). Here Maffie is avoiding one of the most common colonial mistranslations of *teotl* as God – avoiding yet another trapdoor into a reductive, Westernized, Judeo-Christian worldview.

Furthermore, as Jefxs Romo and García describe above, *teotl* is also enfolded and embodied through *Ometeotl* – *Omecihuatl*, *Ometecuhtli* (feminine dual Creator, masculine dual Creator). If *chitontequiza* is cosmic re-integration in general,

teochitontequiza is re-integration with *the* energy that is creating the cosmos in the first place. Within danza, one of the most common ways in which one will encounter these concepts is through the sacred utterance of the word “Ometeotl.” Similar to the use of “axé” or “aho” or “amen” in other contexts, danzantes in the Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl tradition will speak “ometeotl” as a ceremonial affirmation. This sacred word is offered in innumerable ceremonial circumstances: to open or close palabra (speaking in a ceremonial way), to offer supportive energy to fellow danzantes, to affirm and maintain the *ánimo* (enthusiasm) of a ceremony, especially before a particularly intense or difficult physical movement, to affirm the presence of an ancestor when their name is spoken out loud, to give thanks, etc. It is a way of saying, “the Creator is present,” a reminder of why we are here – both in ceremony and in general. “Ometeotl” is spoken virtually every 2-3 min while in ceremony (if not more), a constant re-affirmation of the presence of Ometeotl, and reiteration of the desire to embody and understand Ometeotl as our true nature. For the Concheros, the equivalent saying is “El Es Dios,” “He is God”.⁷⁹

Relating Ometeotl back to teotl, Maffie (2014) posits that “talk about Ometeotl represents another way of talking about teotl: one that focuses upon teotl’s agonistic inamic unity” (169). Maffie’s concept of “agonistic inamic unity” is another way of saying “Ometeotl,” in that it names the centrifugal, inter-dependent dualistic movement through which two-ness becomes one-ness – the radical mutuality and inseparability that binds oppositional energies into a field of totality. Ometeotl is a fundamental concept in an Anahuacan cosmovisión. *Agonistic* refers to constant tension, *inamic* is a borrowing from the Nahuatl “inamic” – “a power, force, or influence that is by definition matched or paired with a second power, force, or influence...the complementary polar opposite” (Maffie 13). Maestra Chicueyi Coatl (2014) calls this having a “cosmic companion” (78). The *unity* aspect points to the importance of these pairs being, in the end, two sides of one totality. This forms “what Nicholson calls the ‘Ometeotl complex’ – a single, all-encompassing cluster of energies consisting of the agonistic unity of all inamic pairs: male~female, dry~wet, being~nonbeing, order~disorder, and so on” (Maffie 169).

Teochitontequiza then is a journey to *Omeyocan* – “where Ometeotl dwells” (Maffie 171). In ceremony, danzantes visit this “time-place of continual agonistic inamic unity; the time-place of continual generation, regeneration, and transformation; the birth time-place of all things; and the highest fold or layer of the cosmos” (Ibid.). Put another way, teochitontequiza is a way of “thinking the highest thought” (Cajete 276). Tewa (Santa Clara Pueblo) scholar of Native science, Gregory Cajete (2000), argues that “thinking the highest thought” is a cross-cultural Indigenous spiritual-epistemological attitude – part of a set of shared, “basic understandings about sacred knowledge” that includes “the notion that a universal energy infuses everything in the cosmos and expresses itself through a multitude of

⁷⁹ A phrase we will revisit in Chapter Two of this study.

manifestations” (264). He advances that this notion “also includes the recognition that all life has power that is full of wonder and spirit. This is the ‘Great Soul’ or the ‘Great Mystery’ or the ‘Great Dream’ that cannot be explained nor understood with the intellect, but can be perceived and understood only by the spirit of each person” (Ibid.). In other words, while I have described *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza* as levels of ceremonial consciousness here in a systematic way, one cannot truly understand the knowledge contained therein through the intellect alone. The cosmic truths that are understood and experienced through *danza* cannot be fully transmitted through these words – they are only approximations. As a form of ceremonial theoretico-praxis, “thinking the highest thought” (Cajete 2000: 276) requires “dedication, care, discipline, and self-sacrifice” (Romo and García, quoted in González Torres 190). In order to truly re-member our place in the cosmos, *we must dance this truth*.⁸⁰

Conclusions

In this chapter I have defined some of the key terms that shape my study of *danza* as a way of knowing: ceremony/ceremoniality, embodiment/the body and ceremonial consciousness. *Danza* as a theoretico-praxis has been unfolded and animated through the key concept/infographic: *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*. *Danzando* in these ways does not bring me to a place of drawing conclusions, but instead to posing more substantiated questions. In this way, I begin to consider how these forms of ceremonial consciousness might expand and re-vision understandings of decolonial theory and practice, and Other ways of knowing at large. For example, returning to the radical women of color feminist question of “theory in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983), what kind of theory (or theoretico-praxis) can we produce when the flesh, in *nacayotl*, is understood as always already an expression, a container, a manifestation of spirit, of energy, of *teotl*? What does “thinking the highest thought” (Cajete 2000: 276) look like when rooted in a “politic of necessity” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983)? Similarly, what forms of *decolonial love* emerge in these spaces of ceremonial embodiment and consciousness? Re-membering to relate through *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*, *danzantes* may have something to say about this, with or without words. Seeking harmony in all our relations, *danzando* on this path of *conocimiento*, I now turn to questions of cultural memory, survival, resistance, and resilience through the theoretico-praxis of Anahuacan ceremonial movement in community.

⁸⁰ To borrow a phrase inspired by the title of religious studies and history of consciousness scholar David Delgado Shorter’s (2009) *We Will Dance Our Truth: Yaqui History in Yoeme Performances*.

Chapter 2

Danza as Cultural Memory and Survivance: On Calpulli, Concherismo and La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc

Structures of Cultural Memory

In this chapter I trace danza as an embodied, communal and ceremonial way of activating and transmitting cultural memory and stories of survivance. By cultural memory I am referring to the ancestral ways of knowing and being that are given shape through the dancing Anahuacan body in community and in ceremony – in this case, through the *teyolia*, the heart-body. As was stated in the previous chapter, the *teyolia* is a site of memory. Furthermore, the *teyolia* is not only an individual heart-body, but the heart-body of the cosmos – a vital force that permeates the universe and all our relations, and that enters the human body and concentrates in the heart and left side of the Anahuacan body. Danzando in ceremony activates this heart-side, left-handed place of memory. As Diana Taylor (2003) argues “cultural memory is, among other things, a practice, an act of imagination, of interconnection...Memory is embodied and sensual, that is, conjured through the senses” (82). In this way, the dancing Anahuacan body, with an expanded and ceremonial sensorium and consciousness, evokes the memory of the individual heart-body, as well as the heart-body of the circle, the heart-body of the *calpulli* and ultimately the heart-body of the cosmos. This is part of how danza *re-members to relate*. I will trace how danza enacts this form of cultural memory through the traditional governance structure of the *calpulli*, the survivance strategies of *Concherismo*, and the ceremonial re-tellings of *La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc* as an ancestral prophecy of decolonization.

What is a Calpulli?

Calpulli is the fundamental unit of organizing in the Nahuatl culture and therefore within la *Xitontekiza* [sic] (Danza Movement) too. It is our ancestral form of organizing in community, and part of the larger structure of power and politics in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The word Calpulli comes from the root words Calli and Pulli, *calli* referring to casa, home, refugio, refuge, central place...and *pulli*, which means surplus, or excess, un montón, a bundle, a reunion. Together, calpulli then can be translated as a bundle of houses, a gathering of families, a central meeting place of reunion. In general this term can be translated as “community,” though in the Western world not all “communities” are organized along the protocol of Mexica-Tenochka Calpultin (plural for calpulli). A Calpulli is a gathering of homes, a collective of families who work together to take care of each other and have a clear division of labor that cares for the land, the children, the elders and our ways of life.

The concept of calpulli can be found in practice in many different Native communities today: including the caracoles of the Zapatistas, the pueblo of Cherán in Michoacán, México, the *Lof* in Mapuche territory (Chile/Argentina) and many others. The common themes of these communities are a commitment to autonomy (self-determination, self-sufficiency), collective work organized by *cargos* (specific responsibilities and shared protocol), and the survival of indigenous ways of life despite ongoing occupation and centuries of colonialism. Not all calpultin are danzantes, but all danzantes are organized in some form of calpulli-like structure (though some may call themselves a “grupo”, or “familia”, or “circulo”, etc.). To live in calpulli means to always think of yourself as a member of a larger collective, to make decisions and structure your life in relation to your fellow calpulli members and our collective needs. This requires that we decolonize the individualism that is emphasized and built into the Western culture and identity that surrounds us. It is our shared responsibility to work to maintain and grow our calpulli...Members of the Calpulli are those committed to keeping it alive and flourishing. Commitment is shown in one’s practice of danza, including participation in coordination, practice sessions, ceremonies and other events...Members should keep in communication with the rest of the Calpulli and give notice if they will not be able to attend. To be a member, a four year commitment to the calpulli is required (Calpulli Huey Papalotl 2018).

Organizing and knowing in community, danzantes re-member to relate through the calpulli structure. Living and working in the urban centers of post-apocalyptic Anahuac, calpulehqueh (calpulli members) maintain autonomy and community care in ceremony – resisting modern/colonial structures of power, knowledge and being. Danzantes take care of elders, children, themselves and each other. Organized through an Anahuacan cosmovisión (Colín 36), dancing in calpulli is dancing in community, *entre familia* (in family). The calpulli is one level of the cosmos, in that it is modelled after the cosmic patterns and principles of harmony that are all around us and within. Carrying cargos (ceremonial responsibilities) creates a web of relationships and roles that bring about harmony through interconnection and tequio (collective work). Though very few urban calpultin have land, sharing resources such as food, plant medicine, childcare and clothing maintains the ancestral practice of thinking collectively about individual “property.” In fact, as Calpulli Huey Papalotl (2018) argues, being in a calpulli “requires that we decolonize the individualism that is emphasized and built into the Western culture and identity that surrounds us” (1). Maintaining sovereignty and self-determination at the most intimate and private levels of daily life, calpultin navigate and, at times, subvert settler laws, authority and ways of being.

This decolonial negotiation has been transmitted across generations and is a particularly present continuity with the Conchero elements of danza's lineages. In this way Concherismo is a strategy of survivance, a way of maintaining Anahuacan continuity in the face of multiple and ongoing genocides. As danzante-scholar and member of Calpolli (sic) Teoxicalli, Zotero Citlalcoatl (2010) argues,

One particular strand of Mexica resistance, the Macehualiztli Mitotiliztli Conchero lineage, preserved the infrastructure of the Calpolli through the incorporation of Catholicism as a survival strategy (Maestas, 1999). This was done at a time when our hands would be cut off for playing the Huehuetl, our traditional Mitotiliztli drum. The armadillo shell was used to construct stringed instruments as a substitute for our traditional drums (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). In this way the ancient Mexica rhythms, songs, dances, culture, and traditions were preserved for future generations (Maestas, 1999). What is known today as 'Aztec dance' was preserved by Conchero families who continued conducting traditional Mitotiliztli ceremonies. They were forced to adopt Catholicism in order to preserve our ancient traditional dances (30).

Through creative acts of resistance and refusal, danzantes developed "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990) through which to maintain an Anahuacan cosmovisión in the heart of the community, the home and the body. This embodied and communal way of transmitting ancestral knowledge is also carried out "hidden in plain sight" (Rodríguez 145). For example, "dancing in the Zócalo 365 days each year to 'knock down the Cathedral' that sits atop the temple of Quetzalcoatl...danzantes in Mexico City commonly tell people that they dance so that their vibrations will knock down the Cathedral" (Rodríguez 147). These contestations of ongoing settler colonialism and cultural genocide are centered in the calpulli structure. However, this resistance is also a matter of intra- and inter-community healing and balance. As Citlalcoatl (2010), "reconnecting to our own autonomous structures of governance is necessary for balance and harmony to be restored in our community" (26).

Theorizing Indigenous Resistance: Beyond Syncretism, Transculturation, and Hybridity

Danza is the result of over 500 years of Anahuacan resistance and negotiation with Spanish, Mexican, American and other Euro-centered systems of domination. Many existing ways of theorizing this process of colonial encounter and cultural confrontation, however, do not work to fully describe the dynamic I am mapping through danza. Though it circulates as the dominant discourse for theorizing danza – especially the case of the Concheros (Yolotl Gonzalez 2005) – *syncretism* as a concept is inadequate in describing this dynamic, complex and non-linear process. Syncretism

as such remains a Eurocentric formulation – entering primarily through discourses of religious studies and anthropology. Thinking from Greco-Roman traditions (Leopold 2001), it emphasizes a “third” product being created by “two” cultures meeting. Some of the earliest accounts of the concept point to temporary military alliances being built for the sake of uniting against a common enemy as a form of syncretism (Johnson 2016). The implication of syncretism per se is that different cultural worlds and discourses somehow mix to create new, synthetic ones. It implies a neutral amalgamation. When thinking about this relationship from the Anahuacan/Spanish *colonial difference*, the situation is hardly neutral. Instead, we must consider the invasion of Anahuac by European settlers as the inauguration of a violent, colonial, genocidal structure (Wolfe 2006) – normalizing relationships of domination and exploitation through a “paradigm of war” (Maldonado-Torres 2008). Instead I ask, what does an Indigenous-centered notion of “syncretism” look like – one that seeks to trace and unearth the ways in which colonial discourse was strategically adopted as a means of decolonial appropriation and subversion, for the sake of survivance and Indigenous futurity? How can danza – especially in the Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl, Xicanx Indígena tradition – account for a process of *de-syncretization* and *de-conversion*, centuries after original compromises were made?

This line of questioning relies on the understanding that colonial genocide was, and is, unsuccessful. As Diné artist-scholar-activist Lyla June Johnson (2016) posits, “they say that history is written by the victors, but how can there be a victor when the war isn’t over?” (3:30-3:38). The *teyolia/yollotl* (heart-memory-energy) of an Anahuacan *cosmovisión* and ways of being have been preserved *through* so-called syncretism. Following María Lugones (2003), who argues that oppressing always already creates resisting, I ask: how can we attune our historical and contemporary analytical lenses to account for the ways in which the continuity of Indigenous knowledge and life are active forms of resistance to oppression – even when what is seen on the surface is assimilation, adoption or conversion culturally, religiously or otherwise? What underlies these processes is also refusal, negotiation and the strategic appropriation of dominant concepts for the sake of cultural resistance. As James Scott (1990) has argued, “the arts of resistance” are many and dynamic – and cannot be reduced to outright opposition of dominant power. In danza, there are countless examples of strategic compromises that were made to be able to continue the practice of dancing with the cosmic energies. What I am suggested here is that what could otherwise be seen as a process of silencing or erasure – which are, no doubt, acts of violence – can also be sites of tactical, temporary protective measures taken by Indigenous peoples and other resistant communities who are guided by visions of decolonial futures. In this way, *chitontequiza* as “*saliendo del silencio*,” “emerging from silence” (González Torres 190) takes on a different historical weight and meaning as a form of decolonial cultural memory.

While syncretism fails to fully account for the forms of decolonial resistance I wish to trace through danza, notions of transculturation (Ortiz 1940) and cultural

hybridity (Canclini 1995) offer similarly incomplete analyses. Like syncretism, these theories seek to trace a horizontal exchange where there is instead a vertical relationship of power and violence. These concepts rely on Eurocentric fragmentations of religion, science, art, and the culture as separate and discrete worlds of influence. For example, hybridity is a question of biology, syncretism one of ritual, or eclecticism a matter for the arts (Johnson 2016). This approach would implicitly re-center a European disciplinarity in its reading of Indigenous resistance. If instead we center an Anahuacan perspective of these histories and continuities, we visibilize a whole different terrain of struggle – one that is rooted in *resistant pluriversality*, subversive appropriation and radical continuity. Rather than relying on discourses of biological mixture or cultural infiltration, I posit – through La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc as a story of survivance (below) – that a larger cosmological perspective may be most useful.

Hemispheric performance theorist Diana Taylor (2003) offers relevant and critical perspectives on these concepts. Through a close reading of contemporary and historical performances that emerges to confront these dynamics, Taylor thinks at length through the notions of *mestizaje*, hybridity and transculturation. By centering the body in all these discourses, Taylor describes how we must re-think and redefine how they have been traditionally mobilized. In conversation with Angela Rama's (1982) critical definitions of transculturation, she offers an analytical framework that approaches the ways in which I seek to read danza as a vehicle of spiritual and cultural resistance. In response to Ortiz' (1940) original formulation of transculturation, Rama (1982) theorizes transculturation as “four stages in the process – loss, selectivity, rediscovery, and incorporation – all of which take place simultaneously” (quoted in Taylor 105). In this way, “the seemingly recognizable Western forms hide other logics within them. The double-codedness continues the tradition of hiding one system within another that characterized indigenous resistance to colonialism” (Taylor 106).

With these theoretical frameworks for understanding the colonial *choque* (clash) in mind, I will now return to danza to re-think what these negotiations look like in practice – both historically and contemporaneously. The 16th-century *Battle of Sangremal* serves as a particularly important moment of origin for the figure of the *Conchero* – the hybrid, mestizx, transculturated, syncretic danzante. The Concheros – and their use of ceremonial dance and music – serve as the nexus through which Indigenous ways of knowing and being survive genocide and in particular, the occupation and forced conversions of the Spanish Catholic Church. From 1531 to the early 20th century, the Conchero is the primary figure who carries this cultural memory encoded in their danzas and *alabanzas* (worship songs). Without this creative resistance and protection of ancestral knowledge, there would be no basis from which the Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl movement could later decipher and unpack the Anahuacan cosmovisión that had been hidden in plain sight all along. This is a relatively recent phenomenon that I, along with many other Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl

danzantes and scholars, seek to further evidence through my own research and analysis. Before this is possible however, we must first return to the centuries-long work of the Concheros, to try and understand how it was that these decolonial compromises were made.

Shifting the Terrain of Struggle: From Military to Spiritual Warrior at the Battle of Sangremal

To better understand the Conchero methodology of spiritual-cultural resistance we must locate their presence in the long historical trajectory of Anahuacan ceremonial dance and music. I turn again to the space between the archive and the embodied, oral tradition to gather relevant and reliable, that is cross-referenced, sources of evidence. In this way, I read and interpret an important cultural text that continues to be celebrated and retold within the danza tradition: the 1531 *Battle of Sangremal*. This history is important not simply as a factual account of “what really happened” (Trouillot 1995). Instead, it is precisely in how it is interpreted and re-told by danzantes, as a moment of origin for the emergence of the Conchero, that situates its re-telling within a resistant, survivant historiography of danza.

This oral history tells of a battle between the *Chichimecas* and the Spanish on July 25, 1531. According to the *Crónica of Michoacán* (1778), it was upon this hill of *Sangremal* in *Querétaro* that a miraculous conversion took place. Some accounts tell of the appearance of a mounted Saint Santiago appearing in the sky, instructing the Chichimec warriors to surrender to the power of the cross (Córdova, “Los Concheros,” 6). Here they are reported to have approached the cross to rejoice, dance and exclaim: “El es Dios!” Other accounts tell of this ultimate fight taking place “*a puñetes, patinas y mordidas*,” (“with punches, kicks and bites”) meaning without formal weaponry (González Torres 2005). These accounts then tell of the Chichimec warriors surrendering to the Spanish, eventually participating in the erection of a stone cross on the site. Around this cross, the Chichimec danced and kissed the cross for eight days. This is the cross that becomes known as the *Santa Cruz*, a figure that permeates many traditional songs and dances to this day (Córdova 2010).

There remains an active debate on how to interpret this story as one of the origin stories of the Concheros – though most accounts and interpretations agree on this battle as a significant moment of syncretism, of hybridity, of transculturation, of mestizaje. As I have already stated, however, my purposes here are to seek to move beyond these frameworks, and towards a lens of Indigenous survivance, resilience and agency. In this process, I rely on the contributions of many previous studies of the Concheros (González Torres 2005; Córdova 2010; Luna 2013; Aguilar 2009; Hernández-Ávila 2004; Rostas 2009) and my own ethnographic and personal experiences in collaboration and in ceremony with my Concherx relatives. Here I rely on two Conchero maestrxs/ancestors to offer a very brief introduction to the

tradition. Quoted in Ernesto Colín's (2014) study of *Indigenous Education through Dance and Ceremony*, "Maestro Federico Sánchez Ventura (1963) provided a concise overview of the essence of the Conchero variety of Mexica dance:

La danza de los concheros, o danza Chichimeca, ha sobrevivido a siglos, a conquistas, y ha permitido la permanencia del conocimiento original que transmitieron nuestros antecesores. Danza sagrada que, al dar gracias a la creación, realiza el gesto dinámico de integrar cuerpo, mente y espíritu a través del ritmo acompasado de los ayoyotes, del canto de las conchas, del bajo profundo del caracol, y del retumbar del huehuetl. Se trata de cantos y danzas que datan de miles de años, que han continuado después de la Conquista hasta nuestros días sin perder los rasgos esenciales de la cosmogónica que comparten en las viejas civilizaciones y se han adaptado al cristianismo, en cuyo sincretismo confluyen fuerzas históricas, sociales y políticas de nuestro tiempo. Repartidos por diversos estados en el centro del país y por algunos lugares lejanos del Altiplano, los concheros mantienen vivo el rito del sol, que comparten con otras danzas similares como las de los quechuas, los hoppers, los vascos y los sufis.

[The Concheros dance, or danza Chichimeca, has survived centuries, conquests, and has allowed for the permanence of the original knowledge transmitted by our ancestors. Sacred danza that, by giving thanks to Creation, performs the dynamic gesture of integrating body, mind and spirit through the cadenced rhythm of the ayoyotes (seed rattle anklets), the song of the *conchas* (mandolin-like stringed instrument), the deep bass of the conch shell, and the rumbling of the huehuetl (drum). These are songs and danzas that are thousands of years old, that have continued after the Conquest until today without losing their essential features of the cosmogony that is shared across ancient civilizations and have adapted to Christianity, in whose syncretism converge historical, social and political forces today. Spread across various states in the center of the country and along some remote places in the Altiplano, the Concheros keep the solar ceremonies alive, which they have in common with similar dances such as the Quecha, the Hopi, the Basque, and the Sufi.] (quoted in Colín 14, my translation)

Capitan Andrés Segura (Macias 2013) offers another important, concise and useful history of los Concheros, highlighting the complex history of "syncretism" as a form of Indigenous resistance, he states:

The history of los Concheros is based on our songs, some of which were adapted by the Franciscan fathers as they sought to 'Christianize' us

after la Conquista. While the Franciscans denied us our instruments, notably the flute and the drums, they did allow some of our songs to be sung at ceremonies. The Franciscans merely inserted Jesus' name when our songs spoke of a masculine deity and the Virgin Mary for a feminine deity. Based on this syncretism of indigena and Catholic religious ceremonies; our ancient songs were preserved, making possible the continuation of the indigena tradition in Mexico.

However, music was still needed to accompany our songs so that our ceremonies could fulfill their purposes. Our ancestors resorted to somewhat devious maneuvers in order to overcome the ban on the flute and drum. These instruments provide the exact musical notes, the harmonics, that our ceremonies required, and a substitute was needed. Seeing the guitar as a popular instrument of choice for the Spaniard, our ancestors therefore created a ten string guitar-like instrument using the armadillo shell, which in Spanish is called a 'concha,' and which provided the harmonic music that our ceremonies required...From the use of the concha came the name given to us, los Concheros (translated and quoted in Macias 318).

These are the stories through which I problematize notions of syncretism, or cultural mestizaje, as processes that over-represent the dynamics of conversion as domination. Resistance is always present – and can emerge through what Maestro Segura (Macias 2013) calls “somewhat devious maneuvers” (318). Elsewhere, Maestro Segura has stated, “I prefer to call it a *reencuentro*” (Poveda 284). A *reencuentro* is a reunion, a re-encounter, a re-uniting. Here, Maestro Segura is doing the work that many *danzantes* continue to take up, of shifting the time and space and worldview from which we read these histories. Here, a re-encounter vis-á-vis a syncretism, privileges a circular, or cyclical understanding of time. Or better yet, a notion of *spiral time* (Martins 2007). Instead of a linear absorption and erasure of Indigenous knowledge – a colonial trope of Native as always already frozen in the past – the conversion of Indigenous warriors to dancers through Christianity is a *remembering process*. That is, these ancestors recognized these symbols through their own cosmovisión, understanding their cosmic and spiritual significance, no matter the superficial appearances through which they manifested. This is a pluriversal move, a paradigm of coexistence (Mignolo 2005), a decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2008), a meta-ideologizing (Sandoval 2000).

Segura extends these notions to include Concherismo as a sort of decolonial semiotics (Sandoval 2000) or epistemic sovereignty, where symbols such as the Christian cross are read as another way of knowing Anahuacan concepts such as *nahui ollin*. While the Catholic missionary project remains focused on conversion through domination, the Conchero as decolonial semiotician is working on their own form of conversion, on their own terms, as a technology of cosmic emancipation

(Sandoval 109). This translates into yet another form when considering the question of sacred space, Capitán Segura states:

At every indigena shrine, or power spot, the Spaniard built a church or erected a small chapel with a cross, but the energy special to us still exists there, so we end up dancing in front of many churches. We don't mind the appearance of the cross; for us, the cross is a symbol of life, the Nahui Ollin...The four points of the nahui ollin, or cross, correspond to the four cardinal points, the four directions, and where they come together in the middle is where life is created. Earth, Air, Fire, and Water all combine and, after a struggle, create life as a synthesis of the four elements. In a Catholic sense, we understand that the cross represents the sacrifice and work of Christ. We therefore use both worldviews for the same purpose: exhorting our communities to sacrifice themselves, to make efforts, for their greater spiritual evolution. La danza is serious; it is a ceremony, not an event to jump up and down (Macias 319).

This is another level of *re-encounter* that is embodied in danza. Sacred sites are remembered for their true power – before, during and after the invasion by European settlers. The place remains sacred despite the violent imposition of colonial symbols and costumbres (customs). Maestra Chicueyi Coatl also shares this teaching, instructing her danzantes to dance wherever we are called, “even if you may have problems with the Catholic Church, dance for the energies and ancestors that are underneath the church, they are still there” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2015). Danzante-scholar Ernesto Colín (2014) theorizes this dynamic as a “palimpsest,” which is “a metaphor for how to understand a difficult present with a hidden but relentlessly powerful past...a multilayered text with an incompletely erased heritage upon which new texts are superimposed for the description of indigenous education, community organization, and identity work” (180).

Using “both worldviews for the same purpose” (Macias 319) is precisely the promise of danza as spiritual resistance. According to Segura, “Our ancestors purposely created our dances to preserve our indigena culture and essence” (Macias 320). While many danza scholars emphasize the modernity and mestiza elements of danza, and in fact refute and critique claims to indigeneity in danza as a problematic romanticization of the past (Córdova 2019), here Maestro Segura is offering us another way of seeing how cultural memory lives in danza. As the descendants of these danzas, contemporary danzantes continue to debate and negotiate their relationships with these stories and ways of understanding what they are in fact practicing. There exists a multiplicity of options and open debates for how danzantes situate themselves in relation to their danza practice (Nielsen 2014). Each of these approaches and their respective philosophies have a historical lineage and internal logic. In my own study I have sought only to emphasize the ways in which danza

contains the possibility of continued cosmic harmony, how danza provides a way for colonized people to remain human. Danza as a form of spiritual resistance, of decolonial cultural memory, shifts the terrain of struggle – through Cuauhtemoc’s last orders (see below) and the Battle of Sangremal’s military defeat. Surrender in both these cases is a move towards *survivance* (Vizenor 2008) – a visionary way of seeing a decolonial future despite a genocidal present. Re-memembering to relate, through a “paradigm of co-existence” (Mignolo 2005), is a subversive act of existence as resistance. Though the battlefield had shifted – from military confrontation to spiritual warfare, from physical to cultural struggle – the battle remains the same: harmony by any means necessary. Returning to the words of Diné artist-activist-scholar Lyla June Johnson (2016):

Somos guerreros del amor y guerreros de la paz, y no vamos a escondernos más...[We are warriors of love and warrior of peace, and we will no longer hide]...The battle has only just begun, and Creator is sending His very best warriors. And this time it isn’t Indians vs. Cowboys, no, this time, it is *all* the beautiful races of humanity, together on the same side. And we are fighting to replace our fear, with love. And this time bullets, arrows and cannonballs won’t save us. The only weapons that are useful in this battle, are the weapons of truth, faith, and compassion (3:40-4:15).

Prophecies of Decolonization and Survivance

In this journey we must now return to ceremony. We will continue this path of the ceremonial warrior through a yearly *ceremonia* that is held in various danza communities, usually during the Gregorian month of February. During this ceremony, danzantes commemorate and re-member *La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc* – the final words of the last *Huey Tlahtoani* (Great Speaker, the highest rank in the Mexica political structure) of México-Tenochtitlan. After opening a ceremonial space with danza protocol, the community pauses to read these words aloud – often in Nahuatl, Spanish and English. This oral historical text serves as a methodology for understanding how Anahuacan knowledge has survived historical structures of genocide and settler colonialism – in particular through ceremony and danza itself. I situate this cultural resistance in a larger tradition of what Gerald Vizenor (2008) has termed “Native survivance” – a rich lineage of prophetic, visionary and creative subversion. In this way, I extend my critique of existing theories of syncretism, hybridity, and transculturation – pointing to the ways in which these frameworks fail to account for the creative, active and subversive tactics taken up by Indigenous peoples throughout Anahuac I conclude with reflections on the importance of embodiment, spirituality and ceremoniality in studies of Indigenous resistance.

La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc and Other Stories of Survivance

Gathered at Sylvia Mendez Elementary School in Huichin/Berkeley, CA – Calpulli Huey Papalotl, a newly-formed danza community, is in ceremony. The huehuetl drums are beating their low harmonic thuds, the tlapiztlalli flutes sing their bird-like melodies. The danzantes are warm and glisten with sweat. They are formed in concentric circles around the central altar that smokes with copal resin and is adorned with flowers, feathers and medicinal plants. The danzantes move with grace amidst the lively and seemingly chaotic energies of the circle. Their chachayotes, seed-pod rattle anklets, shunk with each step of their collective offering. As a model of the order of the cosmos, they move as many bodies to form one universal body – expanding and contracting, spinning and jumping as an interconnected whole.

The day is Tuesday, February 11, 2014; it is approximately 7:30pm. After another group of danzantes make their offering to the central altar, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl – the community’s leader – calls for everyone to pause the danza portion of the ceremony and gather in a closer circle. She invites those outside the ceremonial circle to enter through the door that is located opposite the altar. As the community gathers, *tlaxilahquelequeh* – those who maintain the discipline and order of the ceremony – help guide everyone into one large circle, making sure there are no gaps through which the circle would be broken. This night we are about thirty danzantes, plus around fifteen community members supporting from outside.

Maestra Chicueyi Coatl then asks other danzantes to help distribute a small pamphlet she has prepared, making sure each participant receives their own copy. She calls out, “Ometeotl!” Various danzantes in the circle respond, “Ometeotl!” – a call and response acknowledgment that she will begin speaking in a ceremonial way. Speaking in a woven language of English, Spanish and Nahuatl, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl shares with the community the intention for our ceremony that night; why we have gathered, and what we will be reading together from the pamphlet she has distributed. She shares that we are in circle to remember La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc, the final words of the last Huey Tlahtoani of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Some community members exclaim “nican ca!” – meaning “they are present” – a common ceremonial way of acknowledging the presence of an ancestor when speaking their name. She explains the profound significance of these words we will read in community, in ceremony. She tries to paint the scene of what it must have been like to be in Mexico-Tenochtitlan during those days, watching your relatives die from mysterious new diseases while your whole culture is being targeted for destruction by invading soldiers and clergy people fixated on conquest. She introduces *Cuauhtemoc* himself, a young man of around 25 when he assumed leadership of the Triple Alliance of Anahuac. She tells the story of his naming and its significance. She shares that his name “describes that moment when an eagle that is hunting tucks its wings and begins descending to its prey.” She shares that this means he must have been “extra intelligent” and a truly exceptional young person to be elected to the highest

leadership position at such a young age. She also lamented at how difficult it must have been to assume leadership as your civilization was under attack.

She then asks for two volunteers to help with reading the Spanish and English versions of the text, she herself will speak the *Consigna* first in Nahuatl. In ceremony, in circle, she begins reading:

Tlatohuani Cuauhtemoctzin Itenahuatiltzin

*Totonaltzin ye omotlatihtzino, totonaltzin ye omixpoliuhztzino, auh
centlayohuayan otechmocahuili.*

*Mach tictomachitiah occehpa hualmohuicaz, occehpa hualmoquixtiz ihuan
yancuican techmotlahuililiquiuh.*

*Inoquic ompa Mictlan momaniltiyez ma iciuhca titocentlalihcan ma
titonechicohcan auh in toyolloihtic, ma tictlatihcan in mochi toyollo
quitlazohtla ihuan ticmatih in totlatqui: topan in hueyi chalchihueuh.
Ma tiquimpopolohcan in teocalli, in calmecac, in tlachco, in telpochcalli, in
cuicacalco; ma inceltin tohhui mocahua auh ma tochantzinco techmopiel.*

*Inoc hualmoquixtiz toyancuic tonaltzin, in tetahtzitzinhuan in
tenantzitzinhuan, ma aic quimolcahuilihcan ma aic quimolcahuilihcan
quinmolhuilizqueh intelpochtztzinhuan, ma quinmamachtilihcan
impilhuantzitzin, inoc monemitizqueh in ixquich icualnemiliz totlazoh
Anahuac in campa toteotzitzinhuan techmocuitlahuilihcateh,
inyolohcacopatzinco, ihuan zan no impaltzinco tomahuiztiliz ihuan
tonepechtequiliz in oquimocelilihqueh in tachtocoltzitzinhuan ihuan
totahtzitzinhuan, ahhuic in toyoloihtic, oquinmiximachiltilihqueh in toyelizpan.*

Axcan tiquintotequimaquilian in topilhuan:

*Macahmo quilcahuahcan, ma quinnotzahcan in pilhuan ca
ToTlacuilollitztli Ihuan Tototlamatiltztli, mapixquia panpa nemiolitztli.
Axcan Ihuan Tikin Toxanhuan, ToTeoCalhuantzintli, ToCalmecahuantzintli,
ToTlaxcohuantzintli, ToTelpoxCahuantzintli, ToCuicaCalhuantzintli.
Macahmo quilcahuahcan, ma quinnotzahcan quenin oyez imahcoquizaliz,
quenin occehpa meuhtzinoz totonaltzin; quenin quimihtiliz ichicahualiztzin
quen quimaxiliz itenahuatiltzin in totlazohtlalnanzin Anahuac.*

As she reads these words, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl begins to weep. She pulls her *paliacate*, her bandana which is tucked into her ceremonial *faja* (belt), to wipe her tears. A few tears she catches with her pinky finger, and places them carefully on the ground near the altar – an offering for the energies, for the ancestors who are present, perhaps for Cuauhtemoc himself. As she finishes this gesture, she nods her chin towards certain *danzantes*, the *atecocolizqueh*, those who carry the conch shell, a trumpet-like instrument. They wail their heartfelt *atecocolli* notes, as *danzantes* shake their *ayacaxtli* (rattles) and *chachayotes* (seed-pod rattle anklets), perhaps

here to acknowledge the power of these words and their being spoken in ceremony. She then asks for the words to be spoken by the others who have volunteered to read the translations in Spanish and English. They begin:

La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc

Nuestro venerable Sol se ha ocultado. Nuestro digno Sol ya escondió su rostro. Y en completa obscuridad nos ha dejado. Ciertamente, sabemos que otra vez vendrá, otra vez se dignará volver y nuevamente vendrá a alumbrarnos. Mientras tanto, se quedará en el Mictlan, en la Mansión del Silencio, la Región del Eterno Reposo. Pero mientras permanezca allá en el Mictlan, debemos reunirnos muy rápido. Abracémonos con fuerza, jurándonos esconder en el fondo de nuestro yolotl, nuestro corazón, todo lo que nuestro corazón aprecia, todo lo que considera un Tesoro como un gran Chalchihuitl (esmeralda hermosa). Destruyamos nuestros Teocaltin (Recintos de energía), nuestros Calmecac (Recintos de estudios elevados), nuestros Tlaxco (Campos de juego de pelota), nuestros Telpoxcaltin (Recintos para jóvenes), nuestros Cuicacalli (Recintos de canto), Que se queden vacíos nuestros caminos, y que nuestros hogares nos resguarden en tanto salga nuestro nuevo Sol. Que los buenos padres y las buenas madres nunca lo olviden, que nunca olviden decirles a sus jóvenes, que les enseñen a sus hijos, cuán buena ha sido nuestra madre Anahuac en donde nuestros honorables difuntos nos cuidan, Nuestra Madre Tierra, que hasta hoy nos amparó, nos protegió, nos otorgó un glorioso destino gracias al venerable comportamiento de nuestros Abuelos; de nuestras costumbres que recibieron nuestros venerados abuelitos y abuelitas, y que nuestros venerados padres con empeño, sembraron en nuestra esencia. Ahora nos toca a nosotros decirles a nuestros hijos: No olviden informar a sus hijos, que guarden nuestra escritura y nuestra sabiduría que hemos elegido para prosperar. Desde ahora nuestros propios hogares serán nuestros Teocaltin, nuestros Calmecac, nuestros Tlaxco, nuestros Telpoxcaltin, nuestros Cuicacalli. No olviden informar a sus hijos cómo se elevará, cómo otra vez se levantará nuestro digno Sol; y cómo mostrará dignamente su fuerza; cómo tendrá a bien completar su digna promesa en ésta, nuestra venerada y amada tierra de Anahuac.

Tlatohuani Cuauhtemoczin's Message

Our venerable Sun has hidden. Our respectable Sun has hidden its face. He has left us in total darkness. Indeed we know he will come back; he will return and illuminate us once again. In the meantime, he will stay in Mictlan, in the mansion of silence, the place of eternal rest. But while he

remains in Mictlan, we must gather rapidly. Let us embrace each other strongly, swearing to hide in the bottom of our hearts everything which our heart appreciates; everything which it considers a treasure, like a great Chalchihuitl (beautiful emerald). Let (them) destroy our Teocaltin (Precincts of Energy), our Calmecac (Precincts of higher education), our Tlaxco (Ball game fields), our Tepoxcaltin (Precincts for youth) and our Cuicacalli (Chanting Precincts). Let our roads be emptied and our homes keep us safe until our new Sun comes out again. May the good fathers and mothers never forget; may they never forget to tell their young ones, to teach their children how good our mother Anahuac has been to us. That mother where our ancestors protect us; our Mother Earth that until today, has sheltered us, protected us. That mother that has given us a glorious life and destiny thanks to the respectable behavior of our elders and of our customs, which were received by our grandfathers and grandmothers and that our respectable parents have sowed in our essence. Now it is our turn to tell our own children: Don't forget to tell your children to save our writings and our wisdom, which we have chosen to thrive and prosper. From now on, our homes will be our Teocaltin, our Calmecac, our Tlaxco, our Tepoxcaltin, our Cuicacaltin. Don't forget to tell your children how it will be risen; how once again our respectable Sun will rise and how it will show with dignity its strength; how it will fulfill its respectable promise in this, our adored and revered land of Anahuac (Calpulli Huey Papalotl 2014, English translation by Marinette Tovar).

As these words come to a close, the atecocolli sound their siren songs once again, finding harmony amidst different tones, joined by the huehuetl drum and other instruments that have gathered for this ceremony. Maestra Chicueyi Coatl retells the long journey these words have made in order to come to us on this day – how these words were agreed upon by the last *Huey Tlahtocan*, the highest committee of elders in 16th century Mexico-Tenochtitlan. These elders counseled with Cuauhtemoc himself to prepare the statement that would be shared on the morning of August 13, 1521. These words were carried by runners to the four directions and memorized, passed down through the oral tradition over the past 495 years. Though the origins of these words are a source of historical debate, my aim here is not so much to enter into this discussion regarding historical authenticity – which is a debate that relies significantly on colonial archives and Eurocentric historiographies. Instead, my aim is to trace how these words have travelled across space and time, and found their place as a key text in the Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl danza movement throughout Anahuac.

As Calpulli Huey Papalotl is doing here, re-reading these ancestral words in ceremony, in community; so too do countless danza communities across Anahuac. Los

Angeles' *Parque de México* (within Lincoln Park), includes Cuauhtemoc amongst a dozen commemorative statues.⁸¹ This public space serves as the central gathering place for a large, yearly *Consigna* ceremony. Each year during this time – from the middle to the end of February – *danza* circles throughout Anahuac speak these words aloud, dedicating a ceremony to this intention. Here during the week of February 10, 2014; we will also attend another Cuauhtemoc ceremony, this time with Grupo Xitlalli in San Francisco, CA on February 14th, under the leadership of la Jefa Macuil – a respected elder in both Conchero and Mexicayotl-Toltecayotl *danza* communities. The Gregorian month of February serves as the yearly time for this ceremony due to it being the supposed month of Cuauhtemoc's birth – as well as his eventual torture and murder – along with other significant moments in his life, including being elected to Huey Tlahtoani (Ortíz 2010).

I read the significance of this ceremony within *danza*, and the content of this message, as a *prophecy of decolonization* – as a way to understand how Anahuacan cultural memory has been transmitted across generations despite centuries of genocide and colonial violence. The ongoing recounting, and re-membering of these instructions guides *danzantes* and their respective communities back through what Gerald Vizenor has called “stories of survivance” (Vizenor 2008). It is a resistant, visionary way of encrypting Indigenous ways of life within the heart and within the home – with a futurity that provides eyes to see the present as a time of return, of recovery, of re-membering. This re-telling re-imagines linear narratives and discourses of syncretism, transculturality, hybridity and *mestizaje*; and instead traces a particularly decolonial impulse within the medium and the message being transmitted. What is being re-membered – decolonial cultural memory and stories of survivance – and how it is being re-membered – through ceremony and dance – is what I evidence in the following section.

La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc and Other Stories of Survivance

The word *consigna* in Spanish can be translated in a few different ways. It is most commonly translated to mean “instructions,” or “orders,” in the military sense of the term. In Spanish, what I have been calling thus far “La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc” in fact has a few different titles that circulate within *danza*. For example, some *jefxs* recite these words as the “*último mandato*,” (last mandate) or “*último mensaje*” (last message) of Cuauhtemoc. I use the title of “la ultima consigna,” because it is the primary translation I have come across in my own participation in *danza*. Nonetheless all of these translations into Spanish speak more so to the difficulty, or perhaps untranslatability, of the original title in Nahuatl. That is, as is often the case with translations from Indigenous languages and cosmovisiones to Euro-settler discourse, these are all approximations of only a few levels of what is contained, in this case, in

⁸¹ Inaugurated in February 1981 by *Comité Mexicano Cívico Patriótico*, *Frente Villista*, *Frente Zapatista de Los Angeles* and the *Los Angeles City Employees Chicano Association*.

the word “*Itenahuatiltzin*.” For the purposes of this close reading I utilize “consigna” to also highlight the ways in which Cuauhtemoc leaving was “last instructions” or “last orders,” as a simultaneously spiritual and military mandate.

As the Huey Tlahtoani, the Great Speaker, the highest rank in the Anahuacan political structure of the time, this notion of giving last orders carries a connotation of authority. Power is invested in a tlahtoani (speaker, leader) by way of a process of building collective trust and confidence in a leader. This *confianza* is built through years of training and preparation, in Cuauhtemoc’s case, in Calmecac (Anahuacan higher education, “university”-like). It is said that Cuauhtemoc earned the titles of both *YaoOcelotl* (Jaguar Warrior) and *YaoCuauhtli* (Eagle Warrior) as a young student – which would be seen as a tremendous pedagogical achievement in Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Stivalet 1991). This means he was understood as a mature, humble and committed scientist/warrior/poet – a person of integrity and in mastery of one’s ego; focused on the task of leading his people towards harmony. The notion of a tlahtoani, literally meaning “speaker,” or “they who carry the word,” also represents the power of the word within an Anahuacan cosmovision.⁸² It speaks to the notion that a tlahtoani serves as the communicator, the head and mouth who can speak on behalf of the whole. Many levels of *tlahtoanimēh* (speakers/leaders) are organized throughout Anahuac under the word of the Huey Tlahtoani – in this case and in this moment of invasion, the young Cuauhtemotzin himself. These words and messages have also been crafted in direct council with the Huey Tlahtocan, the circle of elders who help guide leaders such as Cuauhtemoc to make sound and harmonious collective decisions from a place of groundedness – that is, of embodied experience, *matiliztli* (wisdom, inherited knowledge) and *huehuetlahtolli* (the words of the ancestors).

Surviving through the oral tradition, passed down from mouth to ear, from mouth to heart, through cultural memory, in Nahuatl, these words are now expressed throughout Anahuac. As is typical within the oral tradition, a few variations have evolved as these words have travelled across time and space – in this case, across 500 years and thousands of miles. Studying these different versions in circulation, Maestro Tlacatzin Stivalet (1991) has systematically translated their meaning and identified the key themes that are shared across each version, providing a cohesive study of the most essential aspects of the messages encoded in these words. Maestro Stivalet (1991) emphasizes the need to situate these words in a Nahuatl language and Toltec “*cosmopercepción*” (11) in order to more genuinely understand their important messages.

Through this lens we can build a more complete interpretation of this oral text. Through multilayered and interconnected metaphors, Cuauhtemotzin tells the peoples of Anahuac that this current period of the Sun, of light, of knowledge, of energy, is coming to an end. He instructs his people to prepare for a period where this

⁸² See also “Dancing the Word” in this study.

sun, this knowledge, this light, this energy, will go underground, will go to Mictlan, to the underworld. In this context, he instructs Anahuacan peoples to intentionally and strategically hide – physically but also epistemically and culturally. He encourages them to understand the physical destruction of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (temples, schools, ball courts, etc.) as only a temporary, passing state. For the interim he instructs his people to bring the values, the knowledge, the memory of these places, into their homes, into their hearts, their bodies. The beauty and splendor of Anahuac, as a place, must transform, must shift in how it manifests materially, in order to remain intact energetically, spiritually, epistemically, cosmologically.

Within an Anahuacan cosmovisión, what Stivalet (1991) calls a Toltec cosmoperception (11), this instruction resonates with the Law of Duality (Macias 2013) of the universe. In this way, Cuauhtemotzin is situating the colonizing process in a larger cosmic order: in discourses and principles of harmony, cosmic balance, and the Law of Compensation (Macias 2013) that undergirds an Anahuacan cosmology. This is an Ometeotl worldview, of constant renovation and return, through a dance of life and death, creation and destruction. In other words, even as the genocide was just beginning, Cuauhtemoc understood that this was only a passing state of being – that the destruction before them would inevitably be balanced by a forthcoming period of creation, creativity and restoration. This is the natural order of things, even as unnatural disasters unfolded around him.

Encoded in Nahuatl, and in a secret oral tradition, this knowledge carries the seeds of a decolonial future. These words were designed to stay encoded, transcoded and eventually decoded when the time was right. They announce a military surrender but a cosmic, spiritual and underground resistance. They relate a temporary, strategic and partial acquiescence, with a transgenerational vision that “never surrenders the children” (Fieldnotes, Tio Samuel, Spring 2011). In fact, contemporary danzantes often point to the fact that danzantes, especially young children, can now dance in full regalia in ceremony, without fear of “being sent to the inquisition” – perhaps for the first time since 1521 – as an indicator of the fulfillment of this prophetic vision. For example, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl will point out that “each of these children are a ray of the sun that is returning” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2015); in direct reference to the metaphoric visions of Cuauhtemoc’s Consigna. Other examples of re-emergence that are understood in this way are the return of the lighting of the New Fire ceremony in the 1970s, and the physical re-emergence of *Coyolxauhqui* (1978), *Tlaltecuhтли* (2006), and other monolithic stone sculptures from underneath modern Mexico City. Even the sinking of the entire *Ciudad de Mexico* into Lake Texcoco has been read in this way, as the natural ecological and prophesied decline of “*el yugo extranjero*” (the foreign yoke), facilitating and making room for re-emergence at every level of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Cruz 2011).

These are Anahuacan, Mexica-Tenochca stories of survivance. Anishinaabe scholar and UC Berkeley Professor Emeritus Gerald Vizenor (2008) theorizes survivance as “an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion;

survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent” (1). He asserts that survivance “is a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory” (Ibid.). Survivance is a decolonial attitude, a *mitotiani* (danzante) way of being. With La Consigna as a core story of survivance, *mitotiliztli* (danza) itself is a method of survivance. It is an embodied, enacted, ceremonial way of Indigenous continuity and futurity. It is a way of “returning to our time,” (Huacuja 52) of re-membering cultural memory through watering the seeds of stories of survivance such as la Consigna. As la Consigna de Cuauhtemoc continues to be re-cited and re-membered throughout Anahuac, these ceremonies of survivance are harvesting and re-sowing this decolonial prophecy. It is a way of re-membering, that we have been here before, and we are still here:

Survivance is an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry. The practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence. Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason (and) tragic wisdom. Native stories of survivance are prompted by natural reason, by a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the natural world, by the turn of seasons, by sudden storms, by migration of cranes, by the ventures of tender lady's slippers, by chance of moths overnight, by unruly mosquitoes, and by the favor of spirits in the water, rimy sumac, wild rice, thunder in the ice, bear, beaver, and faces in the stone (Vizenor 11).

Through Anahuacan cosmological metaphors of suns, energies and multi-dimensional worlds and realities, Cuauhtemocztin places the conquest in a longer cosmic view. As was/is known by Anahuacan scientists, mathematicians, and astronomers – understanding the alive nature of the universe in its totality, as consciousness – it was clear that their world was “ending” as such. But there is no end without a new beginning. There is no journey to Mictlan, to the place of abundant transformation, without an eventual renewal of life from death; it is merely the transmutation of energies in agonistic inamic unity (Maffie 2014), the duality of Ometeotl, of *Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl* dancing in centrifugal relation to *Mictlantecuhtli*. Just as the sun dies and is born again, so too will Anahuac. *In ilhuicatl* (the sky) is not only a metaphor, but another level of truth – as above, so below. Try as they might, colonizers remain against the nature of life itself – a futile and myopic genocidal fantasy. Stories of survivance such as La Consigna are reminders of this *neltiliztli*, this truth, that which stands tall, that which remains standing despite constant movement and change (Chicueyi Coatl 2014). Knowing this at the beginning, that there will be an end, is the heart of this survivance story. Each time it is spoken, it rings true across time and space not merely as a matter of faith, but as a resonance with “la esencia de

las cosas,” (Macias 2013) with the intuitive desires and knowings of the colonized body. *Nuestra facultad* (Anzaldúa 2002) our gut, knows; that in the struggle for decolonization, the universe is on our side.

On the Necessity of Embodied Knowledge

Tracing the ways in which cultural memory, cosmovisión and stories of survivance have been encoded and transmitted through danza, the power of embodied knowledge is evident. Mapping these ways of knowing in the context of a modern/colonial matrix of power, it becomes increasingly clear that embodied knowledge has been, and remains, an important means of maintaining cultural, personal and spiritual (that is, relational) integrity. In other words, re-remembering to relate may help us stay human, remain whole. Reading danza as a resistant way of knowing amidst historical structures of settler colonialism, imperialism and genocide, I wonder how critical Ethnic Studies might re-think cultural resistance through these types of embodied analytics. Remaining cognizant of how dominant systems of power and knowledge have relied/rely on the written word and the construction of colonial archives as technologies of attempted erasure and surrogation, how can reading for embodied, ceremonial and community ways of knowing help shift how we map “oppressing ←→ resisting” (Lugones 34) at large? As performance scholar Diana Taylor (2003) argues, “not only did the colonizers burn the ancient codices, they limited the access to writing to a very small group of conquered males who they felt would promote their evangelical efforts...the importance granted writing came at the expense of embodied practices as a way of knowing and making claims” (18). In this way, the written word erases, it seeks to eliminate as it creates. In this study, I have evidenced the ways in which this process has been radically unsuccessful, and in fact subverted in creative and visionary ways by Anahuacan peoples. Danza is but one example of the hundreds of ways in which Indigenous knowledge systems have survived an archival holocaust.

With this context of genocide/epistemicide (Grosfoguel 2013) in mind, we must remain critical, if not downright suspicious of literature that relies on the archive alone to describe danza and similar human movement systems. As dance historian Paul Scolieri (2013) has argued, the dancing Indigenous body permeates the colonial archive as purported evidence of Indigenous peoples’ child-likeness and lack of civilization, reason and knowledge, concluding “dancing was in many ways central to Europeans’ experience of the New World, which they often memorialized as a dance between the self and the other” (152).⁸³ In this way, dance itself can also be understood as an important media through which colonial claims to Indigenous territory have been made. Nonetheless, the primary epistemic conflict I wish to point

⁸³ Though he also accounts for the ways in which dance was a more ambivalent place of encounter for Spanish colonizers, at time even a form of mediation and communication across difference.

to here is, to return to Chapter One, the *colonial difference* between dance vis-à-vis danza per se.

For danza in particular, Capitán Andrés Segura has argued that most of the existing written sources are in fact incorrect (Macias 2013). The factuality of the Eurocentric perspective that dominates the colonial archive is something that is actively problematized, and also read against the grain, in danza circles. Maestros Ocelocoatl, Andrés Segura, and others go as far as to argue that the stories of human sacrifice (around which danza is alleged to be omnipresent) were in fact invented, or at least inflated, for colonial ends (Colín 2014; Macias 2013). Other jefxs have argued this is an overly romantic notion and that archaeological evidence of human sacrifice is irrefutable (Fieldnotes, Fall 2017). However, these debates do agree on the fact that the mass ritual sacrifice aspects of Anahuacan culture have been over-represented and continue to serve as the dominant lens through which Anahuacan history is misunderstood in mainstream discourse.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that these colonial, archival misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing were/are being produced in a largely genocidal structure of power and knowledge that decolonial theorist Ramón Grosfoguel (2013) has termed “genocide/epistemicide.” Making linkages between the conquest of “Al-Andalus” (Southern Spain) and the Americas, Grosfoguel (2013) writes:

In addition to the genocide of people, the conquest of Al-Andalus was accompanied by epistemicide. For example, the burning of libraries was a fundamental method used in the conquest of Al-Andalus. The library of Cordoba, that had around 500,000 books at a time when the largest library of Christian Europe did not have more than 1000 books, was burned in the 13th century. Many other libraries had the same destiny during the conquest of Al-Andalus until the final burning of more than 250,000 books of the Granada library by Cardenal Cisneros in the early 16th century. These methods were extrapolated to the Americas. Thus, the same happened with the indigenous ‘codices’ which was the written practice used by Amerindians to archive knowledge. Thousands of ‘codices’ were also burned destroying indigenous knowledges in the Americas. Genocide and epistemicide went together in the process of conquest in both the Americas and Al-Andalus (80).

Similarly, cultural historian Ivan Van Sertima (2012) posits that the study of Pre-Cuauhtemic, trans-Atlantic/trans-Pacific cultural exchanges between the peoples of Abya Yala, Africa and the Pacific Islands is deeply problematic when conducted through the conventional archival methods of academic historiography. He argues:

The reason why history has to be reconstructed in the Americas and in Africa in the way it is done now, is because we cannot use the same historical methods that are used in Europe. Europe has had the enormous advantage of the conquest, in that its libraries have remained fairly intact for many centuries. Our libraries have been shattered, and it's not a question of the lack of libraries. In the Americas alone there were thousands of books, only three major American books survived. And now they're not even in America. They are in Germany, they are in Spain...These are the few things that survived...It's not just the absence of documents, but the destruction of documents. Fortunately, history does not leave its mark only on written documents. History leaves its mark on everything. If you do not find the books, there are scripts...there are skeletons, there are sculptures, there are plants...there is the Native American oral tradition...there are many things that have left their mark, and that is the reason why we reconstruct history by going through all of those strands and all of those avenues. It is not that it is our historical method, it is the only valid, genuine historical method to reconstruct the fragmented history of Africa and the Americas (5:47-8:10).

Returning from history to cultural memory, I am arguing something even more simple. That if “history leaves its mark on everything,” memory leaves its mark in ways that are even more apparent. That the burning of amoxcaltin (libraries) and subsequent methods of attempted epistemicide – including cultural genocide in the form of colonial schooling systems – have made the study of embodied cultural memory “the only valid, genuine historical method to reconstruct the fragmented” history of Abya Yala. From a critical Ethnic Studies perspective, this intervention is not for the sake of re-legitimizing Westernized academic fields of history and archaeology, but to reaffirm the sovereign ways of knowing and being through which non-Western peoples maintain their integrity and peoplehood – re-affirming Xicanx Indigeneity and belonging through “embodied recuperations” (Huerta 2009). These ways of knowing and being refuse Latinx, Latin American, Hispanic and other Eurocentric, neocolonizing mestizx subjectivities where “our existence is resistance” (Fieldnotes, Teokalli Fall 2016). Furthermore, towards decolonial ends – that is, if it is decolonization or decoloniality that we seek (and I do) – through these considerations it becomes abundantly clear that we cannot rely on colonial regimes of disembodied epistemologies and ontologies to do the work of getting free from colonialism and coloniality. If Ethnic Studies is truly about liberation, we must remember to relate, Otherwise.

Chapter 3
Danza as Cosmovisión

The Flower of the Universe

During a session of Calmecac Huey Papalotl (the House of Knowledge of the Venerable Butterfly) Maestra Patricia Juárez Chicueyi Coatl, is teaching her danzantes about “la cosmovisión Anahuaca” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2017). To do this she tells the story of the flower of the universe, the unfolding creative structure of the cosmos. The story begins in nothingness, which is also everythingness, the state of *Itzcuahtli* (black eagle, or obsidian eagle). From this no-time, no-space reality comes the reflection of darkness, *Tezcatlipoca Yayauhqui*, the Smoking Black Mirror of Obsidian, refracting light from pure blackness, reflecting the everything that sits in harmonic oppositional relation to nothing. This reflecting pair becomes an agonistic inamic unity (Maffie 2014): OmeTecuhctli, OmeCihuatl, or *Tonacatecuhtli*, *Tonacacihuatl* – masculine, feminine Creator energies. This unfolding continues – from where it began at zero, to one, two and now four – with the birth of the Four Directions of the Cosmos, the *Four Tezcatlipocah*, the four reflections that are born from one reflecting obsidian mirror: *Yayauhqui Tezcatlipoca*, *Xipe Totecuhtzin (Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca)*, *Huitzilopochtli (Texauhqui Tezcatlipoca)*, and *Quetzalcoatl (Iztli Tezcatlipoca)*. These four creative warrior energies begin their cosmic work, piecing together the universe, reproducing themselves in fractal representations of infinitely unfolding and self-replicating patterns – *Ipalnemohuani Moyocoyani*, the Giver of Life, they who reproduce themselves, *In Tloquenahuaque*, they who are near, they who are far.

To locate ourselves in this universe story, this larger cosmic order, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl draws a flower emerging from the seed of creation. Here she is situating us in the space of in talticpac, the material, terrestrial plane of reality, ruled by the laws of physics as we experience and perceive them in our physical bodies. Upon this plane, the surface of the earth, unfolds another quadra-directional expression of a four-petalled flower, this time situated in time and space: *Tlahuiztlampa* (direction of the early light), *Cihuatlampa* (direction of the feminine receptive energy), *Mictlampa* (direction of death and transformation), and *Huitzlampa* (direction of the thorns). Each of these cardinal points is a re-articulation of the four Tezcatlipocah energies that created the original structure of the universe. Everything that can be perceived in talticpac (of earthly material reality) is always already simultaneously true in ilhuicatl (the sky, the infinity of space). Finite and more-readily perceivable dimensions of reality are reflections of the omnipresent, infinite and otherwise imperceivable (by the mundane senses) energies that govern the movements of the cosmos. The four Tezcatlipocah on earth then are organized through the structure of Nauhcampa, the four places, the four cardinal directions. This nauhcampa formation is the four-petalled flower upon which four Tezcatlipocah warriors dance.



Figure 4:
Xochitezca Teotihuacana
Flower-mirror from Teotihuacan
(Source: Simon Burchell, *Wikimedia Commons*, 2012)

This quadrangular cosmological space is dynamic, alive, moving, conscious – shifting with the seasons, solstices, equinoxes, as we experience them from earth. Because the universe moves, so do these points, therefore Nauhcampa, the four directions, are also a living, moving and breathing entity, a great danza in the sky also known as *Ollin* (Maffie 229). Within this flower of the universe there are three primary levels of cosmic existence: the earthly plane (in *tlalticpac*), the above (*ilhuicatl*) and the below (*mictlan*) – a flower growing from a stem growing from a mother plant that has roots. Reaching to the sky, the sun, the air, the flower connects to *mactlactlihuanyei ilhuicaltin* – thirteen houses in the sky, thirteen vertical levels that journey towards Omeyocan, the place of Ometeotl, a journey back to infinity, back to the origin of spacetime. Below, the roots that feed this flower dig and reach towards *chicnaumictlan*, *los inframundos*, the nine underworlds.

These are the building blocks of la cosmovisión Anahuaca, that which provides the basic structure through which danza takes place. Each aspect of danza is a way of embodying this knowledge, this cosmovisión. From the physical layout and structure of the ceremonial space, to the individual pasos (steps) and collective movements of dancing bodies. For danzantes, the ceremonial task is to serve as a conduit, an instrument by which this flower can bloom. We dance in *tlalticpac*, on the surface of the earth, in our material bodies, but in a cosmological sense, we are dancing upon and within the flower of the universe – seeking harmony, grace and equilibrium in the chaos of creation. We interact and work with these other dimensional realities precisely through danza. We are dancing astrophysics, cosmogony, botany, and, ultimately, *danzando la cosmovisión Anahuaca*, dancing an Anahuacan worldview.

Translating La Cosmovisión Anahuaca: An Other Cosmology/Worldview

What is *cosmovisión*? How does it relate to questions of art, science and philosophy? To questions of knowledge and power? How do we translate this concept? Both linguistically and conceptually? I posit that we must translate *cosmovisión* as both “cosmology” and “worldview” – invoking fields of astrophysics, theology, philosophy and cognitive linguistics in particular. Through this transdisciplinary analysis I seek to trace the political and epistemic contours of *cosmovisión* as a site of the colonial difference (Mignolo 2005), and therefore as a locus of decolonial struggle. I begin by reading *cosmovisión* through a history of Western science and critical discourses of cosmology, before turning to decolonial considerations of *cosmovisión* as worldview. With this more robust analytic of *cosmovisión* I return to *danza* as a ceremonial, communal and embodied way of knowing an Anahuacan *cosmovisión*.

Cosmovisión as Cosmology

In the history of Western science, cosmology is a subfield of physics and astronomy that pursues questions of the origin, structure and evolution of the universe. It is the primary language through which Western scientists tell the “universe story” (Swimme and Berry 1994). Though more commonly associated with the revolutionary work of German theoretical physicist Dr. Albert Einstein in the early 20th century, cosmology has been a part of the tradition of Western science since at least “the ancients” – primarily the Greeks and the Romans – who are viewed as the progenitors of Western thought (Alexander 2016: 44). Cosmology is where Western physics, based in mathematics as its intuitive language, combines existing theories of astrophysics with larger super structural questions of the creation and evolution of the largest patterns and laws of the universe. Today the prevailing cosmology of Euro-modernity is the so-called Big Bang Theory – the story of a random, explosive moment of creation. Based on methodologies found at the intersection of observational astronomy and particle physics, cosmology has been the subfield where some of the most significant recent developments in Western science have taken place: for example, the discovery of the Higgs boson, theories of quantum gravity, and the presence of dark matter and dark energy permeating and holding the universe together.

Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Sir Isaac Newton are some of the foundational thinkers associated with this tradition. The work of Max Planck and Albert Einstein at the turn of the 20th century however – and the so-called quantum turn it inaugurated – opened the door to “the study of sub-atomic particles and the reality structures that govern their attributes” (Holmes 59) at another level. These cosmologists look for “order within the apparent randomness – and not just for the hundreds of millions of stars within our own galaxy, but in the distribution of galaxies

in our *entire* universe” (Alexander 2016: 47, emphasis in original). The integration of quantum mechanics into cosmological questions is what helped establish cosmology as a subfield in its own right.

These studies regarding the largest structures and dynamics of the universe and its many galaxies – and seeking to understand what it is, in fact, that influences, animates and designs this motion – is something I wish to borrow from Western formulations of cosmology. However, this theorizing must also integrate a clear definition of what is meant by the “cosmos” in cosmology, or *cosmovisión*. Cosmos is a term – from the Greek *kosmos* – that is used to refer to “an orderly harmonious systematic universe” (“Cosmos”). A tendency with this definition is to look skyward, to the stars, towards outer space, as the place of the cosmos. Instead, following quantum physics, I’d like to ground this definition of cosmos as a concept that is also inclusive of the tiniest scales of reality – seeds, cells, microbes, viruses, and subatomic particles. These relatives are also part of this notion of cosmos, and therefore, of my definition of the *universe*. Thus, shifting *cosmovisiones* entails a radical transformation of this totality. It is my contention that these cosmological questions are integral to a *danza*-based epistemology and its relationship to *cosmovisión* at large.

Beyond cosmology circulating as a way to describe an important subfield of contemporary astrophysics, it has also been a long-standing key concept within Western traditions of theology and religious studies (Holmes 2002). The dominant theological cosmology in the West is the Book of Genesis in terms of the Christian story of Creation, while other Abrahamic stories of “God created the universe” serve to inform what a religious cosmology looks like today. Numerous so-called Eastern traditions are worth noting in this way as well, with Buddhism based on a cosmology of infinity – of no beginning and no end in the universe – and Hinduism containing numerous Vedic texts that tell stories of creator/destroyer gods and goddesses as a pantheon of inter-related narratives. A key distinction here in the Westernized, Eurocentric mind is that these stories constitute *mythologies*, while science on the other hand is supposed to provide an objective, rational alternative to these symbolic, metaphorical representations of the cosmos. Within a Westernized worldview, this has been a source of contention between religious and scientific claims to the story of how the universe came to be, and what our place in its larger order might look like. This has contributed to binary ways of thinking of religion and science as inherently opposed. As theologian Barbara Holmes (2002) argues:

In the nineteenth century, impermeable divisions soon separated religion and science. The artifacts of those divisions remain with us today. Religion would reign over the spiritual, poetic, and metaphoric truths, while the sciences would focus on verifiable facts. Today, religion still claims a stake in the truth that requires faith, while science relies on ‘objective’ claims and the ability to test its precepts in repeatable

experiments. In the extreme, both offer diminished and reduced life descriptions that present only a shadow of reality. Despite effort to bring the disciplines back into conversation, each tells a different story about life, death, and human origins (56).

A decolonization of knowledge and power process requires that we dismantle these false binaries – for example, the opposition of scientific vis-à-vis cultural cosmology – binaries that have been produced historically by the Western rational mind in the context of modernity/coloniality. Instead, as our ancestors have done since we started asking these questions as human beings, let us think in *epistemic harmony*, seeking the ways in which we can engage holistically and in conversation.

In this way, Gregory Cajete (2000) offers a generous definition of cosmology for us to consider. He writes:

Cosmology is the contextual foundation for philosophy, a grand guiding story, by nature speculative, in that it tries to explain the universe, its origin, characteristics, and essential nature. A cosmology gives rise to philosophy, values, and action, which in turn form the foundation of a society's guiding institutions (58).

Cajete (2000) points to the radicality, that is, the primordial nature of cosmology, when he advances that “cosmologies are the deep-rooted, symbolically expressed understandings of ‘humanness.’ They predate all other human structured expressions, including religion and social and political orders” (52).

Pointing to the different forms of violence that have been historically entangled within dominant Euro-modern cosmologies, Cajete (2000) and Holmes (2002) ask us to reconsider cosmology as an important site of difference between the West and the rest – a confrontation that I would further problematize as the colonial difference (Mignolo 2005), bringing cosmology into the fold as an important, and radical, site of decolonial struggle. Cajete (2000) argues,

The cosmology that has shaped the evolution of the West with its focus on dominion over nature, the hierarchy of life, and a transcendent male God, has also shaped...a cosmological clash between foundations of Native culture and those of modern society...The ambiguity, conflict, and tension that we are now experiencing at all levels of modern life are a reflection of our inability to come to terms with an essentially dysfunctional cosmology, a cosmology that can no longer sustain us at any level (53).

Barbara Holmes (2002) offers another critical perspective for us to consider in this way. In conversation with fellow theologian of liberation Henry Young, Holmes

(2002) problematizes both Christian and Newtonian cosmologies' reliance on hierarchy and individualism in order to function. Holmes (2002) critiques these mechanistic and Eurocentric cosmologies for their radical complicity in centuries of unspeakable violence in the forms of slavery, genocide and the ongoing oppressions of modern/colonial life (58-60).

In conversation with Catholic priest and theologian Thomas Berry, Gregory Cajete (2000) considers a way to move forward from this cosmological coloniality and conflict. This conversation stems in part from Berry's (Dellinger 2018) perspectives that we are living with a "crisis of cosmology" – that we "need a different story" – that "the difficulty that we're into has come, to a large extent, from the limitations and inadequacies of our story. And what we need...is a new story" (quoted in Dellinger 2018)." In this way, Cajete (2000) posits that:

we must develop a capacity to re-think the predominant guiding story of Western civilization in a new and life-nourishing way...The images we create, the languages we speak, the economics we manifest, the learning systems we espouse, and the spiritual, political and social order we profess must all reflect and honor interdependence and sustainability (55).

He returns to the cosmological possibilities that have been opened up by quantum physics, as "theoretical physicists and others have begun to realize that the universe has a non-material dimension, a deep spiritual dimension, and an elegant guiding intelligence" (Ibid.).

It is precisely in this zone of cosmological conflict – in this *cosmological break* – that I wish to situate the work of shifting cosmovisiones as a decolonial concern. This cosmological work is not a purely philosophical exercise. Instead, it implies that we reconsider the deepest foundations of Western, modern/colonial culture – it's embodied, everyday acts – and look to Other cosmologies – ways of knowing, being and relating – from below. In this way, we must re-member decolonial cosmologies that have been silenced, repressed or otherwise marginalized in, and through, modernity/coloniality. The decolonization of knowledge and power is made possible only when we expand and de-center Euro-modern cosmologies – when we consider an Other "view of totality" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2014). Therefore, in this study of danza as a way of knowing – as a way of embodying an Anahuacan cosmovisión and remembering to relate – I explore the possibilities of shifting and decolonizing cosmologies in these ways; towards harmony, reciprocity, and interdependence.

Cosmovisión as Worldview

While cosmovisión can be translated as cosmology, through fields of astronomy, physics, theology and religion, another common translation of

cosmovisión – as “worldview” – asks us to consider these questions in light of cognition, language and “systems of symbolic representation” (Wynter 1995). Cognitive linguist George Lakoff is one of the most well-known scholars of language and its role in structuring worldview. His work with philosopher Mark Johnson (2008), *Metaphors We Live By*, deconstructs the nature of the metaphoric mind, demonstrating the ways in which language and worldview are inextricably linked, functioning as mutually reinforcing modes of cognition. The basic notion here is that every word we use in a language is always already in relation to other words that produce a vast system of relationships and metaphors that are given meaning through socio-linguistic “structures” (Lakoff and Johnson 2008). Put another way, words as/and symbols are given meaning only through their social, cultural and cosmological context. How symbols are read and interpreted, where they land cognitively, neurobiologically, is in the space of the worldview. How we read the word, and the world (Freire 1985), is through the worldview. How we make meaning of things and our experience of them is filtered through a worldview. How we express ourselves and communicate with each other – the phenomenon of language – therefore, is about how we relate through worldviews. Post-structuralist philosophers have theorized a related methodology of *semiotics*, the study of how signs and symbols are read. How those signs and symbols are interpreted and situated in a larger structure of meaning, shapes the contours of the worldview. This is one way to understand poet and activist Drew Dellinger’s (2018) assertion, “Change the Worldview, Change the World.”

The critical study of worldviews as “systems of symbolic representation” is of great concern to radical philosopher Sylvia Wynter. In her work “1492: A New World View,” Wynter (1995) critically unpacks the ways in which systems of symbolic representation are at the heart of de/colonial crises. Through Fanon, she theorizes the ways in which a white, Euro-modern, settler colonial worldview structures a world through spaces and subjectivities of Being and non-Being. Thinking from the case of the black colonized subject, Wynter (1995), with Fanon, problematizes a world/view that dis-members peoples and lands that are otherwise cohesive and understood as one interconnected whole. For Wynter, the colonial worldview – as a racializing, gendering, sexualizing, Othering cosmology – produces social/cultural fragmentation where there otherwise is none. Tracing the cognitive dissonances that are created through racialization’s disentanglement of biological and cultural belonging, Wynter unearths how the modern/colonial world has produced an understanding of the human that is distinct from the biophysical reality of homo sapien sapien constituting one coherent human family. She terms this, creating the “poetics of the propter nos” (28) a creative way of dividing who counts and who doesn’t. In this way, the Western mind is radically and violently contradictory. Reading Fanon’s (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks* as a treatise on decolonization as a biocultural struggle, Wynter (1995) argues:

the central mechanism at work here, therefore, was and is that of representation. Its role in the processes of socialization, and therefore, in the regulation both at the individual and at the collective levels of the ensemble of behaviors – affective, actional, and perceptual-cognitive – is central. For it is by means of the strategies of representation alone that each human order and its culture-specific mode of empirical reality can be brought into being as such a “form of life” and...languageing existence (45).

Worldview, as a language, culturally-situated way of reading representative symbols, is precisely what must be problematized, and in her eyes transcended and pluralized, for the possibilities of a new world view to emerge. Wynter reminds us that different subjects are not seen as such within systems of symbolic representation that racialize, gender or otherwise represent difference as a mark of Being non- or less-than-human. In other words, the operative cognitive structure that shapes the contours of what it means to be a human being is the worldview. Therefore, we must not only revise the criterion through which humanness is negotiated, we must critique the deepest roots of these systems – roots that lie within the modern/colonial worldview. My contention, extending Wynter, is that shifting epistemically out of Westernized worldviews and thus opening up the cosmological landscape as pluri- or multi-versal, is a radical, decolonial act.

Let us re-consider and re-integrate these understandings of worldview – as a language-based way of reading and interpreting symbols and signs and situating them in a larger socio-cultural structure – into our working definition of *cosmovisión*. Not only is *cosmovisión* concerned with questions of the origins of the structures of the universe and our place in it – in problems of ethics and the story of why we are all here – but it also makes visible the invisibilized parts of reality that have otherwise fallen out of view. This work of the worldview exposes the veil (to use a DuBoisian term) that must be lifted in order to be made conscious that it is there. It compels us to re-member, to find wholeness in the fragmented and violent reality of a modern/colonial cosmovisual dystopia. Indigenous movements to retain and reclaim Native languages and cosmovisiones must be placed in this context. This is the decolonial to protect entire knowledge systems, structures of symbols and ways of seeing and being in the world that are directly related to a particular place and its relation to time and space. This is partly why there have been studies to demonstrate the links between the loss of Indigenous languages worldwide and the loss of biodiversity in those same regions. Cultural appropriation must also be understood in this way, as the violent and partial extraction of certain aspects of a culture from its worldview by outsiders, producing *cosmological violence*. With these more robust and developed definitions of an Anahuacan *cosmovisión*, I am able to move forward to trace how this key concept is transmitted and maintained through *danza praxes*.

Embodied Knowledge in the Structure and Protocol of Danza

“We follow the earth/the earth follows the stars/the stars know their way”
(Neurosis 2012).

The circle of the dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits. At certain times on certain days, men and women come together at a given place, and there, under the solemn eye of the tribe, fling themselves into a seemingly unorganized pantomime, which is in reality extremely systematic, in which by various means—shakes of the head, bending of the spinal column, throwing of the whole body backward—may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. There are no limits—inside the circle. The hillock up which you have toiled as if to be nearer to the moon; the river bank down which you slip as if to show the connection between the dance and ablutions, cleansing and purification—these are sacred places (Fanon 1963: 57).

Aspects of an Anahuacan cosmovisión emerge in ceremony, providing evidence for a *danza-based epistemology* – an embodied, creative and communal approach to knowledge production and transmission. As an *embodied cosmovisión* – danza also enacts an Other cosmology, an Other worldview...re-membering to relate. Here I will provide a very general overview of some of the ceremonial protocol that is most common in contemporary danza circles. These sections are not meant to be a guidebook nor to serve as instructions for how to run ceremonies. Nobody should be trying to hold ceremonial spaces such as danza without direct mentorship from elders and a community that is committed to protecting and continuing these traditions *in a good way*.

How to actually do this ceremonial work will not come from books, nor from young and inexperienced danzantes such as myself. Therefore, here I provide some general descriptions of danza protocol insofar as they provide a way of understanding danza as a way of knowing. That is, I will provide a generalized “run-through” of how many ceremonies take place throughout contemporary Anahuac, based on my experiences as a young mitotiani – having attended approximately 100 ceremonies across California, Texas, and Mexico in particular. I will thus focus on the aspects of danza protocol that illustrate most clearly how danza contains an epistemology and cosmovisión that is embodied and embedded in communal and ceremonial practices. In other words, this knowledge lives in *doing* danza, making danza happen. Danzantes are not given a step-by-step training session in preparation for ceremonies. Instead, we are told to simply “go to ceremonies,” and learn by observing and participating. Show up ready to work, be of service to the prayer. Give thanks for the honor of being able to attend a ceremony, especially if we are asked to take on any ceremonial roles,

within or outside the circle itself. If we are not ready to enter the danza circle, come as a volunteer and ask what we can do to help in other ways. There is no alternative for *being* in ceremony.

Traditionally, many danza ceremonies begin with some sort of procession, or *caminata*. Again, this practice varies across communities and lineages. The procession before and/or after the danza is not understood as a separate moment from the ofrenda, it is part of the ceremony itself. Though there are clear moments and protocols for when the ceremony begins and ends, when this happens is on “spirit time” – which is to say, ceremonial time is not clock time. In fact, preparation and integration are not understood as a clear “before” and “after” of danza, they are always “part of the ceremony” (Fieldnotes, Tio Samuel, Fall 2010). This is another way to observe how ceremonialized ways of knowing understand *life as ceremony*, and ceremony as life. It is all, as it were, “part of the ceremony.” Therefore, preparation can also be understood as part of the embodied theoretico-praxis of danza. This is especially true given the fact that danzantes must be prepared to dance for 4-6 hours at a time in intense, focused and living ceremonies. Some danzantes emphasize the importance of a healthy diet, sleep/rest, breathing and regular exercise in this way. Other danzantes practice abstinence from intoxicants as a way to purify, coming to a sober place of focused intention and meditation for danza. Also by way of preparation Maestra Chicueyi Coatl, for example, requires that her danzantes do the work of sewing their own *trajes* (regalia) and creating and gathering offerings for the jefes who will receive them in their ceremony. Preparing gifts for visitors who arrive is also a crucial part of preparing for ceremony if one is hosting. Maestra Chicueyi Coatl also prepares her danzantes by practicing danzas to near perfection before earning the privilege of entering into certain ceremonial circles. This preparation is mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional. Danzantes must prepare to serve as vehicles for energy, as conduits in a field of cosmic consciousness that will open and close through the catalyst of ceremony. To accomplish this requires discipline, clarity and focus. The health of the ceremony and all who participate is an interconnected and collective responsibility. The levels of consciousness reached in danza are not the result of individual effort and talent, but of collective harmony, focus and interbeing.

How danzantes create and hold ceremonial space and time is through the Anahuacan cosmovisión. This is how ceremonial protocol becomes a technology – an applied cosmology. For example, the technology of the circle provides an important geometry for danza. If a danza “begins” in procession, it will then continue as a ceremonial pilgrimage that eventually arrives at a site – the place where the danza will take place. In general terms, contemporary danza ceremonies take place in open fields, parking lots, school gymnasiums, plazas, parks, inside and around churches, and at “archaeological” or sacred sites such as Teotihuacan, Chalma, or Ixcateopan. When danzantes open ceremonial space, there are important protocols that must be followed and respected. Tlaxilacalequeh (danzantes in charge of discipline and protecting the circle) and other danzantes and supporters will have to help clear the

space for the ceremonial circle to begin taking shape. This means respectfully asking anybody in the space to make way for the coming ceremonial offering. This also serves an energetic purpose, of clearing space with the intention of demarcating the temporary boundaries in which a shared focused intention – or prayer – can (quite literally) take place.

As the establishment of energetic boundaries is being negotiated, *tlahuipuchtin* (incense carriers) will work to smudge and purify the margins of the ceremonial space, consecrating the circle as sacred space, while other *tlahuipuchtin* will work to establish the *xictli* (bellybutton) at the center of the ceremony. A *xictli*, or *momoztli* (altar), is fundamental to *danza*. As the umbilical cord for the community to connect with the energies of the place and time, it is as fundamental as the umbilical cord of a child during the gestation of a baby in the womb. This metaphor of the womb can also be extended to understand the circle with its umbilical center. That is, by simply creating a circular structure with a focused center, we have already begun embodying the story of the universe as a flower, whose seed is planted in the earth through ceremony. Dr. Jennie Luna's recent work on *danza* and birth ceremonies makes this connection through the example of the placenta – which, when viewed through these eyes, can be seen as a poetic embodiment of the tree in life in *tlalticpac* (Luna 2020). That is, being connected to the placenta and umbilical cord of our mothers at birth is our first ceremony in this life, and therefore each ceremony of our lives can become another way to re-member this original moment of birth.

The *danza* ceremony, as it were, then becomes the gestational period for the growth and development of a particular ceremonial intention – and thus, is a rebirthing process. Because of the sensitivity of this connection, no one who is not a *tlahuipuchtli* (incense carrier) may touch the *xictli*. Only with the purifying smoke constantly cleansing and protecting this relationship can this interaction take place across dimensions. All the sacred *armas* (tools of *danza*) are placed in relation to this umbilical center connection. All the *danzas* that will be offered during ceremony will take place in front of this altar – oriented towards this umbilical community center. When this altar is lifted, the ceremony is over. Entering into the womb space of our Mother Earth, demarcating a time and place on which to dance with respect and humility on her belly, we ask permission to offer her a much-deserved womb massage.

Directly next to this umbilical center are the *huehuetzotzonqueh* (grandfather drummers) who establish a line of *tambores* (drums) and other instruments for holding the heartbeat of the *danza*. Elements of the individual body are given a place in the collective body-space of ceremony. The belly and the heart of the individual body, the belly and the heart of the circle, the belly and heart of our mothers, the belly and the heart of the cosmos – all are related. *Huehuetl* drums are themselves made from old growth trees, ideally harvested also in ceremony, with permission and respect, with offerings of copal, tobacco, songs, *danzas*, before cutting and shaping the drum in the designs of different energies in the Anahuacan cosmovisión. These trees

of life become instruments in the tree of life connection that is created for each ceremony, carrying the heartbeat of our mother while we dance in/on her womb.

Trees of life and flowers of the universe unfold and unfurl from this heart/belly center. Drums as trees are *ejes*, are conduits, lightning rods for the energies to move through and enter the danza circle. Flowers adorn and abound from the xictli center – their color and fragrance a reminder of the beauty and sweetness of Creation; their intricate and elegant designs an example of what love looks and smells like. These elements are also expressions of the rays of the sun that radiate from a warm, colorful center – signaling another level at which danza takes place, which is *in space*, on “planet earth,” moving in a larger cosmic ceremony of the “galaxy,” and the universe. Everything that approaches this heart/belly center is also approaching the heart/sun center of Mixcoatl, the Milky Way galaxy. These are reminders of the great ceremony of the universe, cosmological symbols that bring the sky down to the surface of the earth so that we may give thanks and build direct contact and relationship with Cemanahuac, the world, the universe, the totality.

With the boundaries of the circle, xictli and huehuetzotzonqueh in place, danzantes are arranged according to the protocol of each particular danza and community. Most often, the *jefxs*, those who carry *palabra* (authority) in their respective communities, are placed closer to the central altar, while newer and younger danzantes are placed in concentric circles that radiate out in orbit from this shared *ombligo* (belly button). Some communities will arrange danzantes according to masculine/feminine energies. This practice is often done through alternating between male and female danzantes. However, this can also become a point of contention in terms of gender identity, especially for Two Spirit, non-binary and gender non-conforming relatives. Each ceremony and group is different in this way, but I have witnessed and participated in many conversations happening within danza that are working to decolonize this gender binary thinking. The work of decolonization and depatriarchalization remain an active project within and through danza. Nonetheless, this *costumbre* (custom) remains widely practiced, where the *tlaxilacalequeh* – those who maintain the discipline and give danzantes their place in the circle – will try and arrange danzantes in a way that embodies balance in terms of masculine/feminine energies. In particular, I have noticed a conscious pattern of making sure masculine energy is held in balance and not allowed to *amontonar* (concentrate) in any one area of the circle. Another way of framing a balance of masculine/feminine is to also consider maintaining a balance of static/electrostatic, or young/elder, and other dualistic relational energies that are embodied through the danzantes in the ceremony.

With the first steps of establishing the ceremonial circle in place, the most explicit “opening” of the danza begins, by honoring Nauhcampa – the four directions. Nauhcampa begins in Tlahuiztlampa, the east, the direction where the light comes from, the place of the masculine energies, the place of Quetzalcoatl, the place towards which the ceremony itself is oriented, where the door is placed to enter the ceremony,

we offer songs, smoke, the sound of atecocolli (conch shell trumpets), and tlahtolli (spoken prayers). This continues, turning towards Cihuatlampa, the west, honoring the feminine energies, the place of Xipe Totec (they who wear flayed skin, who sheds what is dead), Tlahtauhqui Tezcatlipoca, the indescribable gradient of colors that welcomes the setting sun – again we offer songs, smoke, atecocolli, *xochitlahtolli* (flowery words). We then turn to Mictlampa, the north, the place of the elder/ancestral energies, of Tezcatlipoca Yayauhqui, the obsidian mirror from which the darkness was reflected to create the universe, the color black, the absence of light – smoke, songs, drums, atecocolli. Then, to the fourth direction, Huitzlampa, the south, the direction of the thorns, of Huitzilopochtli, the blue warrior, the hummingbird who flies on the left hand side, the venerable heart that continues to beat despite constant adversity, the spirit of *sí se puede*, the direction of the youthful energies. Each direction in tlalticpac, on the earthly plane, is also a corner of the universe. Thus, we greet not only the spiritual energies that come from these places, but also everything that can be found if one were to draw a single, unbroken line out in this direction, into the infinite space of the universe.

Following the unfurling of this four-petaled blossom as the flower of earth, nahuacampa approaches dimensions of verticality and interiority – the place of four continues unfolding to become the place of seven. From this earthly plane, the trees of life begin sprouting, turning our attention to the sun, *Tonatiuh*, Our Father, who shines from above, honoring all the energies that come from ilhuicaltin, from the houses of the sky, all that lives above, all the way to Omeyocan. Then we turn to the earth, kneeling in veneration to *Tonantzin Tlalli Coatlicue*, our beloved Mother Earth who wears a skirt of serpents, the energy of *Tlaloc Chalchihuitlicue*, the pulque of the earth, the water cycle of the clouds, rivers and groundwater, the horizontal waters, the flow of she who wears a skirt of jade. We honor the inframundos, the underworlds that extend below our earthly perceptions. To close with a seventh direction, many groups also honor the center direction, the xictli, in tlalticpac, nican axcan – honoring *Huehuecoyotl*, the elder coyote, *Xochipilli*, the young masculine energy of the flowers and other protector energies that give us danza, and make this moment, and these movements, possible.

Here the protocol through which the space of ceremony is opened is a poetic embodiment of an Anahuacan cosmovisión. The flower of the universe is unfurled, the tree of life planted, the *teocalli* (house of energy) placed at the center of in tlalticpac. Every body participates in this re-membering process, in putting everything in its right place. Honoring the four directions, which are seven directions, places the xictli, the ceremonial center, at the center of the universe – at the center of a four-petaled flower, below thirteen skies that unfold above, and nine underworlds that unfold below. This is the multi-dimensional node from which danzantes seek balance together. It is dancing on the tightrope at the center of the universe. Beneath a sky where the sun dances with other stars, with other planets and galaxies – danzantes become the stars, become the planets, become the sun, become the

universe. Entering through the door, you are entering into a microcosm, a *micro-cosmos*. Again, the cosmos here are not only the stars as such, but also cells, DNA structures – all the repetitive energetic patterns that shape matter at many levels of reality. Circles, squares, pyramids, and other geometries are constantly being unfolded and enfolded – before, during and after danza ceremonies. For example, a cloth that is placed at the center of the xictli – a square, four-colored fabric – is unfolded to open the space before being re-enfolded in a particular order at the end of ceremonies to close. A perfect square can enfold onto itself from the corners until it becomes compact and is folded one last time, this time in half, to become the one from which all unfolding happens.

Each performance of these patterns is an unspoken way of knowing the cosmos by becoming the hidden patterns of the Creator, embodying what David Bohm theorized as the “implicate order” (Bohm 1980). Each circle is a cypher, a zero, a womb, an embodied community. Each square is a way of bringing order and structure to that sacred shape. Each danzante that enters through the door must move in one direction – either to the left or right depending on the group – maintaining the orbit and spin of the ceremony. Within this space and time, anything that enters that door is transformed, and thus, everything outside of that door is transformed in turn. Sweat, as well as blood and tears, flow in this space, as libations, as sustenance for energies of the cosmos that are present in the ceremony. The labor that takes place in this space is sacred work, it is an embodied way of knowing our place in the universe. Danza creates sacred space – which foments ceremonial consciousness – an Other spacetime:

a) un lugar sagrado constituye una ruptura en la homogeneidad del espacio; b) simboliza esta ruptura una «apertura», merced a la cual se posibilita el tránsito de una región cósmica a otra (del Cielo a la Tierra, y viceversa: de la Tierra al mundo inferior); c) la comunicación con el Cielo se expresa indiferentemente por cierto número de imágenes relativas en su totalidad al Axis mundi: pilar (cf. La universalis columna), escala (cf. la escala de Jacob), montaña, árbol, liana, etc.; d) alrededor de este eje cósmico se extiende el «Mundo» (= «nuestro mundo»); por consiguiente, el eje se encuentra en el «medio», en el «ombigo de la Tierra», es el Centro del Mundo...la experiencia del espacio sagrado hace posible la «fundación del mundo»: allí donde lo sagrado se manifiesta en el espacio, lo real se desvela, el mundo viene a la existencia. Pero la irrupción de lo sagrado no se limita a proyectar un punto fijo en medio de la fluidez amorfa del espacio profano, un «Centro» en el «Caos»; efectúa también una ruptura de nivel, abre una comunicación entre los niveles cósmicos.

[a] a sacred place constitutes a rupture in the homogeneity of space; b) this rupture symbolizes an opening, which makes possible the transit

from one cosmic region to another (from the sky to the earth, and vice versa: from the earth to the underworld; c) communication with the sky is expressed by a number of images related entirely to the Axis mundi: pillar (the universal column), stairway (stairway to heaven), mountain, tree, vine, etc.; d) around this cosmic axis extends the world (our world); therefore, the axis is found in the center, in the bellybutton of the earth, it is the center of the world...the experience of sacred space makes possible the foundation of the world: where the sacred is manifested in space, reality is revealed, the world comes into existence. But the sacred rupture is not limited to projecting a fixed point in the midst of the amorphous fluidity of profane space, a Center in the Chaos; it also represents a rupture of level, it opens communication between the levels of the cosmos.] (Eliade 27, my translation)

Ceremonial consciousness is an intentional return to Source. It is a cyclical remembrance that moves in spacetime, in spirals that spin backwards, forwards, upwards and downwards. Spinning on this axis mundi – surfing the flux on these trees of life and flowers of the universe – danzantes find grace in a world that is in motion and in chaos. What creates this order amidst chaos is ceremony. This knowledge is embedded in protocol – in the how, when, where, why and what of ceremony. This knowledge lives in community – in cross-generational and interconnected webs of relationships. When we forget these ways, we forget how to relate. In other words, if we lose these ways, we will lose our way.

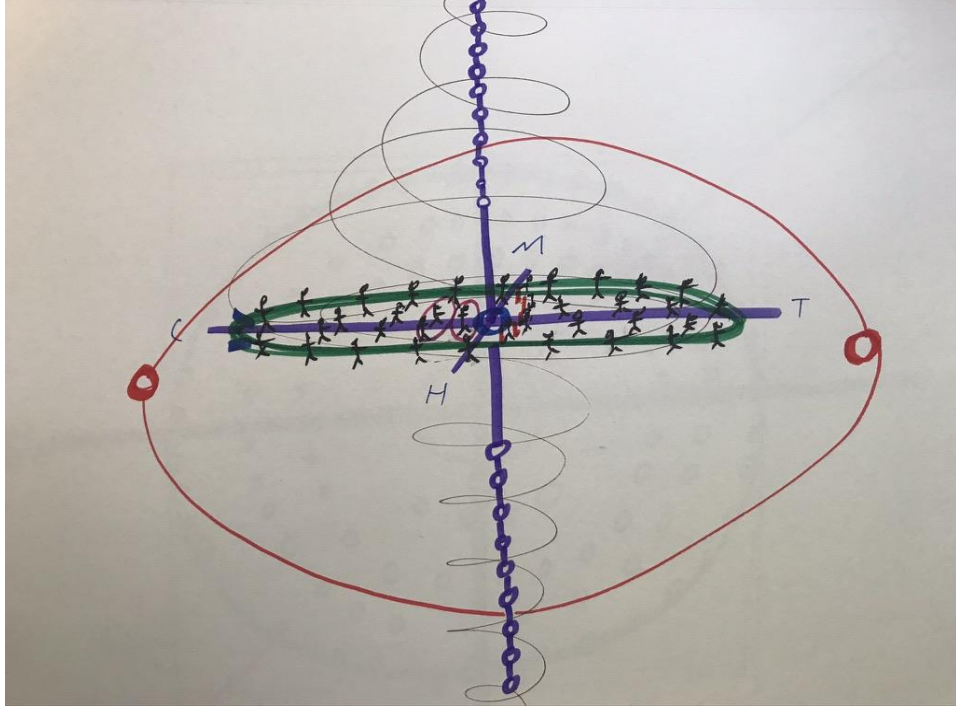


Figure 5:
 Surfing the Flux: The Living Geometry of Ceremony
 Source: Drawing from Author's notebook (2020)

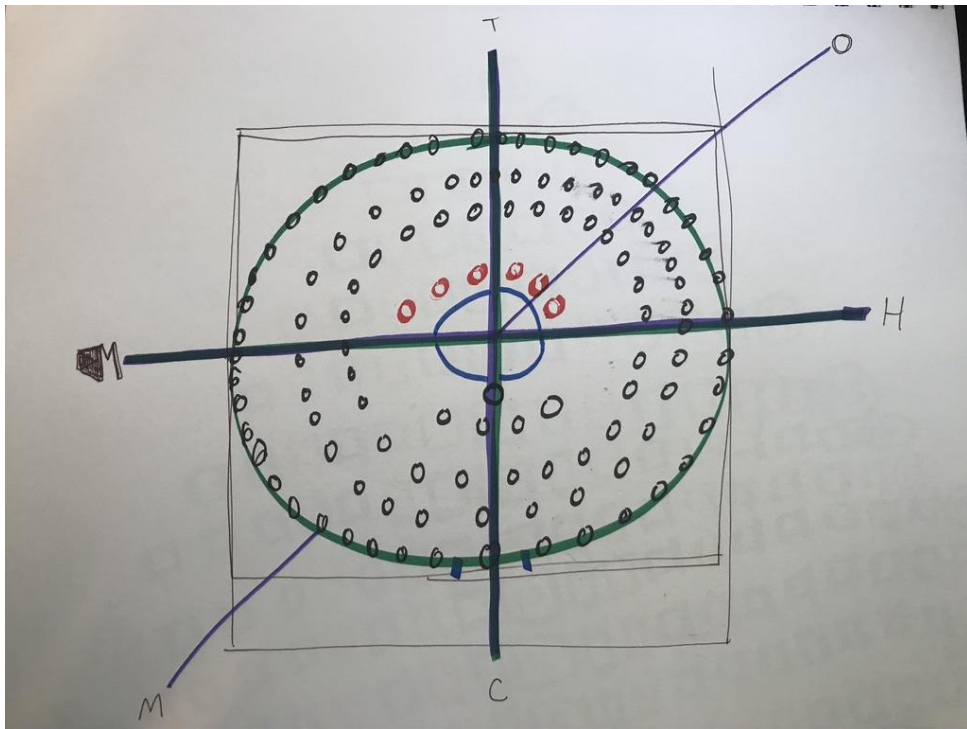


Figure 6:
 The Embodied, Ceremonial Community of the Cosmos
 Source: Drawing from Author's notebook (2020)

Embodied Knowledge in the Pasos of Danza: Paso de Permiso

La danza cósmica anahuaca es una danza sagrada, ya que representa un camino para buscar la armonía con la tierra y con el cosmos, con sus tipos de movimiento o de expresión, de ahí que en nuestra danza haya pasos que representan o simbolizan la tierra, el agua, el viento, y el fuego. Otro tipo de pasos de armonía con el cosmos, son los que imitan los movimientos de rotación y traslación de los planetas...

[Anahuacan cosmic danza is a sacred dance, since it represents a way to seek harmony with the earth and with the cosmos, with its types of movement or expression, hence there are steps that represent or symbolize the earth, the water, the wind, and the fire. Another type of steps in harmony with the cosmos, are those that imitate the movements of the rotation and orbit of the planets.] (Maestro Tlakatzin Stivalet quoted in González Torres 191, my translation)

While the structures and protocol of danza provide one window into the depth of knowledge that is contained in these collective and communal patterns, I will now turn to the individual steps of danza as ways of knowing. The pasos, the steps, produce knowledge, transmit stories, are a decolonial and embodied pedagogy. I will analyze the movements of *paso de permiso* to unpack the basic repertoire of danza gestures and symbology, before closing with further gestural analyses of a few indicative danza postures. El paso de permiso, “the steps of permission,” are a short combination of movements that every danzante must perform before, and sometimes after, offering their danza to the momoztli altar. I return to this paso throughout this study, in particular in Chapter Six, as an embodied, ceremonial ethic of respect through asking permission. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will unpack the specific gestures that are performed through this paso as an important example of how danza carries and produces knowledge and cosmovisión.

There are many different versions of this fundamental sequence of steps. To begin, we must understand that this is not a danza per se, but a paso. What this refers to is the distinction between a danza as a cohesive narrative structure with *flores* (changes) and *bases* (repeated steps), and a paso, which are embodiments of *protocol*. Another paso as such is “*paso de camino*” for example, which are the embodied movements that danzantes perform in order to move in procession, to enter circles, to *caminar*, to walk in ceremony. Paso de permiso then refers to the sequence of embodied movements that themselves serve to ask permission in ceremony. When these same pasos are performed after a danza they are often referred to as “paso de firma,” or the steps through which one provides their signature, as if one is signing a contract, or perhaps a work of art.

These pasos serve as a way to witness danza as a way of knowing. These movements serve as an inter-dimensional text that transmits knowledge across time and space. By this I mean that these pasos in the body, communicate to the altar, to other danzantes in the circle, and to all the other energetic bodies that are present in the ceremony – ancestors, elements, relatives of all dimensions. These movements ground the space before and (sometimes) after each danza. They are a constant reminder of the ethic of asking permission before speaking with or connecting to the medicine of the altar. And as a firma, a signature, they say “sign, sealed, delivered,” they say, “please Creator hear our voices (which are embodied, danced voices), please feel our danza.”

This paso begins the moment the central danzante, they who are carrying/leading the danza, arrive at the front of the altar space. After greeting the altar and possibly smudging themselves with the copal smoke, they begin moving their body as danza. The first moments of movement are a sort of running in place motion, a waking up of the dancing body, an energizing and basic motion of stepping left/right, left/right...This moment initiates the point of contact between the danzante and the altar, between the *sonaja* (ceremonial rattle) and the huehuetl drum, between the hearts of the dancers and the hearts of the drummers. Once this (hopefully) harmonic connection is established, the lead danzante may make a signal that the paso de permiso will begin. This could be a raised hand, a raising of the ayacaxtli (ceremonial rattle), *chicahuaztli* (ceremonial staff) or other ceremonial arma, a verbal cue, or nothing at all.

The first steps of paso de permiso follow a rushing towards and away from the momoztli central altar. This marks two of the primary directions that will orient the danza and the danzante. These movements also symbolize the movement of *fire*, the swift pillars of flames that spread when fire is stoked by the wind. After two repetitions of this motion, the danzante will then side-step left and right, in a shuffling sort of switchback gesture. These movements represent the slow falling of *water* – the cosmic companion to the fiery energy of the first steps. After four of these water shuffling movements, the danzante will then begin spinning, first to the left, then to the right. These movements represent the passage of *time*, the circulation of *winds*, and the important dimensional movements of spinning and moving left and right in relation to the momoztli. Then the danzante takes one small step with the left to ground their weight, before lifting the right leg – to the right, left, towards, away – marking *the four directions* with their hips, legs and/or feet – honoring the element of *earth*. Three synchronized stomps with the left, and then a left, right, away, towards, four-directioned mirror image emerges from the left leg. The paso is then sealed with a few shuffles to the left and right and a short spin to the left.

There are many different versions and variations of this paso, but I am thinking here from the most basic and common version that I have witnessed and learned through my experiences in danza. Many danzantes in Northern California, for example, do not include the second part of the paso de permiso I describe above.

Furthermore, some more advanced *danzantes* may take much more improvisational and creative license, and create their own version of these *pasos*, often within the general schema of the intention of *permiso*. Lastly, the final movements of this *paso* vary greatly across communities and *danzantes* – acting as a creative tail-ending where the *danzante* may express their energy through jumps, kicks, or squatting gestures. As is often the case with variation in tradition, there is open debate within *danza* circles about which version is “correct.” However, again, my intention here is not to share a step-by-step guide on how to offer *paso de permiso*. This is impossible without also providing the actual rhythm, guidance from elders/teachers, and the general structure of ceremony. In short, to learn *paso de permiso* once must enter ceremony and dance *paso de permiso*. Nonetheless, I take this moment to reflect on these *pasos* as a way to understand *how* *danza* is a way of knowing.

These *pasos* are an embodied form of ecology, cosmology, astronomy, geometry and philosophy. They evoke and begin connecting with the heart of cosmos, the *teyolia* (heart-body) of different energies – the elements of fire, water, air, and earth; and dimensions of space and time – through the dancing, focused body. They provide the basic repertoire of *danza* through movements of towards/away, left/right, spinning/turning and four-directional crosses. These gestures are the core vocabulary of *danza*, the structure upon which hundreds of *danza* are built. These movements also embody the creation of the cosmos in its most primordial moments of inception – first, second, third, fourth and other dimensions within and beyond spacetime. *Paso de permiso* also does the important work of greeting the more-than-human with a gestural language – a kinesthetic form of painting, writing, recording, transmitting and expressing knowledge.

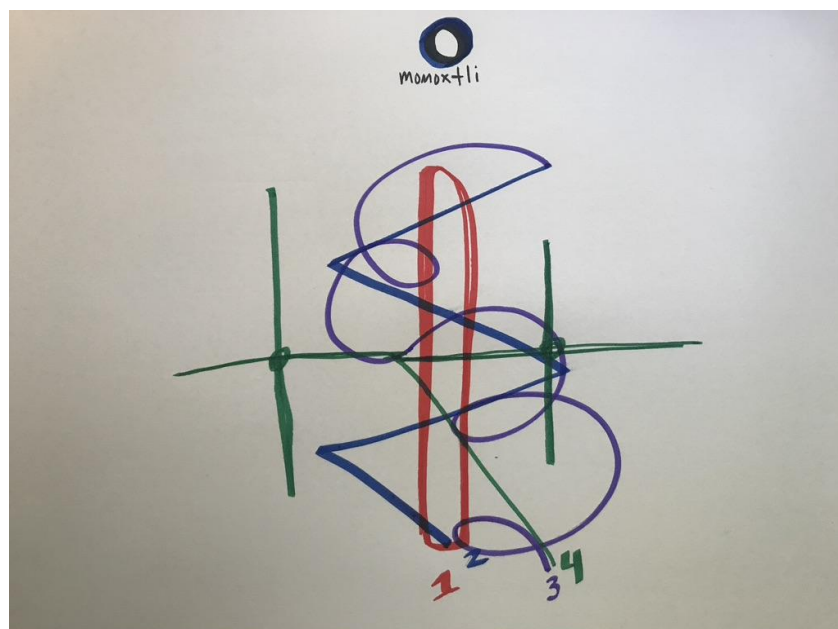


Figure 7:
The Painted Pedagogy of *Permiso*
Source: Drawing from Author’s notebook (2020)

With *paso de permiso* as an important example, I have evidenced the embodiment of an Anahuacan cosmovisión through the *pasos* of danza. Recall that one translation of danza is *mitotiliztli* is “telling stories through movements” (Luna 2020). Telling stories in this way opens up the possibility of other forms of consciousness. The spinning *danzante* body becomes a living, breathing symbol of the passage of time, the orbital movements of planets. Twisting with arms outstretched, *danzantes* becomes *Ehecatl*, the energy of the wind. Moving backwards while criss-crossing their feet in a braided, serpentine movement, the *danzante* becomes a snake slithering close to the earth. Jumping into squats, the *danzante* is diving into the underworld. Each gesture gives flesh to another aspect of an Anahuacan cosmovisión, transforms the dancing body into a shapeshifting, species-queer cosmic antenna. Through danza as cosmovisión, we return to the creative energies of the universe.

Conclusions

Through danza, an Anahuacan cosmovisión is made flesh. This flesh is that of the Anahuacan body – that is, *cosmic flesh* – the physical body, subatomic bodies, energetic bodies, celestial bodies, communal-relational bodies. This is danza as remembering to relate, the human as a cosmic relative – symbols becoming metaphors through a cosmology-worldview of interconnection, integration and renewal. Performing these movements amidst modernity/coloniality, telling stories of survivance (Vizenor 2008) with their feet, *danzantes* know Otherwise. In community, in ceremony, returning to “true time, our time,” (Huacuja 2013) *danzantes* expand the body, multiply the senses, achieve cosmic consciousness, shift the “perception horizon” (Samanta-Laughton 2006). Emerging from silence, emerging from darkness, is infinite light – a decolonial cosmovisión. Changing the worldview, *danzantes* change the world (Dellinger 2018).

Chapter 4

Danza as in Xochitl, in Cuicatl:

Towards an Anahuacan Philosophy of Science/Poetry/Spirituality

European concepts of reality
Ya no soplan.
Reason alone no es todo el cuento
El indio baila
He DANCES his way to truth
In a way INTELLECTUALS will
Never understand

El corazón
(YOLLO en nahuatl - movimiento)
Feels a reality the mind
The human mind
Cannot grasp
(Valdez 177)

Danza is an embodied knowledge, an embodied science/poetry/spirituality. As a community-based ceremonial praxis, danza contains a complex set of cosmological and philosophical foundations. It is a way of practicing “a complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity” (Battiste and Youngblood 2000). Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated how danza is a theoretico-praxis – a communal, embodied, ceremonial way of knowing. Movements in, through, and in relation to the Anahuacan body evidence a spiritual/scientific/poetic approach to knowledge production and transmission. To deepen and ground this understanding, I must attend to the underlying philosophies and theories that make this possible. Danzantes as scientists/poets/warriors – as astronomers, ecologists, physicists – practice danza as a seeking of truth, as a theoretico-praxis of coming-to-know. At the heart of this epistemology is the desire to live in harmony with all our relations. Therefore, studying the dynamic nature of a living universe, the intricate and orchestrated patterns of the Creator, the movements of the cosmos – all are ways of coming to know *the principles of living in harmony*. Yet the question remains: *how* do danzantes know in this way? Critical and comparative Ethnic Studies scholar-ancestor Ronald Takaki (2008) wants to know: “how do you know, you know, what you know?”

Paso de Permiso

Con su permiso, Ipalnemohuani, Dador de la Vida, Giver of Life. Aquí estamos, como tu querías, listxs, para el trabajo. We are here, nican axcan, para cumplir con

nuestra obligación. The space has been opened, the time marked, the circle established, the door opened, the *tlemaitl* (hand-held incense holder) lit. The huehuetzotzonqueh (drummers) play a low thudding heartbeat, carrying the pulse of our collective breath and prayers. *Las energías estan presentes,* the energies are here. Las animas, those who have come before – human, non-human, beyond human – are present.

I receive the chicahuaztli – the sacred, feathered staff that carries the force of life, the energy of our blood, our ancestral memories – from our beloved *yey-tlahtolli* – *la tercera palabra*, they who carry the third word, they who carry el cargo, the sacred work of weaving together our prayers before the altar. On bended knees, before you, we offer our prayers, exchanging light in an olin saludo – our pasos, *nuestros caminos cruzando en tu vientre* Tonantzin Tlalli. *Dibujando mientras sembramos semillas de la esperanza. Ya estamos en el movimiento, ya estamos en la batalla.*

Running to the left, I greet all those to my heart-side, charging through the field of dark matter teyolia that permeates the ceremony, infinite relatives responding to the calls of our atecocolli hearts and minds. Behind our beloved huehuetzotzonqueh I gallop, as a hungry coyote, seeking knowledge with you Ipalnemohuani. Together seeking truth, seeking each other.

Las flores del círculo, the flowers that form the ring of the ceremony, are also dancing, floating in a protective shell for our ofrenda. Las plumas are also dancing, as the dead are also dancing. I kneel before you, sacred belly button, *querido momoztli de nuestro calpulli*, to ask permission before offering my conscious breath, my *xochiyolcuicatl*, my flowery singing heart.

Now in danza, we offer poetry in motion, creativity in communal movement and in ceremony. I raise the chicahuaztli as a finely tuned antenna, a conduit of our shared focused intention, to enter into the spacetime of *xochiyaoyotl*, of flowery war, of introspective inquiry together, of thinking/doing/being in a beautiful way, relating in a harmonious way, with each other, with ourselves, and therefore with you In Tloquenahuaque.

First, we contract, running closer, moving together towards the center. Then we expand, exhaling in reverse. Moving as a circular breath – we become one beating heart, one breathing body, one unified community. We do this twice, marking the towards and the away, the forward and the back, moving as a wind-stoked fire spreads, swiftly *y con fuerza*. This line introduces the present moment to our *yollotzin*, shows the ancestors our essence. Embodied, in ceremony, we cannot tell a lie.

Then as water, we fall – down switch-backed mountains, rushing back to the sacred center of the universe. To the left, to the right, to the left, to the right. Then heliocentric turns on our axes. First, always to the left, towards our feminine hearts, before an inamic agonistic unity turn to the right, our bodies' *recinto* of sacred masculine power. Now we are the wind itself, a cyclone of creative left/right patterns, a coiled spiral of serpentine growth. With our left feet and legs firmly rooted upon our Mother Earth, her roots allowing us to stand tall and firm, we raise our right legs,

honoring the four directions of our hips, knees, feet and toes; the right/left/towards/away pattern that embodies our first astronomy lesson *Saludando y honrando*, we finish our firma, our signature, asking permission, with respect, to be alive, to be of service, an example for the children, a mitotiani, un danzante, *en movimiento*, with you.

Getting in the Zone

I begin by asking permission, offering a paso de permiso to enter into these thoughts, in conversation with the place and time from which I write; Huichin, 8-Tecpatl Xihuitl. From nican axcan, from here and now, I enter into the spacetime of *in xochitl*, *in cuicatl*, into the zone of *flor y canto*, flowers and songs.

If – as Maestra Chicueyi Coatl (2014) posits in her manuscript *Calmecac Huey Papalotl* – “*neltiliztli*...that which is True, that which has Foundations, that which is Standing Tall...was the fearless and tireless search of our Anahuacan Ancestors” (6) – how did (and do) danzantes walk this path of conocimiento? How did they/do we seek truth?

If – as philosopher of Native science Gregory Cajete (2000) argues – “everything in nature has something to teach humans” (21) – how do they teach us? How do we listen and learn?

If – as another philosopher of Native science, Leroy Little Bear (2015) argues, “science is really all about how we delve into the unknown” (Little Bear 0:40-0:50) – how do mitotianimeh (danzantes) as Native scientist/poet/warriors come to know?

If – as Little Bear (2015), Cajete (2000), Maestro Andrés Segura (1981) and others have argued – Native science is rooted in foundational understandings of interconnection, relationality and constant flux – what does a theory of knowledge look like that extends from these metaphysical presuppositions?

If – as I have argued in Chapter One – the mitotiani (danzante) seeks “graceful movement and harmony amidst inner/outer chaos,” what are *the principles of living in harmony* that guide this dance?

In this chapter I posit that *the spacetime of in xochitl, in cuicatl* – the zone of flowers and songs – guides an Anahuacan philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality. Weaving together different thinkers, danzantes and maestrxs, I theorize a *mitotiani epistemology* – where danza is a way of knowing and knowing is a way of dancing. These theories serve as the foundations upon which this study has been built. Here, knowledge is *poetic* (Césaire 1982; Lorde 2007), *embodied* (Taylor 2003; López Austin 2004), and *ceremonial* (Wilson 2008; Somé 1993) – guided by a desire for enacted and sustained harmony with all our relations; with self, community, ecosystem and the cosmos.

Ceremony as a Mode of Inquiry: Towards A Mitotiani Epistemology

In Indigenous ways of knowing, the self exists within a world that is subject to flux. The purpose of these ways of knowing is to reunify the world or at least to reconcile the world to itself. Uniting these ways of knowing is necessary, as each can contribute to human development and each requires its own appropriate expression. Indigenous ways of knowing hold as the source of all teachings caring and feeling that survive the tensions of listening for the truth and that allow the truth to touch our lives. Indigenous knowledge is the way of living within contexts of flux, paradox, and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces. In the realms of flux and paradox, 'truthing' is a practice that enables a person to know the spirit in every relationship. Developing these ways of knowing leads to freedom of consciousness and to solidarity with the natural world (Battiste and Youngblood 42).

Rooted in a paradigm he theorizes as "Native science," Gregory Cajete (2000) argues that Indigenous scientists "not only observe nature, but also participate in it...with all (their) sensual being" (20). For the purposes of this study, and through the work of this chapter, I theorize Native science as an intersection: as Indigenous science/poetry/spirituality. I make explicit these particular articulations of science, art/creativity/poetry and spirituality as these are the primary epistemic fissures I seek to fuse through danza. This holistic approach, however, is already implied and embedded in Cajete's theorizing of Native science as such. As Cajete (2000) writes,

Native science is used as a metaphor for Native knowledge and creative participation with the natural world in both theory and practice...Native science reflects the unfolding story of a creative universe in which human beings are active and creative participants...Native science is a reflection of the metaphoric mind and is embedded in creative participation with nature. It reflects the sensual capacities of humans. It is tied to spirit, and is both ecological and integrative (14).

Therefore, in theorizing in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* as a philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality, I am simultaneously tracing in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* as a philosophy of Native science. Building upon Cajete's paradigm of Native science, I trace how danza becomes a way of knowing that is rooted in a philosophy of knowledge that is always already scientific/poetic/spiritual, embodied and felt – what I have also been calling a *theoretico-praxis* – something Cajete's Native science also preempts as "a metaphor for Native knowledge and creative participation with the natural world in both theory and practice" (Ibid.).

Maestra Chicueyi Coatl teaches danza in this way. She argues that, traditionally, *matiliztli/machiliztli* (Anahuacan knowledge of how to live in harmony with the cosmos) was learned and transmitted over generations through “feeling it” – through direct, embodied communication with the forces of nature (Fieldnotes, Spring 2015). As contemporary danzantes, she argues that we must develop our faculties of feeling to remember these ways of learning. Working with the energies, sounds and movements of *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*, she encourages us to “fall in love” with each danza (Fieldnotes, Spring 2018). Not only will this help us as danzantes to remember the steps and movements of each danza when it is our time to lead them, but this becomes our method for embodying the energy that each danza is meant to invoke. For example, when dancing *Huitzilopochtli*, a hummingbird-style dance, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl instructs danzantes to “*become* *Huitzilopochtli*” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2018). When dancing *Tlaloc*, a water dance, we *become* *Tlaloc*. She adds, “you are no longer you when you are offering this dance, you must become the energy of the danza” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2018). If we are counting, or otherwise over-intellectualizing the danzas, we interrupt the power of this direct embodied connection. We must remain affectively focused and sensitive.

In this way, Maestra asks “how many of you have fallen in love?” A number of us, most of us, raise our hands. She encourages us to do so with confidence, saying “don’t just raise your hand, wave them around and say ‘Yes! Me! I am in LOVE!!!’” She then adds the lesson, “well then, when you fall in love do you calculate all the pros and cons, and think, oh well I don’t know if I’m going to do this or not? NO! You just fall in love” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2015). This is how Maestra encourages us to be danzantes, to be scientifically polyamorous with the energies, to ask permission, with respect, to fall in love with them, to fall in love with each force of nature as we learn the steps, rhythms and sequences of their danzas. In this way we can also dance with the power of love, with the energy of fearlessness and entrega total (total effort) that defines a danzante. When we fall in love with danza, we begin to dance with the heart. Thinking with our feet, with our hearts, in love, we can practice an ancestral approach to art/science/spirituality – connecting directly with the *yollotl*, the essence of each force of nature that has been encoded in danzas. Danza, as it were, is a heart-centered way of knowing.

Maestra Chicueyi Coatl argues that this relationship to knowing as loving is rooted linguistically in Nahuatl itself. She writes (translating the work of Espina de Maguey): “Patrick Johansson explained in several of his articles that many of the terms in Nahuatl related to cognition (i.e. process of knowing, learning and understanding things) have the root *yol*, whose abstract, *yollotl*, means heart. He says this is because in the ‘pre-Columbian Nahuatl world, a message is not considered understood until (it was) felt’” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014). She offers various examples of Nahuatl words that illustrate this concept. Including “*noyolquimati*, which literally means ‘my heart feels it (or knows it)’ and is used to say ‘I know it’” (27). Also: *nimoyolcuepa*: to change one’s mind (literally: my heart turns)...*Nenoyolnonotza*: to

reflect (literally: to talk with the heart)...*Nictlapoa in nix, in noyollo* - I am paying attention (I open my eye, I open my heart)" (Ibid.).

This understanding of yollotl as the heart, as a place of knowing, is a key concept in an Anahuacan philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality. This notion is extended further when we consider the other concepts that are contained within this same word. For example, others have argued that "yolotl is better translated as 'life force'...is the 'heart or essence' of an object, being or spirit...Everything in the cosmos has a yolotl"⁸⁴ (Maffie 191). It has also been translated as "seed" or "core of life...that form which 'life sprouts' and the 'internal life force that gives the body movement and life" (Ibid.). Also, the Nahuatl word for life itself contains this root, "yoliliztli" (Maffie 192). In this way, knowing is a living, vital act. The *danzante* as ceremonial scientist/poet/warrior seeks to resonate with the life energy of a being or spirit as a way of knowing. The yollotl, as an energetic body – *teyolia* – along with the *tonalli* (consciousness/solar energy), the *ihiyotl* (liver-body) and other bodies in the Anahuacan body, know. The processes of knowing through these sense-organs is guided by this desire to know more intimately the essential forces of nature – as these are, in fact, part of our own essences.

Maestro Andrés Segura and “La Esencia de la Cosas”

“*La esencia de las cosas*” is a concept that circulates within contemporary *danza* communities, perhaps thanks to the foundational teachings and lessons of Maestro Andrés Segura. As one of the two main *jefes* that brought *danza* from Mexico-Tenochtitlan to the north in the 1970s (Aguilar 2006) – to California, Texas, and New Mexico (Luna 2011) – Segura’s influence on *danza* in general, and on *danza* as a theoretico-praxis of Native science in particular, cannot be overstated. Segura served as a mentor for many *danza* circles in the United States and Mexico, and also became the maestro/teacher for many influential Chicanxs in the 20th century – including non-danzantes such as the playwright and founder of *El Teatro Campesino* Luis Valdez, and author and TWLF veteran Ysidro Macias. When discussing *danza* as Native science/poetry/spirituality, paying respects to Maestro Andrés Segura’s work as a *Capitán de la Tradición Conchera* (Conchero captain) and *temastiani* (educator) is fundamental.

During a 1981 interview conducted by Pablo Poveda (1981), Maestro Andrés Segura articulates in detail how *danza* serves as a form of Native science theory and praxis. Through his Conchero – that is, Catholic-infused – discourse, Segura vividly describes a *xochicuicatl* philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality. I include his words at length:

⁸⁴ Yollotl can be spelled as both yolotl or yollotl. I utilize the LL, following my teachers and the majority of the literature I cite, both of which spell the word as such.

Our dances are both religious and agricultural in nature. On a religious level, we dance for God. Our objective is to achieve cosmic integration with God...Every step and movement in la danza has a symbolic purpose and results in certain energies being invoked. Our steps are learned gradually and through repetition, and each danzante develops a certain affinity for certain dances. When we dance, we try to achieve a cosmic harmony. At the center of our dance circle is the drum, representing the fire, our Father Sun, who is also represented by the lighting of the copal. Surrounding the drum, in a circle representing the planets of the solar system, are the danzantes...Our ancestors purposely created our dances to preserve our indigena culture and essence. Creating our danza through mathematics, each step represents a number, and each number moves certain energies within the dance. That is why our dances are constant and cannot be changed ("*no hay forma de cambiar las danzas*"); each dance has a certain number of steps that together will move the energies intended. This is also the reason commercial representations of our danza are not valid; they have been altered to conform to the spectacle desires, not the movement of intended spiritual energies...(*Como ya dije anteriormente, nosotros tratamos de representar la armonía cósmica. En este sentido, el que está llevando la danza simboliza el planeta que en cada momento determinado está ejerciendo su influencia sobre todo el sistema solar...*[As I've said before, we try to represent cosmic harmony. In this sense, they who are carrying/leading the danza symbolizes the planet that at any given moment is exerting its influence on the entire solar system]). Every one of our dances begins facing our Father Sun, since again our dances are solar rituals. Before the dance can begin, however, comes the part where we ask permission to perform la danza. The first part of asking permission involves purifying the site where we are about to dance. This is accomplished by invoking the four directions, the four winds, the four points of the Universe. Each direction has different energies, and in order to function correctly in the center of the four directions, in the center of the cross, we must be in harmony with the four energies we are invoking...Besides representing the solar system circling the sun, our circle also represents atoms rotating around its nucleus, the basic structure of our Universe. Here we continue asking permission to cleanse the site, all the while soliciting the help of Ometecuhtli/Omecihuatl, the Giver of Life, the Giver of Cosmic Harmony...We also reach out and ask for help from the Seres and other spiritual entities that surround us, and for protection as well during the ceremony, asking for their help that we perform everything correctly. There are spirits all around us, and we invoke the protection of those

energies friendly to us so that we may correctly perform our tasks (Quoted and translated in Macias 319-321).

Here Maestro Andres Segura provides the framework through which we can read danza as a richly encoded, Native scientific/spiritual/poetic way of knowing. Representative of a particular impulse within the danza tradition, he speaks of danza in scientific/spiritual/poetic terms; where ceremonies represent the cosmos, the nucleus, the proton, the electron, the neutron, the solar system. When Maestro Segura would describe the Native scientific principles that are embedded in danza and other Anahuacan cultural texts, he would often invoke the notion of “la esencia de las cosas...a worldview (that) encompasses both matter and spirit” (Macias 136-137). In this worldview:

...everything that exists, in whatever form, be it material or spiritual, is composed of energy. And all energy that exists, everywhere in the universe is...El Dador de la Vida. Everything that exists, thus, whether it is in material or spiritual form, is but a different frequency of the One Energy...It is this difference in the frequency of one's material vibration that enables the different life forms that exist to manifest themselves as they do. Thus, mountains have their own vibration, as do rivers, clouds, trees, plants, the various animals and insects, fish, the cosmos, and, of course, humans (Macias 137-138).

Maestro Segura understood this approach to science as distinct from Western approaches in fundamental and irreconcilable ways. Although he was educated in Westernized, Eurocentric institutions in Mexico he emphasized that he had to shed this European worldview in order to more genuinely understand and practice Native ways. He argued:

The European sees the world as it suits his materialistic vision of life; a vision of life brought about by the sciences which the European has created. These sciences dictate that what exists is what can be seen, touched, tasted, and smelled. These are the senses the European relies on to determine what is real and what is not...This Western educating method of observing the world and then using this worldview to determine what is important for me, as a *mexicano*, did not allow me to fully comprehend my native culture. The reason for this is that the Western, or European, worldview, does not factor in the spiritual world. The spirit world can be seen, touched, tasted, and smelled; but Western man has forgotten how to adjust these senses when accessing the spirit world (Macias 68-69).

As a Capitán Conchero, Maestro Andrés Segura understood and lived this philosophy through a lifelong commitment to practicing and teaching ceremonial dance, music and healing. Here he is giving voice to the principles of a *mitotiani epistemology* that sit at the heart, as it were, of danza praxes.

Rooted in this worldview, and in conversation with Maestra Chicueyi Coatl, I argue that a danzante epistemology implies building loving relationships with la esencia de las cosas. As a way of seeking truth, the danzante/scientist falls in love with energy itself, as a simultaneously spiritual/material phenomenon. Getting to know these energies in ceremony, the danzante situates themselves in an ecology of relationships. This is a *xochicuicatl way of knowing*. This praxis of awakening sensory experiences and feelings of the body while existing in a living web of interconnected relationships is part and parcel of a Native science paradigm and approach to seeking truth. As Cajete (2000) argues:

Nature is reality, and worthy of awe in the perceptions of the person who practices a culturally conditioned ‘tuning in’ of the natural world. He or she sees, hears, smells, and tastes the natural world with greater acuity. The body feels the subtle forces of nature with a heightened sensitivity. The mind perceives the subtle qualities of a creative natural world with great breadth and awareness. In spite of anthropologists’ cultural bias and misinterpretations that continue to influence views of the Indigenous experience, none of this sensual participation with nature is ‘supernatural’ or ‘extra-ordinary.’ Rather, it is the result of an ancient and naturally conditioned response to nature (20).

For danzantes as ceremonial scientists/poets/warriors, knowing is feeling – awakening the senses to the spiritual/material beauty of Creation. Being in love, in our feelings, in the present moment, is when we are most human; and therefore, are closest to the truth. This approach to knowledge as loving – as feeling – is a marked departure from Western, positivist, heteropatriarchal desires for objectivity as neutrality and distance. If we do not know something in the West, it is because it has not been “discovered” yet, that is, it has not been seen through Western eyes – often quite literally, through telescopes, microscopes or other visual technologies. Knowledge from an Anahuacan standpoint, however, does not carry this underlying philosophy. An embodied intimate relationship with perennial truth is favored over an objective discovery-like encounter with something “new.” Ways of being in harmonic relationship with these original energies of the universe and their manifestation here on earth are the guiding ethic of this inquiry – not domination, nor control.

Perhaps this is why Maestro Andrés Segura (2012), during a presentation at DQ University asked: “How did the ancestors know these things without telescopes? ...They knew simply because they were human beings...nothing more” (41:48-42:10,

my translation). In this light, Native science is a way to be human, or perhaps, to stay human. As Cajete (2000) reminds us, Native science is not supernatural, nor extraordinary. Instead, it is a holistic approach to poetry as science, to science as poetry, to science and poetry as methodologies of becoming a human being. This is *in xochitl, in cuicatl*. This is *la flor, y el canto*. The flower, the song. This is a science of metaphor, a space of symbols that represent energy waves as they move and transform in constant flux across spacetime. This is danza. The energies are dancing, and therefore so must the danzante. These energies are guided by love, therefore, so must be the danzante.

Neltiliztli, Macehualiztli, Yoliztli: Anahuacan Philosophies of Truth, Humanity and Life

While a mitotiani epistemology is rooted in this worldview of interconnection and energetic resonance, it is also guided by presuppositions of an impermanent, living, conscious, always already transforming universe. In this context, a particular approach to seeking truth emerges: how does one find a foundation that is solid when all that is solid is only temporarily so? Teaching Anahuacan philosophy and science/poetry/spirituality, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl (2014) posits “Life IN TLALTIPACTLI, on earth, is transient, everything has an end, nothing lasts forever...So...is there anything that lives forever” (6)? These questions are at the heart of Anahuacan philosophy and xochicuicatl, flowery songs that seek truth. *In tlalticpac can mach ti itlatiuh?*

*Cuix oc nelli nemohua oa in tlalticpac?
Anochipa tlalticpac. Zan achica ye nican.
Ohuaye ohuaye.
El ca chalchihuitl no xamani,
no teocuitlatl in tlapani,
no quetzalli poztequi.
Yahui ohuaye.
Anochipa tlalticpac zan achica ye nican. Ohuaya ohuaya.*

[Truly do we live on earth?
Not forever on earth; only a little while here.
Although it be jade, it will be broken,
Although it be gold, it is crushed,
Although it be quetzal feather, it is torn asunder.
Not forever on earth; only a little while here.]
(León-Portilla 1963: 7, his translation)

Thinking from this particular *xochicuicatl*, from the so-called *Cántares Mexicanos*, Miguel León-Portilla (1963) offers these reflections:

Life in *tlalticpac* is transitory. In the end everything must vanish; even rocks and precious metals will be destroyed. Is there anything, then, that is really stable or true in this world? Such is the question of the Nahuatl poet asks of *Ipalnemohuani*...the Giver of Life...With the denial of all stability and permanence in *tlalticpac*, there arises the profound anguished question: Has man any hope for escape from the unreality of dreams – from the evanescent world? (7)

This is the search for *neltiliztli*, for the truth. According to León-Portilla (1963) “the word ‘truth’ in Nahuatl, *neltiliztli*, is derived from the same radical as ‘root’, *tlanelhuatl*, from which, in turn, comes *nelhuayotl*, ‘base’ or ‘foundation’” (8). In the chaotic, ever-changing and shifting flux of the cosmos, the *mitotiani/danzante* as Native scientist/poet/warrior seeks this foundation, these enduring truths. Yet, this foundation, and its attendant truths are themselves ever-changing – shapeshifting, transforming, never truly at rest. “This is a precept of Native science, for truth is not a fixed point, but rather an ever-evolving point of balance, perpetually created and perpetually new” (Cajete 2000: 19). The *danzante* as Native scientist/poet/warrior then, is an indefatigable funambulist, a never-ending, perpetual tight-rope walker, an infinite surfer of the cosmic flux. Cajete (2000) argues that “our instinctive ability to ‘flow’ with the stream of chaos and creativity leads us metaphorically to the ‘vortices’ of individual and collective truth. What is true from this viewpoint is the experience of the moment of balance inherent in chaos, like that point at which water, not quite boiling, forms vortices” (19). In ceremony, one is *nican axcan*, in the here and now, and nowhere else. In that presence of mind, body and spirit, dancing in cosmic movement, in the mindful, embodied experience of dancing as a conscious offering, the *danzante* knows/feels the “essence of things.”

Put another way, my argument here is that *danza* ceremonies – as collective, embodied, spiritual/scientific/poetic spacetimes rooted in a *xochicuicatl* philosophy – serve an analogous function as the experimental laboratory does to the Western chemist, or the particle accelerator does for the Western physicist – the controlled conditions in which research, as the search for truth, can be conducted. There is protocol, an underlying set of cultural and metaphysical parameters, a worldview, a *cosmovisión*, that undergirds the organization and practice of these ceremonies. There is a production of relevant technologies as tools of inquiry. This is a *mitotiani* method/ology, a *xochicuicatl* philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality.

Translating In Xochitl, In Cuicatl as the Spacetime of the Spiritual/Scientific/Poetic

Through Anahuacan ceremonial dance as a theoretico-praxis, this space of fluxus-based knowing, of resonating with the heart of the cosmos, in community, is the state of in xochitl, in cuicatl, *the spacetime of flor y canto*, flowers and songs. In xochitl, in cuicatl is most commonly translated from the Nahuatl to mean “poetry” (León-Portilla 1963: 75). This translation interprets in xochitl, in cuicatl as the “difrasismo” that combines the two literal words meaning flowers and songs to metaphorically become one singular signifier that produces a third meaning, in this case, referring to the practice of singing flowery songs, or “poetry” (Ibid.). What I will do in the following section is offer another translation, and therefore another way of conceptualizing in xochitl in cuicatl – not as a product but a process, as the spacetime of flowers and songs, as the creative zone in which danzantes practice Native scientific/poetic/spiritual inquiry, coming-to-know in community and in ceremony. Flowers and songs will be considered in literal/concrete, symbolic/metaphorical and philosophical/scientific terms at once.

In Xochitl, La Flor, The Flower

Flowers represent culture, the fruition of work, the ephemeral beauty of impermanence, the sacred geometry of nature, the five-fingered-flower of the hand, that which creates, forges connections to the ancestors, through a road that is paved with flowers (Fieldnotes, Yaoehcatl, Fall 2017). Flowers adorn. They serve as a vessel for medicine, food, and sustenance. Flowers grow from the body of Mother Earth, bringing beauty, color, and medicine that heals. Flowers carry information, are a way of knowing. *Xochimeh* (flowers) contain (and know) mathematics, geometry, design, engineering, the resilient spirit of life. And these flowers come with songs. Or perhaps these flowers are also songs, they express the beauty and complexity of the “implicate order” (Bohm 1980) in such simple and delicate designs. In xochitl, in cuicatl, the flower, the song.

In danza, flowers are a technology – an important media, as collaborators and co-authors in creating the spacetime of harmony in which we seek and come to know. Colors of flowers are the material expression of frequencies of light. These colors are energy waves – vibrations of varying oscillations of light and, importantly, their relationship to our own visual perception. Violet, pink, blue, crimson, each have a tone and resonance visually, aurally, and energetically – a tonalli (light energy) we can seek to resonate with. Flowers are the final moment of beauty in a long and unseen process from seed, to plant, to pollination, to enduring long nights and days, storms and sun, to arriving at a beautiful and resilient flower. Asking permission, with respect, to pick them for ceremony, one sees, and feels, that this is a sacrifice, a beautiful offering of death/life as renewal and final breath. In this way, gardening and

danza are more alike than they are different. In xochitl, in cuicatl, singing songs to the flowers, with the flowers, in the garden – these are conversations with the ancestors.

In Cuicatl, El Canto, The Song

Songs, like flowers, are ephemeral and carried by the wind (Aguilar 2009). Songs, as music, sound vibrating harmoniously, are a technology through which we learn how to work with time, and therefore space, with sound, which is the element of air, voice, and frequencies in the form of sound waves – which is to say, another medium of energy. In a xochicuicatl approach to music making, the medium, as it were, is not music, but air. In danza, musical instruments serve as another technology through which the danzante can experience the forces of nature in an embodied and ceremonial (that is, respectful) way. Music, as harmonious sound waves moving through time and space, is about learning to use instruments (such as tlapiztlalli/flute, huehuetl/drum, ayacaxtli/rattle) to connect with, to resonate with, to vibrate at the same frequency, and temporarily embody the spirit of nican, axcan, the right here, the right now.

In this way, the work of the danzante as scientist/poet/warrior is to learn and build relationships with these different technologies so that we may learn to live in better harmony with our beloved Mother Earth, and all our relations. The medium is always the one original creative energy of life, teotl, just at different frequencies. Learning to work with these tools⁸⁵ helps us find our place in the cosmos. Learning from the birds, we become sound workers, playing, respectfully, *con cuidado* (with care), *con permiso* (with permission), with Ehecatl (the energy of the wind) – they who help us to communicate, which is to say, to connect. Songs are a way of knowing this truth through the creative body in ceremony, and therefore serve as an important aspect of a mitotiani epistemology, a xochicuicatl philosophy of science/art/spirituality.

Towards a Xochicuicatl Philosophy

With these considerations in mind, we must work to resist limited, reductive, or otherwise flattening, translations of in xochitl, in cuicatl as poetry per se – that is, misreading in xochitl, in cuicatl through a Westernized lens and worldview, as an aesthetic category of the written word with its origins somewhere in Ancient Greek philosophy. Poetry here must refer more broadly to include many forms of creative expression. Here poetry refers to the process, not the product. In conversation with various xochicuicatl texts in the so-called *Cantares Mexicanos*, Miguel León-Portilla (1963) theorized poetry as such:

⁸⁵ These are musical instruments in this example, but the same could also be said for other “tools” such as tlemaitl (hand-held incense holder), chachayotes (seed-pod rattle anklets), fajas (ceremonial belt), trajes (regalia), flores (flowers), etc.

True poetry derives from a peculiar type of knowledge, the fruit of authentic inner experience, the result of intuition. Poetry is, then, a creative and profound expression which, through symbol and metaphor, allows man to discover himself and then to talk about what he has intuitively and mysteriously perceived. Since he feels that he will never be able to express what he longs to express, the poet suffers. Nevertheless, his words may at times embody authentic revelation...(Poetry) is born of inspiration emanating from beyond - from 'what is above us.' And it is this inspiration which enables man to speak 'the only truth on earth.'...In spite of the universal evanescence of existence, they concluded, there is a way of knowing the truth, and the way is poetry, for which 'flower and song' is both symbol and metaphor...In some mysterious way (poetry) is perennial and indestructible. Although flowers, considered the symbol of beauty, perish, when they are related to song, they represent poetry and are everlasting (76-78).⁸⁶

Maffie (2014) translates in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* as “art” or “creative activity” more broadly: “such as composing-singing poetry, weaving, goldsmithing, and painting-writing” (38-39). Reading across León-Portilla, López Austin, and Garibay’s translations of *xochicuicatl* – here as written “poems” in Nahuatl – Maffie theorizes the many levels at which in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* takes place. This is due again to principles of an Anahuacan cosmovisión. If the universe is constantly in motion, always changing shape, alive and creating itself, then the cosmos themselves are involved in a *xochicuicatl* process. In this way the cosmos are an *amoxтли* (a codex) – a sacred multi-dimensional, folding and unfolding, written-painted text. When we enter into ceremony, we acknowledge this as a truth, and return consciously to this spacetime of creativity, to the place of flowers and songs, of the only truth that there is, but which remains ineffable.

In *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* as an Anahuacan philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality, is an interstitial, liminal media that bridges otherwise disparate forms of “scientific” vis-à-vis “poetic knowledge” (Césaire 1982). It is not a thing but a state. Temastiani (teacher) and spiritual elder Tio SamueLin Martínez translates in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* as “getting in the zone” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2010), likening it to the contemporary form of the hip hop cypher,⁸⁷ a place of experiencing connection with the cosmos, with creation, with creativity, where the body serves primarily as a vessel, a non-identified, non-individualized collective node of relationality.⁸⁸ Like a hip hop cypher, *danza* creates a ceremonial spacetime in which

⁸⁶ As I was reading and transcribing these words, I learned of Prof. Miguel León-Portilla’s transition to the ancestors. May his journey be lit by the sun of the underworlds. May future generations continue to build upon the strong foundations he has left us. *Nican ca, Ometeotl!*

⁸⁷ Freestyle rap battle, break-dancing battle, the improvisational and community-based competitive space in hip hop.

⁸⁸ See also: Imani Kai Johnson’s (2009) *Dark Matter in B-boying Cyphers: Race and Global Connection in Hip Hop*.

the technology of the community, of the circle, is mobilized to activate and connect with universal, cosmic consciousness.

What this implies is that one cannot simply step into in xochitl, in cuicatl on a whim. There are structures, protocols, specific instructions for how to open such a space in which flowers and songs can flow – where poetic knowing is embodied and experienced. It is a way to understand the process of knowledge production itself as a performative act, a *theoretico-praxis*, that is, an embodied, collective, ceremonial epistemology – “the only possible way to invoke the supreme Giver of Life” (León-Portilla 1963: 204).

Xochitonacayotzin – The Creative Body in Ceremony

In xochitl, in cuicatl as a philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality emerges from the creative body in ceremony:

The creative body and all that comprises it – mind, body, and spirit – are the creative, moving center of Native science. Although this may seem to be common sense, modern thinking abstracts the mind from the human body and the body from the world. This modern orientation, in turn, frequently, disconnects Western science from the living and experienced world of nature. The dissociation becomes most pronounced at the level of perception, because our perceptions orient us in the most elemental way to our surroundings. Receptivity to our surroundings, combined with creativity characterizes our perception...In reality, orientation, receptivity, creativity, perception, and imagination are integrated through participation with nature. This is why participation is a key strategy of Native science; it can take many forms and can be individual as well as collective. In Native contexts, creative participation may result in a story, song, dance, new technology or even a vision, ritual or ceremony (Cajete 2000: 26).

Riffing here with Cajete (2000), I am positing that danza ceremonies must be understood in this way – as a creative, embodied participation with nature, and therefore as an embodied, receptive, creative theoretico-praxis. Danza is a ceremonial way of knowing, an application of a xochicuicatl philosophy – is a movement of movements, a moving body of moving bodies, is mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza – moving gracefully towards harmony amidst inner/outer chaos ↔ seeking unity with the creative duality of the universe. This is a mitotiani epistemology, a danzante’s way of knowing.

Contemporary Mitotiliztli ↔ Teochitontequiza (Danza) as In Xochitl, In Cuicatl

Danzas are structured in flores y bases (flowers and bases) – a danced song structure, designed with verses and choruses respectively. In xochitl, in cuicatl. Xochimeh (flowers) are present; there is creativity, change and adornment. Cuicameh (songs) are choral; there is repetition, continuity, and foundation. Bases (as cuicameh) are at once the chorus in terms of the structure of a song as well as the popular collective body of voices singing together. This reoccurring, repeating structure is the basic energy of the dance, the predictable and solid structure to which we will always return. The flores on the other hand are the ephemeral, the moving, the changing, the progressing. The story-telling aspects of danza are woven together in this way. The story of corn, for example, is not linear, it is cyclical. The pasos (steps) always return to the *vuelatas* (spins) that embody the wind that is necessary for pollination and fertility; that is, the reproduction and continuation of life. Therefore, how we plant corn is embedded in a danza, *cintli* – a step-by-step guide to agriculture 101.⁸⁹

While in a xochicuicatl state, we are in a unique, special, autonomous moment. As Maestra Xochitezca of Chikawa Conroe reminded us, that “no two ceremonies are alike” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2018). In other words, ceremonies are ephemeral, momentary, only exist insofar as they are experienced. This is the entangled relationship of impermanence and repetition embodied by a xochicuicatl state of mind. The very fact that we practice the same ceremony each cycle is a reminder that life (as a temporally/spatially experienced phenomenon) is growing yet contains continuities. Ceremony itself is a space to revisit the return of a particular energy – for example solstices or equinoxes – but from another particular moment in time and space in the cosmos. This is a cyclical, upward-spiraling notion of how spacetime moves, and therefore, how we must move with it. Perhaps this is why the concept of in xochitl, in cuicatl is sometimes used to refer to the spacetime of danza ceremonies themselves.

Within danzas ceremonial circles there is quite literally an abundance of flowers and songs. In the tradition of *velaciones* (overnight singing ceremonies), for example, flowers are used in abundance to build and adorn the momoztli (altar), the door, *el tendido* (cross of flowers), *el ollin* (symbolic flower work), and to demarcate the physical space of the ofrenda (the offering). A *palo* (long dowel) that is wrapped with fresh flores offers a *limpia* (ceremonial cleansing). This *trabajo* (work) is bursting with flowers, songs, smoke, sound, music, sensation. The next day, after working in the dark, we work in the light, dancing with the sun and the energies of the daytime. It is traditional to dance during the day near or inside the same space in which we were in *velación* the night before. In this way after singing all night, in private, in community with the flowers of the altar, doing the sacred feminine work

⁸⁹ See also: “Cintli: La Danza del Maíz” in Chapter Five.

of the night, we must harmonize this prayer with its sacred masculine dualistic reflection. In this case, I am referring to the harmonies of darkness/light, feminine/masculine, night/day, private/public – balancing these relationships, as agonistic inamic unities (Maffie 2014) that shape the contours of how ceremonies are symbolically organized and structured. Velación is *trabajo de noche* (night work), danza itself is *trabajo de dia* (day work).

Dancing in ceremony, most often under the late morning and afternoon sun, is the part of danza ceremonies that most of the public understands as danza itself. One of the limitations of even referring to danza as such (as dance), is that it reduces a whole way of life and interconnected set of practices to one thing: dancing. On the other hand, this may be the case due to the fact that the one practice that is necessary for all the others to have a purpose is dance itself. The before, during and after of ceremony is danza – and danzantes are dancers at all times, not only when they dance.

Nonetheless, danza remains the central theoretico-praxis in question, and the case to which we now turn to continue theorizing a xochicuicatl philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality – a mitotiani epistemology. Dancing in ceremony takes place over many hours of sustained focused intention. Physical exhaustion, injury, pain, and other embodied experiences are further sources of information for how to heal our community. When these states pass, as they inevitably do, more light energy fills our cells, las ánimas (the ancestors) nourishing and fueling us with photonic calories. We dance our palabra (word), we sing our flowers, we must *cumplir con nuestra obligación* (complete our obligation). With *conchas* (mandolin-style stringed instruments), ayacaxtli (ceremonial rattles), chachayotes (seed pod rattle anklets), our voices, the cuicameh (songs) feed and nourish the flowers, their life force being honored with each of our pasos (steps) danced on the earth. Our bodies, brown-skinned and sun-drenched, offer sweat back to the soil, participating in the water cycle of the planet, pouring tears as libations for the ancestors, absorbing photonic energy in a quantum reciprocity. A flower's song being expressed as the seeds it leaves for future generations to re-member.

Flowers and songs permeate these ceremonial spaces at many levels. For each ceremony, *lxs sahumadorxs*, in tlahuipuchtin, those who carry the sacred copal smoke, work for weeks or sometimes months envisioning, studying, and imagining what the central xictli, bellybutton altar, could look and feel like. Ultimately, they realize their ofrenda de flores (flower offering) on the momoztli (altar), an ephemeral-momentary beauty that last only a few hours. Nonetheless, the entire time they have been preparing, dreaming with the altar, they have been in ceremony. Similarly, every time they remember this xictli and its lessons, they re-member ceremony, they remain in ceremony. The flowers, the songs, are vessels of future memory.

Flowers demarcate the circular boundaries of ceremonial spacetime. Songs are offered to open and close. Flowers are woven together to be worn as crowns by danzantes. Songs are the basis for every danza. Flowers are embroidered onto colorful *huipiles* (traditional blouses). Songs are offered by the drummers and

musicians throughout the ceremonia. All these literal flowers and songs nourish a metaphorical and philosophical *spacetime of flowers and songs* – of poetry as the medium through which spiritual/scientific knowledge is sought, understood, produced and transmitted. Meta/physical flowers and songs bring us closer to the truth, to *neltiliztli*, to that which stands on a solid foundation.

There is an alabanza (worship song) that sings: “*solo dejaremos flores y cantos de esperanza*” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2016); declaring “we shall only leave flowers and songs of hope.” When we complete the ceremonial dance itself, *calpulequeh* (community members), often the children, distribute the flowers to those who came to offer their songs and *danzas*. *Danzantes* take these flowers to their homes or community altars, they put them in self-love salt baths, or they gift them back to the earth in a good way. The flowers will return to the soil, the songs will end. In this cycle of life/death, the seeds will again burst through the earth to sing, and we will ask permission to be like the flowers again, in service, as medicine for the community.

The Power of Ceremonial Spacetime

Quantum biologist Rupert Sheldrake theorizes “morphic” or “morphogenic fields” – a “group energy field that is held as a group awareness” (Bartlett 28). This opening of energetic communication across spacetime and dimensions is fundamental to an Anahuacan philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality. Performance scholar Richard Schechner (2010) theorizes this cross-generational timespace as strips of “restored behavior” (35), a performed re-remembering. Morphogenic fields and strips of behavior are quantum biological and performance studies interpretations of what is often practiced in ceremony. As Sheldrake argues:

In general, rituals are highly conservative in nature and must be performed in the right way, which is the same way that they have been performed in the past. Ritual acts must be performed with correct movements, gestures, words, and music throughout the world. If morphic resonance occurs as I think it does, this conservatism of ritual would create exactly the right conditions for morphic resonance to occur between those performing the ritual now and all of those who performed it previously (quoted in Bartlett 32).

The original instructions of ceremonial protocol are there for a reason. Not only to protect the practice, but also to harmonize, to ensure our survival as a species on our home planet. These ways of life are part and parcel of *danza* as ceremonial science/poetry/spirituality, that is, as *principles of living in harmony*, as the lifeways that have been created for the sake of our continued co-existence.

This approach to existing in the cosmos as an interconnected whole – where each part is also the whole and vice versa – implies a way of knowing that must attend

to these multivalent, dynamic connections themselves as sites of epistemic density. This produces a method of *relationships as primary epistemology*. I argue that danza itself is one such methodology, a theoretico-praxis of relationality, that is, a ceremonial science/poetry/spirituality.

This is because a philosophy of Native science, as theorized by Cajete (2000), “has always been broad based. It is not based on rational thought alone but incorporates to the fullest degree all aspects of interactions of ‘humans in and of nature,’ that is, the knowledge and truth gained from interaction of body, mind, soul, and spirit with all aspects of nature” (64). In danza as ceremonial science/art/spirituality: feeling, intuition, observation, interpretation, learning from elders, creating new concepts – all are ways in which mitotianimeh (danzantes) embody masculine/feminine ways of knowing at once and in harmony. Western binaries of Nature/Culture are not only irrelevant but dangerous – they abstract Nature as something somehow outside of ourselves and our being, something to be measured and studied only in its material sense. As Maestro Mauricio Orozpe (2013) observes:

A raíz del cambio de paradigma durante el Renacimiento europeo, la ciencia occidental se ha orientado hacia la invención de herramientas para descifrar la naturaleza física del mundo. En cambio, los pueblos del Anahuac interpretaban la realidad como una función de la conciencia, lo que les llevó a estudiar los procesos mentales en un esfuerzo por descifrar la naturaleza de la percepción.

[At the root of the change of paradigm during the European Renaissance, western science became oriented towards the invention of tools to decode the physical aspects of nature. Instead, Anahuacan peoples interpreted reality as a function of consciousness, which compelled them to study mental processes in an effort to decode the nature of perception.] (24, my translation)

Through a mitotiani epistemology where danzantes are understood as human beings in and of nature, studying the dynamics of the worlds around us implies studying the dynamics of the worlds within. Inner and outer worlds are understood as two sides of one totality – as inseparable, mirrored reflections of each other. Coming to know the truth in this way is a matter of a *shift in perception*. In Cajete’s (2000) words, “Native science practice attempts to connect the ‘in-scape’ – our human intelligence, a microcosm of the intelligence of the Earth and the universe – with the heart and mind” (71). Danza as ceremonial science/art/spirituality is the embodiment of these cosmic inner/outer movements – a temporary state of coming to know ourselves as relatives of the cosmos. In this way, flowers and songs are a way

to “decode the nature of perception” (Orozpe 24) through ceremonial consciousness and coming to know through “inner work, public acts” (Anzaldúa 2002).

Chicueyi Coatl (2014) argues that this was possible when *mitotianimeh* (danzantes) were “able to not only see the essence of things but when they were able to go inside the essence of things: the Cuahuiltin (Trees), the Xochimeh (flowers), the Citlaltin (Stars), the Macehualtin (human beings), Tonatiuh (the Sun)...the whole Nature. Then they understood there must be something that gives LIFE. They found the Neltiliztli in the Sacred Energies, in IPALNEMOHUANI in the abode of OMETEOTL” (6). This is danza’s *xochicuicatl* philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality – *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza* as *going inside the essence of things*. This is the spacetime of in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl*, the time and place of flowers and songs, the zone of the poetic/spiritual/scientific. Knowing “la esencia de las cosas,” (Macias 136) by *becoming* them, *danzantes* come to know poetically in the Lordean (2007) sense of the term, when she states:

This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought, as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding (Lorde 36).

In *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* is a spacetime of *spiritual* knowledge insofar as it refers to David Delgado Shorter’s (2016) notion of spirituality as “intersubjectivity”/“relationality.” In *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* is a spacetime of *scientific* knowing insofar as this refers to Cajete’s (2000) Native science as “natural laws of interdependence.” In *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* is a spacetime of *poetic* knowledge insofar as it refers to Lorde’s (2007) “distillation of experience.” Knowing through feeling, through relating, through loving – “*azo tle nelli in tlalticpac?*” [is that the only truth on earth?] (León-Portilla 1963: 75).

Chapter 5

Tlamachiliztli/Tlamatiliztli: Danza as Native Science and Technology

From Science Singular to Sciences Plural

On April 22, 2017, a day celebrated as “Earth Day” in over 150 countries, the inaugural March for Science took place as a global day of action. Over 1 million people participated in various actions in over 600 cities, with Washington D.C. in the United States as the largest contingent – with an estimated 100,000 attendees (“March for Science”). In the lead-up to this mass mobilization – purportedly in defense of science itself – many different popular debates and conversations emerged over the nature of science and its role in our day-to-day lives. Among these critical conversations, a group of Indigenous scholars and supporters published an “Indigenous Science Declaration” (2017), as a means of engaging in public dialogue with the larger March for Science movement and moment. These co-authors expressed their endorsement and support for the larger march, while also considering the question of Indigenous science in particular, in relation to shared concerns over the state of the environment, sustainability and the role and value of science at large. They wrote:

As original peoples, we have long memories, centuries old wisdom and deep knowledge of this land and the importance of empirical, scientific inquiry as fundamental to the well-being of people and planet.

Let us remember that long before Western science came to these shores, there were Indigenous scientists here. Native astronomers, agronomists, geneticists, ecologists, engineers, botanists, zoologists, watershed hydrologists, pharmacologists, physicians and more—all engaged in the creation and application of knowledge which promoted the flourishing of both human societies and the beings with whom we share the planet. We give gratitude for all their contributions to knowledge. Native science supported indigenous culture, governance and decision making for a sustainable future –the same needs which bring us together today.

As we endorse and support the March for Science, let us acknowledge that there are multiple ways of knowing that play an essential role in advancing knowledge for the health of all life. Science, as concept and process, is translatable into over 500 different Indigenous languages in the U.S. and thousands world-wide. Western science is a powerful approach, but it is not the only one (“Indigenous Science Declaration” 1).

In this generous critique, Native scientists, scholars and allies are calling on those who support the March for Science to reconsider the terms of engagement themselves – redefining, expanding and calling into question what we mean by “science” as a concept. In this way, they situate the dominant understanding of Science as such – what Dr. Kim TallBear has called “Big S Science” (“Widening the Lens”) – as an approach to knowledge that emerges from a decidedly Westernized worldview, an approach whose historical arrival to “these shores” was, and continues to be, embedded within a larger settler colonial project. They invite us to de-center Western ways of knowing and claims to universality, asking us to shift from Science singular, to sciences plural.

In this way, the co-authors make clear that Western science has not been a neutral force in Indigenous communities and ways of knowing. On the contrary, they ask that the harm that has taken place in the name of Science be acknowledged in light of this larger call to defend science as such. They state:

We acknowledge and honor our ancestors and draw attention to the ways in which Indigenous communities have been negatively impacted by the misguided use of Western scientific research and institutional power. Our communities have been used as research subjects, experienced environmental racism, extractive industries that harm our homelands and have witnessed Indigenous science and the rights of Indigenous peoples dismissed by institutions of Western science.

While Indigenous science is an ancient and dynamic body of knowledge, embedded in sophisticated cultural epistemologies, it has long been marginalized by the institutions of contemporary Western science. However, traditional knowledge is increasingly recognized as a source of concepts, models, philosophies and practices which can inform the design of new sustainability solutions. It is both ancient and urgent (“Indigenous Science Declaration” 2).

In the context of settler colonialism, slavery and genocide – central analytics in the field of critical Ethnic Studies – science has been profoundly complicit, and in fact instrumental in historical and ongoing violence on the land and Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999). As the “Indigenous Science Declaration” (2017) makes clear, part of this violence has also been epistemic – marginalizing, silencing or seeking to erase Indigenous ways of knowing from their respective places and peoples, as they seek to “destroy to replace” (Wolfe 2006). In this way, the authors of the “Indigenous Science Declaration” point to, albeit implicitly, the decolonization of knowledge and power that is necessary for us to truly plan for a sustainable future as a species – as a community who share a common home on Mother Earth. They ask us to consider the possibilities of *intercultural*, *pluriversal* ways of knowing and thinking across

worldviews. In this critique they do not advocate for the end of Western science – instead they ask for collaboration, for *co-existence*. They state:

Indigenous science provides a wealth of knowledge and a powerful alternative paradigm by which we understand the natural world and our relation to it. Embedded in cultural frameworks of respect, reciprocity, responsibility and reverence for the earth, Indigenous science lies within a worldview where knowledge is coupled to responsibility and human activity is aligned with ecological principles and natural law, rather than against them. We need both ways of knowing if we are to advance knowledge and sustainability...We envision a productive symbiosis between Indigenous and Western knowledges that serve our shared goals of sustainability for land and culture. This symbiosis requires mutual respect for the intellectual sovereignty of both Indigenous and Western sciences (“Indigenous Science Declaration” 1).

In this dissertation, I have been motivated by this desire for cross-cultural, epistemic conviviality and pluriversality. To this end, I have dedicated this chapter to understanding the practice of danza as an embodied modality of Native science. A danza for Tlaloc serves as the framework for understanding danza as a form of *ceremonial agroecological knowledge*. This provides a space of dialogue between danza and forms of knowledge that are disciplined in the Westernized University as the “natural sciences” – chemistry, astronomy, Earth science, physics – and the “life science” of biology – or perhaps, most broadly, as STEM. I privilege *agroecology* as a transdisciplinary field within the Westernized academy that has been capacious enough to value and respect Indigenous community knowledge. Agroecology in practice already serves as a place of epistemic harmony and cross-pollination (Altieri and Nicholls 2012; Gliessman, et al. 1998). This epistemic diversity guides the final thoughts on this subject – on science as *scientia*, as sentience, as consciousness, as knowing. Danza remains the central space from which this dialogue is grounded – towards larger, more general considerations of intercultural possibilities and solutionalities.

Danza as Native Science

The concept of science as an objective, disembodied, experimental method/ology of inquiry is a decidedly Western posture – an historical epistemic structure rooted in European Renaissance/Enlightenment modernity/coloniality. Sciences plural – or science with a little s – might get closer to the heart of the Native science approach that is incumbent to the danza tradition. This is science at its most open and generous – a state of knowing that is “all about how we delve into the unknown” (Little Bear 0:40-0:50). This needn’t be a professionalized, nor specialized

task. As Cajete (2000) makes clear, “while there were tribal specialists with particular knowledge of technologies and ritual, each member of the tribe in his or her own capacity was a scientist, an artist, a storyteller, and a participant in the great web of life” (2). In this way:

Native science is a broad term that can include metaphysics and philosophy; art and architecture; practical technologies and agriculture; and ritual and ceremony practiced by Indigenous people both past and present. More specifically, Native science encompasses such areas as astronomy, farming, plant domestication, medicine, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, metallurgy, and geology – in brief, studies related to plants, animals, and natural phenomena. Yet, Native science extends to include spirituality, community, creativity, and technologies that sustain environments and support essential aspects of human life. It may even include exploration of questions such as the nature of language, thought, and perception; the movement of time and space; the nature of human knowing and feeling; the nature of human relationship to the cosmos; and all questions related to natural reality (3).

This notion of Native science, as outlined and substantiated at length by Dr. Gregory Cajete (2000), is what guides this chapter’s considerations of danza as Native science. However, it is also important to emphasize here that this approach to Native science could also be said to center the entirety of this study. In fact, in its earliest stages, this project began as an exploration of danza primarily as a form of Native science. This inquiry brought about the necessity to flesh out and explicitly investigate the ways in which danza enacts artistic, creative, spiritual, emotional and political labor as well. Nonetheless, these modalities intersect through this matrix of danza as Native science. In other words, Native science is also Native art/science/spirituality – as interconnected praxes that are all rooted in a xochicuicatl epistemology.

When speaking about Indigenous or Native science, one is really talking about the entire edifice of Indigenous knowledge. Using the word ‘science’ is in many ways arbitrary, and it can be said to relate specifically to the way in which people come to know something, or anything at all. But Indigenous science encompasses all of the kinds of knowledge that are part of an Indigenous mind-set, which is essentially relational. Thus, the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘science’ are used interchangeably among Indigenous scientists (Cajete 2000: 4).

In fact, Cajete's (1994) first book (based on his doctoral dissertation in Education)⁹⁰ *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*, includes illustrations (by Cajete himself) that illustrate his own understandings of in xochitl, in cuicatl as a philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality, a mitotiani epistemology.

The Asking

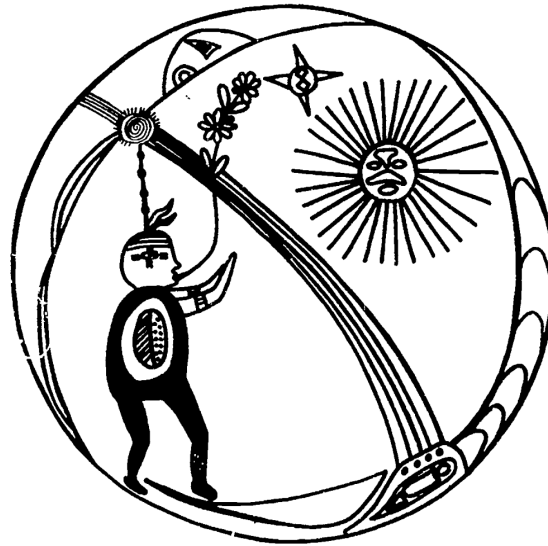


Figure 8:
"The Asking" by Gregory Cajete
Source: Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, p. 24



Figure 9:
Cover Image for *Look to the Mountain*
Source: Cajete 1994

⁹⁰ Cajete, Gregory. "Science: A Native American Perspective": A Culturally Based Science Education Curriculum. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. International College, Los Angeles, 1986.

His descriptions of his own illustrations describe their symbology and inspiration:

The cover illustration is inspired by the tradition of Huichol Indian Yarn Painting, and represents the first act in the journey toward understanding, that of Asking. Looking to the 'inner form' of an archetypal mountain, the human form asks for and receives understanding, with the trickster, in the form of a spider monkey, and four kokopeli looking on. As the 'flower and song' of the human touches the face of the great mystery, the human connects to a great 'rainbow of thought and relationship' which brings illumination and true understanding of the 'ecology of relationship' and of the inherent truth, 'We are all related!' (Cajete 1994: 4).

Cajete himself, as a Native scientist, is also a Native artist and philosopher. These descriptions, as a window into his work in general, serve as the scaffolding for the central concepts of this chapter, and of this dissertation in general. In *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* – what Cajete (1994) describes as the “flower and song of the human” – is the Asking, “looking to the inner form” and arriving at the truth, “we are all related” (4). These foundations of ceremonial consciousness, an Anahuacan cosmovisión and a mitotiani epistemology can now bring us towards theoretico-praxes of ceremonial ecology, astronomy and geometry/mathematics.

Tlamatiliztli/Tlamachiliztli

While there is no direct translation for the Western concept of “science” to Nahuatl, I choose to trace the presence of Native science in *danza* through the concept of *tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* (*mati-/machi-*). As an agonistic inamic unity (Maffie 137), an always already two-sided concept of knowing, these two terms are one. Thinking from Nahuatl in this way, I theorize *tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* as an *Anahuacan philosophy of Native science*. In *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* and *tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* are closely related, as Anahuacan ways of knowing and coming to know. However, what I have theorized in the previous chapter through in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* now turns to one of its applications – that is, ways of knowing astronomy, ecology, mathematics and geometry. For the purposes of this study, *tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* is an Other way of saying Native (Anahuacan) science.

The relationship between each side of *tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* illustrates their inseparability – and also the nature of Anahuacan thought. Each side of *tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* is often translated as “knowledge,” “knowing,” or “wisdom” (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). The root concepts of *mati-* vis-á-vis *machi-* are understood as Anahuacan concepts that have to do with the nature of knowledge. *Matiliztli* and *machiliztli* exist in a dialectic relationship of “received” or “inherited”

knowledge and “created” or “produced” knowledge (Chicueyi Coatl 2014). León-Portilla (1963) translates and interprets this epistemic relationship, beginning with an analysis of the concept of *machize* in the so-called Codice Florentino:

‘his is the handed-down wisdom’: This thought is expressed in Nahuatl by a single word, *machize*, derived from *machiliztli*, with the suffix *e* indicating possession; thus ‘to him belongs...’ The compound loses the ending *tli* and becomes *machiz-e*. *Machize* is derived from the passive form of *mati*, ‘to know,’ which is *macho*, ‘to be known,’; accordingly it may be called ‘a passive substantive,’ wisdom known, handed down from person to person by tradition. Its correlative form is *(tla)-matiliztli*, wisdom or knowledge in an active sense; that is, acquired knowledge (12).

As the “active” and “passive” side of “knowledge” or “wisdom,” *mati/machi* refers to the process of knowledge acquisition – knowing what is known – and production – knowing in your own way. In other words, coming-to-know vis-á-vis producing knowledge. The notion of “production” is not a capitalist sense of intellectual property. In an Anahuacan cosmovisión – where each person carries their own unique combination of energies and therefore perspectives – how one expresses this knowledge is a *machi*- experience, an act of knowing.

This relationship between knowledge and knowing in *mati/machi* cannot be reduced to a Eurocentric archive/repertoire binary. However, Taylor’s (2003) notions of recorded and performed ways of knowing do serve us here, insofar as we decolonize the terms of engagement. That is, the Western notion of an “archive” as such remains a colonial introduction and structure of knowledge. In the next chapter we will delve further into this debate, guided by the questions: What is writing? What is reading? What is thinking? However, for the purposes of understanding *tamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* as an Anahuacan concept of science, I will point out that *machi*- as “passive” knowledge and *mati*- as “active knowledge” does gesture at the importance of understanding the “performatic” nature of Anahuacan science. Thinking critically through the “centuries old privileging of written over embodied knowledge,” (8) Taylor (2003) writes:

It is vital to signal the performatic, digital, and visual fields as separate from, though always embroiled with, the discursive one so privileged by Western logocentrism. The fact that we don’t have a word to signal that performatic space is a product of that same logocentrism rather than a confirmation that there’s no there there (6).

In this way, I argue that *tamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* in fact does provide a more holistic notion of these different “discursive spaces” – especially when situated within the

practice of ceremonial dance. It also reaffirms the fact that many of the interventions that have emerged from the Westernized tradition of performance studies are revelatory primarily for the West, or other “logocentric” (Taylor 2003: 6) systems of thought. From an Anahuacan perspective, so-called “performance” has always been central to the nature of knowledge.

If in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* is understood as a way of knowing as “asking,” (Cajete 1994: 24) *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* is a way of knowing as *practicing/listening*. This is the primary connection I draw between *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* and Native science itself. If Native science, like all sciences (little s, plural), is a state of knowing, *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli* is an Anahuacan state of knowing – which, as argued above, is a dancing, singing, and ceremonial state of knowing. The concept of science as a form of verifiable, repeatable or predictable knowledge in the West has become an end in itself – conducting “normal science” (Kuhn 2012) with the tools (technologies) familiar to this paradigm. However, the transgenerational transfer of knowledge that happens through *danza* – of *neltiliztli*, of “that which stands tall”, “that which is remains True” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014) – is at the heart of Native science as *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli*. Through in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl*, one can come to know what is true. What is learned through in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* is Native science as *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli*, as *practicing/listening*.

This is how *danza* becomes a practice of Native science. The roles of *temachtiani* (teacher, educator) *tlatimini* (“wise one,” or “they who know”), and *tlamacazqui* (ceremonial leader) continue to be practiced by contemporary *danzante* communities throughout Anahuac/Turtle Island/Abya Yala. Furthermore, the practice of *ixtlamachiliztli* (as education) circulates as such in *danza* circles as a notion of (decolonial) pedagogy, especially from *grupos* who carry an “educational” purpose such as *Danza In Xochitl*, *In Cuicatl* at UC Berkeley and *Anahuacalmecac* in Los Angeles. All these concepts share a root in *mati-/machi-* – that is, ways of knowing. Therefore, in this chapter, I will explore *danza* as an embodied form of Native science as *tlatiliztli/tlamachiliztli*. This understanding of knowledge, as *practicing/listening* is encoded in *danza* through a *xochicuicatl* epistemology, a *mitotiani* philosophy of science/poetry/spirituality. These terms guide this chapter as I trace the presence of agroecological, astronomical, and mathematic/geometric knowledge in *danza*.

Danza as Embodied Astronomy and Mathematics: Nepohualtzintzin and Tonalpohualli

During the Fall Equinox of 2019, Calpulli Huey Papalotl was invited to offer a ceremonial opening for a local social justice organization. The ceremony took place at Chabot Space and Science Center in the hills of Oakland, CA. During this ceremony, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl invited the circle to consider that what we were practicing in that moment, through *danza*, was in fact a form of science. It seemed synchronistic

that we were invited to hold this ceremonial opening at a Space and Science Center, for an event entitled “We are All Made of Stars” (Fieldnotes, Fall 2019). After inviting the community to join our danza, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl argued: “this is your first astronomy lesson – the four directions.” She emphasized that “we aren’t just here jumping up and down, if you want to just jump up and down go to Zumba, but if you want to learn how our ancestors did science, come learn danza...If you want to learn how to plant the corn, how to follow the movements of *Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli*, aka Venus, come learn ‘*maíz*’, the corn dance. If you want to learn about the solar calendar and counting of time and space, learn *Tonantzin*, the mother earth dance” (Ibid.).

During this ceremony, danzante-scholar Muteado Silencio offered the danza *Tonatiuh*, the sun dance. Through this danza Muteado became the sun, dancing left/right, rising and setting, moving from solstice to solstice, through the equinox and *tonalnepantla* (zenith sun) with each cycle. Danza itself is a solar dance. This is why it is traditional to start danzas at noon, “*la hora cósmica*” (Fieldnotes, Ixtliocelotl, Fall 2016). Each time a danzante is given danza, asked to dance in the center of the ceremonial circle, directly in front of the altar, they are said to become the sun (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2015). Dancing with the sun, as the sun, Anahuacan scientists developed one of the most precise countings of time (calendars) in human history – *tonalmachiotl*. They also developed Anahuacan mathematics as *nepohualtzintzin*, “our venerable, precious system of counting” (Lara González 2004). As an abacus-style counting system, some danzantes will wear the nepohualtzintzin on their wrist as they dance. This sacred instrument is considered an arma, a spiritual weapon, which is to say, a healing tool. Wearing the nepohualtzintzin as a *muñecera* (bracelet) is a danza-based mathematical technology, an Anahuacan-style ceremonial calculator, a Toltec Apple Watch.



Figure 10:
Example of Nepohualtzintzin as part of ceremonial regalia
(Source: @b_e_marquez)

Danzante and traditional mathematician Everardo Lara González (2004) provides a rich study of danza as nepohualtzintzin. I quote at length from his work *Paso, Camino y Danzo Con la Cuenta de la Armonía: Teoría Matemática del Origen del Universo, y el Orden de la Cuenta del Maíz, en La Danza del Anáhuac*:

En la danza de nuestros ancestros se manifiestan expresiones cuyas connotaciones pertenecen a un orden de pensamiento matemático y geométrico ligado a la cuenta del tiempo, que ilustran desde: el origen del orden de la creación, el movimiento de los astros: como el sol, el enigmático planeta Venus o la resplandeciente luna, el devenir de las edades de la humanidad en el tiempo, este tiempo precioso que en el pasado posee sentido y distancia: la presencia del maíz en nuestro existir, así como sus periodos de siembra y cosecha, las cuentas calendáricas de la órbita solar y de los destinos, y, desde luego, la gestación misma del ser humano.

Asimismo, el cuerpo humano en armonía con el espíritu, es, en la danza, un instrumento generador de energía a través de la descarga termodinámica, creando un campo de rotación de aparentes giros opuestos alrededor del movimiento corporal, tratando de reordenar el campo electromagnético que lo sincronice con la jerarquía cósmica con nuestra madre tierra y demás seres que la habitan, por lo que se propone que se restablezca el orden sublime mediante un código matemático de cualidad de pasos y ritmos que exponencien el mensaje de conducción de vida a través de la danza.

El presente trabajo pretende aportar los suficientes elementos de análisis para configurar una lógica de conjunto donde, a través de la matemática, la metáfora de los números del idioma náhuatl, la teoría de la gran explosión, el mito y el calendario ritual del maíz, se evidencie a la danza tradicional del Anáhuac como una teoría matemática del origen del Universo asociada al rito, desde la selección de la semilla hasta el florecimiento del maíz, a través de la cosmovisión de mensajes que emanan del cuerpo, de las coreografías y de su rítmica.

[In the dance of our ancestors, there are expressions whose meanings belong to an order of mathematical thought and geometry linked to the counting of time, that illustrate: the origin of order in Creation, astronomical movements: like the sun, the enigmatic planet Venus or the brilliant moon, the future of the ages of humanity in time, this precious time that in the past has sense and distance: the presence of maíz in our existence, like the periods of sowing and harvest, the calenderic counts

of the solar orbit and of life paths, and, of course, the gestation itself of the human being.

Likewise, the human body in harmony with the spirit, is, in danza, an instrument that generates energy through thermodynamic discharge, creating a field of rotation with apparent opposite spins through embodied movement, trying to reorganize the electromagnetic field so that it synchronizes with the cosmic hierarchy and with our Mother Earth and with other beings that inhabit her, so it is proposed that the sublime order be restored through a mathematical code that is given steps and rhythms that relay the message of how to live through danza.

My current work seeks to contribute enough analytical elements to configure a logic of set analysis where, through mathematics, the metaphor of numbers in the Nahuatl language, the big bang theory, the myth and ritual calendar of corn, is evidences through the traditional danza of Anahuac like a mathematical theory of the origin of the universe associated with ritual, from the selection of the seed through the flowering of the corn, through the cosmivision of messages that emanate from the body, of choreographies and its rhythm.] (19-20, my translation)

Through Maestro Lara González's (2004) work on the relationship between mathematics and danza, he clarifies that Anahuacan mathematics is both quantitative and qualitative. That is, while numbers most obviously function as a form of counting, they also serve as metaphors themselves – each number means something qualitatively. One example Maestro Lara González presents in this way is the *caracol*, the empty conch shell, which is used to symbolize the concept of 0 in Anahuacan mathematics. According to Lara González (2004), the conch shell represents the 0 in that it is the vessel, it is the shell itself after the conch animal has died or otherwise vacated the container. It may be eventually taken up again by another conch, in which case it will lose its significance as a metaphor for 0. However, while the shell is in this state of vacancy, it serves as a metaphor for 0. The spiral form that naturally forms on the conch shell gives shape to this concept of 0, representing the spiral of time, the expanding/contracting dynamic energies of the universe. Maestro Lara González relates the presence of the *atecocolli*, the conch shell trumpet-like instrument, in danza to this mathematical meaning. He also relates this metaphorical zero to the *sahumador*, the incense holder for the sacred copal smoke. Lastly, he argues that the spinning and jumping movements of danza all embody this symbolic 0, a spiraling expansion/contraction of cosmic movement. These metaphorical 0's bring the spiral energy into danza through smoke, sound and movement.

Maestro Lara González (2004) provides further evidence for the embodied symbolism of two, four, seven, thirteen and twenty – all significant numbers in the

Anahuacan counting of time and space. Two is duality, represented in the harmonic balancing of the moving body itself. Four is the structure of the cross, the symbol of stability, a shape found throughout the structure and movements of danza. The seven is ascendance, represented in the dancing Anahuacan body by counting the major joints on one side of the outstretched arms and legs: the ankle, knee, hip, shoulder, elbow, wrist and neck becoming a spiraling seven in the body. Thirteen is one complete bundle of joints in the body, and the relationship between the circle and the ascending spiral. Twenty represents the square, the twenty digits on the four limbs, and the pantli, the ceremonial flag used throughout the danza tradition (Lara González 2004: 26-42).

Jefa Irma Piñeda of Grupo Teokalli, one of the oldest danza groups in the San Francisco Bay Area, teaches that the danza de *Tonantzin*, the Mother Earth dance, like all danzas, should never be altered or improvised (Fieldnotes, Summer 2016). In the case of *Tonantzin*, the danza contains the embodied mathematics of the xiuhpohualli, the solar counting of time. From the perspective of earth, it takes 365.25 days for one complete solar cycle. Therefore, the earth dance carries the following math:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &9 \text{ steps to the left} + 9 \text{ steps to the right} = 18 \\
 &x 2 \text{ repetitions} = 36 \\
 &x 5 \text{ variations of flores} = 180 \\
 &x 2 \text{ repetitions} = 360 \\
 &\quad + 5.25 \text{ days for } \textit{Nemontemi} \\
 &\quad = 365.25
 \end{aligned}$$

This is also part of the mathematics that can be found in the Anahuacan body. In total, the human body contains 360 bones, in other words, another xiuhpohualli.

Dancing in the Anahuacan body, we are dancing with numbers, calculating complex formulas and differential equations to measure the cosmos with and through the body. This is also evidenced by some of the Nahuatl terminology that is used to describe the practice of astronomy. "*In iohtlatoquiliz in inematacacholiz in ilhuiatl*," what León-Portilla (1963) translates as "the movements and the orderly operations of the heavens," includes "*i-oh-tlatoquiliz*" as "running along the path of the sky" and "*i-ne-ma-taca-choliz*" as "he places his hand upon the flight of the sky" or "he measures with his hand the flight or the crossing of the stars" (20). The hand is the primary technology of measurement, which then provides an embodied relationship to the mathematical and geometric shapes of the cosmos. As Capitán Andrés Segura (2012) has also argued, "*si somos la medida del universo, tenemos que partir de nosotros mismos*" ["if we are the measure of the universe, we have to start from ourselves"] (34:34-34:40, my translation). Capitán Segura asserts this as he also pats his own body with his hands, as if to say, this is our most reliable tool of measurement.

This embodied mathematics overlaps with Western physics' usage of mathematics as an extension of the senses. Experimental physicist and musician

Stephon Alexander (2016) describes mathematics in this way for the Western tradition of physics, writing that:

Mathematics is like a new sense, beyond our physical senses, that enables us to comprehend things that we cannot understand fully through our own perceptions and intuitions. In fact, many realms of physics, as well as aspects of other sciences, like chemistry and biology, are highly counterintuitive. They follow rules that, although consistent and comprehensible, cannot be seen without using mathematics to extend our perceptions (34).

The difference here, however, is that Alexander (2016) is seeking to bridge the gaps between Western physics and jazz music, especially through bridging the work of Albert Einstein and John Coltrane. In the Anahuacan context however, mathematics and music, geometry and danza have always been profoundly intertwined through Anahuacan ceremony and cosmovisión. Nonetheless, mathematics as an extension of the senses takes on a new meaning when those numbers are understood as being always already embodied.

Danza is organized principally by the tonalpohualli, the sacred Anahuacan system of counting time and space. The days and times of danza ceremonies are planned according to these calculations, and these calculations are made through observation of astronomical phenomena. Groups name themselves after celestial metaphors – suns as eagles, constellations as butterflies, eclipses as the rabbit moon eating the eagle sun. Danzas are offered to Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli and *Huey Xolotl* – otherwise known as the planet of Venus in the morning and evening sky respectively. There are danzas for the phases of the moon, the Milky Way galaxy and of course, the sun. The relationships between these cosmic movements and the rhythms of agriculture and other aspects of everyday life are mediated through danza.

Furthermore, as I have already discussed in Chapter Three, the circular microcosm of danza ceremonies is itself a small model of the astronomical universe. It is as if danzantes are creating a means by which the cosmos are made visible and accessible on the surface of the earth. Within this ceremonial structure, the circle and square, danzantes enter the cosmos as the astros. Dancing, playing, singing, praying in this space, they seek harmony through embodying their cosmic relatives. Through some danzas, danzantes become cosmic butterflies, through others, feet and joints become planets in orbital motion. Danzas for each day of the tonalpohualli – the twenty day signs – build relationship with these phenomena not only as non-human animals (such as lizards, eagles, and jaguars), but also as the astronomical metaphors these signs represent. Each of these *tonaltin* (solar energies) represents a ray of the sun, a photonic energy that lives on the surface of the earth as a dog, or a crocodile, or snake. Other cosmic movements, or movement itself, ollin, are also embodied through danza. In Maffie's (2014) descriptions of teotl as ollin (motion-change), as

malinalli (braided grass) and nepantla (middling), he emphasizes these as the “how” not “what” of the Anahuacan cosmos (185). Each of these “how’s” also has a danza associated with them – teaching the danzante *how* the cosmos move through moving *like* them. “Asking” (Cajete 1994) through a xochicuicatl philosophy of science, danzantes come to know ome/teotl through mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza – embodying cosmogony, astronomy, physics and mathematics. I now pivot from danza as astronomy and mathematics to danza as agriculture and ecology. These embodied knowledge systems are all enfolded within the danza tradition – connecting the past, present and future of ceremonial agroecology.

La Danza de Tlaloc

*Tlaloc es la lluvia, cuando llega hasta la tierra la fecunda
Señor de las tempestades, allí en Sacramonte se oye sus cantares
Nican ca, nican ca Tecuhtzin Tlaloc, nican ca*

[Tlaloc is the rain, when the fertility reaches earth
Protector of storms, there in Sacramonte you can hear their songs
They are present, Protector Tlaloc, they are present]

(Endoqui 2011, my translation)

Permiso

El toque del huehuetl, the beat of the drum, the heart. Corazón de la Tierra, Corazón del Cielo, Corazon del Cosmos. *Pidiendo permiso de los guardianes de este lugar*, asking permission of *lxs tlaloqueh*, water relatives, thank you for giving us Life. The energy of the water, this is an offering for you. Aqua dulce, de la Tierra, del Cielo, fresh water that meets from the clouds to the soil, *Tlalocantecuhtli-Chalchihuitlicue*, the vibrations that dance in rivers and down to great lakes and back to Mother Ocean. To all these relations, we give thanks.

1-Xochitl

Walking with heavy steps, three times to the left, we awaken Mother Earth, letting her know we are here and conscious of her love – we pull/push this energy from our heart side. Looking, gazing, with open eyes, to Mictlampa, we become thunder, we become a strike of lightning, we connect the above and below, the over there and the right here beneath our feet. Then the arms swing back to the right and we walk to Huitztlampa, looking at this corner of the universe in the eye, calling on you Tlalocantecuhtli, they who protect the ongoing circular movements of water.

Base

You who wear a skin of *ocelotl*, ornamented coat of beloved jaguar/earth/wisdom. With you we jump, we hunt, we search, we seek out, we pay attention. We become *mazatl*, deer. We contract, we expand, we search left, we search right, sensitive to our surroundings, feeling the space and time with outstretched antler antennae, never making the same mistake twice.

2-Xochitl

As the winds turn, the storm begins to let us know they are on their way, *con su vientecito*, your soft *soplos* of moist air that sweeten the passage of time. Small vortices form as we spin, left, and right, turning our gaze upwards, towards the dark clouds that have formed above. We throw our heads back to turn to you, with outstretched arms, asking this sacred cycle of life and death, of water rising and water falling, to continue, to move through, and with us, with the water that rises and falls, in our bodies, and in our hearts.

Base

The *mazatl*, deer as hunter, returns, still wrapped in the skin of *ocelotl*, agricultural heart of the earth. The farmer and the hunter, seeking to feed their people in harmony. To keep us strong, fed, nourished. Our *chachayotes* sounding as wet stones, we are vigilant, patient, sensitive.

3-Xochitl

The water is pulled up from the earth, invisibly, but tangibly. Our bodies evaporating with each step and breath of the earth. *Chalchihuitlicue*, they who wear a skirt of jade, the precious color of blood when it is still wrapped in our skin, pumping from the heart of the earth, through her arms and veins. Our hands scooping up the moisture of the ground, lifting it to the sky, filling the clouds with a soft mist.

Base

The clouds accumulate, as the deer/jaguar continues their dance. Seeing without light, feeling with every faculty – each hair, a way of sensing. In this state, we dance tasting the sweet pulque of the earth, which is made brackish when it meets the salted sweat of our brows. Our neck is soft and flexible from peripheral motions.

4-Xochitl

The clouds turn a deep shade of grey, a few final moist gusts blow. Lighting strikes through our outstretched arms, grounded through our *huaraches*, and connects to fertilize the thirsty brown soil on which we dance. Most mammals seek shelter from the storm, reptiles prepare for the feast.

Base

The jungle/earth, masculine/feminine dancer returns to the source. Bowing to the momoztli, redistributing the medicine to all our relations. It is a skipping motion, a zig zag that stomps on the still-dry soil. The misty air begins to thicken. And then, at last, a simultaneous lightning/thunder arrival.

5-Xochitl

Cool, clean, hard rain begins to pour down, as if a great gourd in the sky, as large as the earth, starts overflowing, being tipped over and emptied onto the world below. Clouds soak in these cosmic waters, fill fat as sea sponges, and join in the downpour. These waters come in vertical waves. Bodies fold left, then right legs bend, jumping/dropping/squatting and twisting/turning/splashing about. The flowers, the trees, the earth – become drunk, bloated and ecstatic.

Base

The hunter/farmer is now dancing with full intensity – a frantic energy that is unpanicked and articulate – a graceful deer that accepts her death with humility and respect.

6-Xochitl

Now with quickened pace, calling on the north, the south, the dead, the children, we bathe in the downpour. Brown, wet, fertile, flesh, planted with corn. Small puddles form on the skin of the huehuetl drum, splashing into vibrating geometric patterns with each stroke. With eyes turned to the sky, rolling under closed eyelids, our palms outstretched, giving/receiving.

Base

An accelerated, screaming, toward/away, stomping expansion/contraction.

7-Xochitl

Time passes quickly, spinning wet tornados blur through the fog. One hand – an open palmed acceptance of abundance – the other, an immediate redistribution towards community and earth. Tears of joy, of grief, of healing – flow and cleanse the mind/body/spirit/land. Tlaloc-Chalchihuitlicue dancing in full regalia.

Base

One final push/pull, one final hunt/plant, one final towards/away. One final 1, 2, 3 stomp, 1, 2, 3, stomp. Expressing veneration, gratitude, asking for forgiveness. Rain drenched and thankful, returning to earth all at once.

Tlalocantecuhtli-Chalchihuitlicue: Ceremonial Agroecology and Watershed Consciousness

This danza is for the energy known as *Tlaloc* – or Tlalocantecuhtli-Chalchihuitlicue. The energy of the “pulque of the earth” (Fieldnotes, Ixtliocelotl, Fall 2017) – not a god nor a goddess, not a lord nor a lady. Resisting and subverting these colonial, missed translations, I turn to Tlaloc as the masculine/feminine energies of water that dance vertically and horizontally. One is the protective energy, the guardian of the *Tlaloqueh*, of the movement of the fertile waters of the earth, who dances and sings with she who wears a skirt of jade, whose placental waters give us life in tlatcicpac, here and now on the surface of the earth. They who accompany thirteen cycles of rain, *mactlactli huan ce quiahuitl*. They who protect the mazatl (deer) and wear a skin of ocelotl (jaguar).

For Tlaloc, there are danzas. One of them is described above. In this case, *con siete flores*, with seven petals on the flower of the dance, each one, embodying a step in the hydrological cycle of life. Here, danza as a human movement system is an embodied way of knowing irrigation and hydrology, is an *agroecological technology*. A way of re-membling, putting ourselves back together with the rhythm of Mother Earth that gives us water, that gives us corn, flowers and food, and therefore, life.

With the dancing, singing, playing body – *xochitonacayotzin* – as the primary instrument of inquiry, we seek to know how to live well, to live in right relation with water, because this is to be in right relation with ourselves and all our relations. As such, we embody the movements of lightning, of thunder, of the soft winds that signal the coming downpour, of evaporation, respiration and eventually precipitation, becoming the torrential rainfall that jumps from the sky to the earth. All of these movements are guided by the beat of heart, of the drum, and accompanied by the presence of *Mazatzin* – the beloved energy of the deer, the hunter, the sensitive and wise seeker of truth and knowledge – and the Ocelotl – the sun of the inframundo (underworld), *tepeyolohtli*, the “inner form” (Cajete 1994: 4) of the Heart of the Mountain, the beloved jaguar energy of the nocturnal earth. Mazatl energy rushes towards and away, expanding and contracting, always looking left and right, surveying the land with their sensitive horns as antennae, opening peripheral vision in a left/right swivel that sees in all four directions. Ocelotl energy is fierce, dark, masculine/feminine, and unafraid of underworlds – the seed that awaits the fertile waters of the rain to emerge and flourish in tlatcicpac.

These movements in the body, when synchronized and harmonized in community become a one heart, one mind *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*. The technology of the circle activates *moyocoyani* – a metaphor of DNA as “they who reproduce themselves” (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Fall 2014), they who carry the memory, that includes inter-species, reciprocal genetic modification with all our relations, and especially here, the corn. Our blood, sweat and tears, in other words the liquids in our bodies, in other words, our bodies’ Tlalocantecuhtli-Chalchihuitlicue,

irrigates and fertilizes the soil, where the ancestors, as seeds, drink in these libations. In the structure of ceremony – *in mitotilli, in tlamanalli* (in movement, in offering) – we enter the door into cosmic movement, returning to the womb of our beloved, collective Mother Earth, Tonantzin Tlalli. At the center is her xictli, her belly button, which is now our collective body’s belly button, that is, our place of nourishment and connection, first with our mother, and then with all our relations. Above this momoztli, this xictli, is her yollotl, her heart, which is our heart, which is the original heartbeat, the beat of the huehuetzotzonqueh (drummers). In the circle, that is the cypher, that is the womb, that is the 0, that is the place of birth and death, of everything and nothingness, we are warriors in battle, we are mitotianimeh ←→ teochitontequimeh, seeking harmony where there is conflict.

These communal, embodied circular motions, over time, form palimpsestic, residual spirals of memory. They are acts of presence, stories of survivance, that embody ancestral futures. They create a field of consciousness that is place-based and temporally infinite. This ceremony activates the lands and waters on which it is danced. Or more correctly, ceremony allows us to rejoin in with movements of the land and water, which were already dancing. In this case, the *Huey Teocalli de Tlaloc*, the venerable house of energy dedicated to Tlaloc, is a telecommunications device. This conocimiento – alive in the land, in the lake, and the hill – is given a human form through danza. In turn, the Huey Teocalli dedicated to Tlaloc (and also Huitzilopochtli, aka “Templo Mayor”) is an antenna whose frequency is connected to the *Cerro de Tlaloc* (Fieldnotes, Wash, Fall 2018). Danza as an applied modality of a xochicuicatl epistemology asks the water how to live in harmony with its precious, dancing cycles – attracting and connecting the waters that bring fertility, nourishment and life.



Figure 11:

A satellite map of contemporary Mexico City. The blue line here depicts the direct line that connects the *Huey Teocalli* with *Tlalocpetl* – The “Temple” for Tlaloc and the mountain where Tlaloc’s energy lives.

Source: Google Maps

Following los pasos de la danza (the steps of the danza), danzantes become ceremonial scientists, poet-warriors coming to know ecology, hydrology, and geomorphology. Integrating with cyclical danzas of Tlalocantecuhtli-Chalchihuitlicue, danzantes embody a *watershed consciousness*. Becoming the watershed is a Native science and ceremonial practice, through communal movement, medicine and sound. Observing the earthworks of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, I consider: perhaps this is how Nezahualcoyotl knew how to design the great aqueduct of Lake Texcoco – as much an act of poetry as it is water engineering. Perhaps this is how the *chinampas* – precious floating gardens – grew in abundance to provide nutritious food for the people.⁹¹ Perhaps this is why today many danzantes maintain their *milpas* (small farms).

Through danza as a way of knowing watershed consciousness and agroecological knowledge, we can re-member ancestral foodways. This knowledge itself lives in the danzas. This is in part because danza has its roots in agricultural knowledge (Poveda 1981). As Dr. Cintli (Rodríguez 2014) has argued, in conversation with Domingo Martínez Parédes, the intricate systems of counting time and space – the tonalpohualli, the xiuhpohualli – were made possible by these reciprocal relationships with corn (4). As the astronomical systems that organize danza ceremonies, it is important to recognize how this relationship with corn created the conditions through which this knowledge was developed in the first place. As danzante-scholar Citlalcoatl (2010) also advances, “we must keep in mind that we had urban centers in pre-Cuauhtemotzin times that practiced bio-intensive agriculture that sustained millions of people. The basic infrastructure that made this possible still exists within our traditional agricultural practices, systems of organization, and governance” (71). Or as Maestra Chicueyi Coatl has taught, having the ability to logistically sustain the urban centers of Teotihuacan and eventually Tenochtitlan, was made possible only after the original relationships were built with corn, by the *Olmec* (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, 2019). This is a primary reason the *Olmec*, aka *Huehuetoltecayotl*, are considered one of the mother cultures of the entire *Anahuacayotl* genealogy, alongside the Maya, another beloved maíz-based pueblo. The sophisticated and advanced astronomical, mathematical and artistic achievements of the *Anahuacayotl* were all made possible by *cintli*, *elotl*, the corn.

While agroecological knowledge is present in the ancestral pasos and protocol of danza, its presence can also be evidenced through the ways in which contemporary danzantes integrate food systems change into the danza movement. Today many calpultin, urban danza communities, work the land collectively to plant, tend and harvest traditional Anahuacan foods and plant medicine. I have witnessed this in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, California and Mexico. The well-known South Central Farm in Los Angeles, CA is closely related to the local danza community, with many of its central leaders being danzantes themselves. Calpulli Huey Papalotl has strong relationships with the Black Earth Farmers Collective, Sogorea Te Land Trust,

⁹¹ And are being relied upon and expanded again due to the current coronavirus pandemic.

Gill Tract Community Farm, Indigenous Permaculture, and Planting Justice – where we offer danzas for the traditional foods, seeds and medicinal plants that continue to be cultivated in Huichin and surrounding areas. These are only a few examples of danzantes cultivating traditional foods and food knowledge through the danza movement, re-membering and applying the ancestral agroecological knowledge that is embedded in danzas for Tlaloc, for maíz (the corn dance), for malinalli (braided medicine grass dance), and Quetzalcoatl (the protector of the corn). Dr. Cintli (Rodríguez 2014) also notes danza’s importance as a means of protecting maíz-based cultural knowledge. He writes, “danza contains a hidden message, revealing its direct relationship to an ancient cosmology or worldview based on maíz. Many of the danza ceremonies have to do with when to plant, water, and harvest. Some involve the symbiotic relationship between animals, humans, and maíz. Others honor the spiritual forces that make sustenance possible” (146-147).

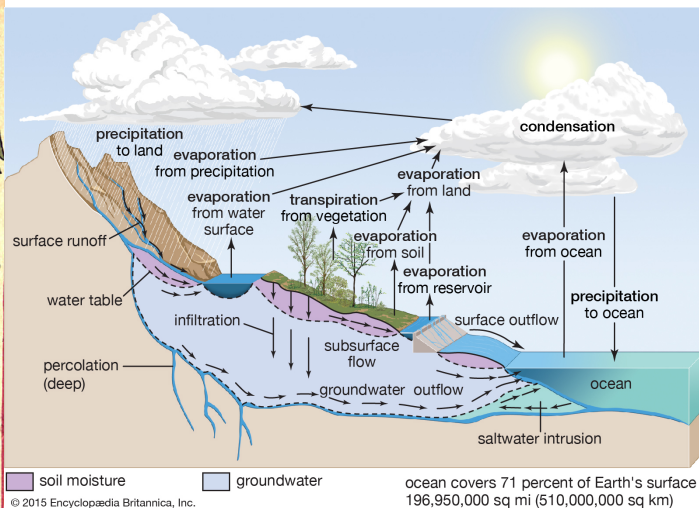
What and how danzantes eat after ceremonies are reflective of ancestral foodways as well. Communal meals are an important part of danza protocol, most often with the hosting calpulli working together for weeks to harvest, purchase, cook and prepare a traditional meal for all who attend the ceremony – enjoying *pozole*, *nopales*, *tortillas*, *tamales*, and other traditional foods. However, while traditional foods are indeed an important part of the ceremony, contemporary danzantes are also embedded in a dominant, industrial, modern/colonial food system that is unhealthy in many ways. An obvious example is the presence of junk food at ceremonies, but I am also thinking here of danzantes who are food and farm workers themselves. From production through processing, distribution, consumption and waste, colonial violence is present at each level of the food system. Therefore, the food system as modern/colonial is also a site of decolonial resistance (Garzo Montalvo and Zandi 2011). My own personal path to danza came by way of working as a food justice and food sovereignty community organizer and educator.

Working from this intersection of food sovereignty and danza, ceremony is an important technology in the struggle towards agroecological justice. From this vantage point, resisting industrial agriculture – as a pesticide-, petroleum- and chemical input-intensive and corporate-dominated model of monocultural development – is a decolonial concern. Patenting and eroding traditional corn genetics through transgenic and GMO varieties is a spiritual, cosmological assault. Considering these questions within the Western academy, the study of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) has been an important component of agroecological research and resistance (Altieri 2009). In their study, “Agroecology and the Design of Climate Change-resilient Farming Systems,” Miguel Altieri, Clara Nicholls, Alejandro Henao and Marcos Lana (2015), argue that “contrary to the monocultures of industrial agriculture, many traditional farming systems...offer a wide array of management options and designs that enhance functional biodiversity in crop fields and, consequently, support the resilience of agroecosystems” (874). Amidst climate

chaos, economic injustice and a global pandemic, these Indigenous food systems are “models of resilience” (Ibid.).

In this way, Native science and traditional agroecological knowledge play an important role in our recovery and futurity as an inter-species community on planet earth. Honoring the ceremoniality – the embodied, communal and sacred elements of this work cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, the possibility of intercultural sciences – ways of knowing that bridge these disparate epistemologies while interrupting a coloniality of power and knowledge – must be strengthened in the interest of a co-existent, decolonial future. In this way, Citlalcoatl (2010) also points to *permaculture*, a movement that overlaps in significant ways with agroecology, as a possible bridge between Native and non-Native communities and ways of living on the land. He writes: “There is no need for Euro-Americans to attempt to replicate our social systems of organization and governance. A more worthwhile and meaningful undertaking would be the establishment of completely sustainable and self-sufficient communities. We can more easily find common ground when we both have our own established relationships of responsibility with nature” (78).

Danzando with Tlaloc, Chalchihuitlicue, with the maíz, *Xochipilli-Xochiquetzalli* – the energies of the flowers and the fruits, the plants that provide food and life – we must continue to defend ancestral foods and seeds as relatives. Food and water sovereignty must be understood as central to a decolonization project. Danza can help us move in this way, connecting with watershed consciousness, re-memembering bioregional Native science through ceremony. Practicing tequio, traditional collective work, we can re-member the Native science that lives in our danzas – danzas that grew from corn in the first place.



Figures 12 and 13:

Left: Tlaloc-Chalchihuitlicue on Plate 7 from Codex Borbonicus (Source: FAMSI 2020)

Right: Western science visual representation of water cycle (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 2015)

These images, dancing side-by-side, provide a way of seeing how Native science and Western science can weave together their ways of knowing in service of the watershed.

Cintli: La Danza del Maíz

Non cuahuitl cintli in tlalnepantla

[The maíz tree is the center of the universe] (Rodríguez 187, his translation)

Pidiendo permiso, del altar, de las energías, de los guardianes de este lugar, of this time and place. Pidiendo permiso, to danzar mi palabra, to palabriar mi danza.

Ce-Xochitl

Starting to the left, turning to face Mictlampa, the place of the ancestors, exposing our right sides to the xictli, we begin *marcando los zurcos*, marking our pasos. With the right foot we stomp lightly, *con cariño*, we slide, push forward, stomp, slide. Chachayotes sembrando semillas del amor, our hands planting sacred cintli. Our sacred relative, the corn, the seeds with whom we have an *acuerdo*, the spirit of the grass with whom we have a sacred pact, with whom we have genetically touched and transformed each other, with respect, permission, and love. Planting these seeds, letting them drop to the fertile soil, we cover each bundle with a one two three four directioned prayer, an embodied focused intention from the ball of our feet, up to our tonalli, and out to the cosmos. Then, in duality, in harmony, to the right.

Base

Left feet take off swiftly from Mother Earth, with swan-necked pointed toes, the arms rising up with the wind, as the wind. *Un viento de la tierra*. We sweep this energy back to our own bodies' center, which are now turning, spinning towards that left side. The habit of duality of the cosmos, sweeps our right legs up, our arms unfurled as butterfly wings, softly, delicately, dancing with the now-fiercely blowing winds.

Ome-Xochitl

An approach to the momoztli, *un salto*, a lunging, athletic jump, squatting towards Mother Earth, our hands connecting with xinachtli, the seed that germinates in the soil. We create an *enlazo*, a direct connection with that seed, and bring it up to the skies, with the canto, may it reach Tonatiuh, our beloved father sun, please bless and warm this precious seed, please pull this plant from the Heart of the Earth, to your heart, the Heart of the Sky.

Base

The winds blow again, to the left, the right. Feet legs and arms sweeping up and turning swiftly. This is the passage of time, staying present and patient with the rhythm of Mother Earth, which is slower, *todo a su tiempo*. The sacred cintli stalks crawling higher each day.

Yei-Xochitl

The air starts to move, to express itself as a dancing bird, a northern/southern twinned breeze. The silken tassels of the corn begin to emerge, *xilonen*, the first sign of fertility, of Life emerging within.

Base

Observing, watching the corn grow, defending our seeds, our plants, from the birds, from disease, from transnational, transgenic corporations. Our DNA, spiraled together across spacetime and species – the corn, the human, the corn-based-human, the human-based corn.

Nahui-Xochitl

You grow taller sacred *teotzintli*, beloved mother, sister. Your pollen ready to fly and interconnect, ride the waves of the winds of change. Ehecatl unfurls his arms, spinning through our bodies through outstretched, helicoptered limbs, twisting centrifugal hearts.

Base

She has been pollinated, warmed, rested, watered, wind-blown, cared for, protected, now she is ready to reproduce, to burst, to unfold.

Maculli-Xochitl

Turning around a darkened Tezcatlipoca axis, a severed, stumped leg, we spiral, as each tooth unfurls within its elote husk. Each *diente* is uniquely colored, placed in order, interconnected. Purple, black, blue, red, white, yellow, popping together as *palomitas* of Life, cracking from the hardened and woody cane structure.

Base

The *elotitos* become *elototes*, become fat, engorged, drinking light and water to swell with white milky blood.

Chicuace-Xochitl

Scissor kicking legs, knees bent close to the earth, folding back and forth, dancing left and right, the harvest has begun. Hardened corn stocks with soft roots are pulled from the bottom, hugged together in bundles and cut to the left, to the right. Danzantes as *campesinxs*, armed with crescent-shaped sickles, give thanks as they gather their crop, advancing slowly in the *zurcos* they have planted and tended all season.

Base

A brief rest after the harvest. Coming in from the storm, the winds and rains cleaning the end-of-season air.

Chicome-Xochitl

The harvest festival, la fiesta, the celebration of Life, of our labor of love. Together we rejoice, giving thanks with our limbs stretched out in all four directions. We shout, songs of joy, to the heart of the earth, heart of sky. Thank you Mother Earth, Father Sky, corn sibling, for this feast.

Chapter 6 Tlacuiloliztli: Danza as Art and Creativity

Danza as a Form of Literacy

For this study of danza as a way of knowing, I must engage with the problem of literacy. By this I mean to point to the ways in which considering danza to be a way of knowing problematizes conventional, that is, dominant logocentric understandings of what it means to write and read, and therefore, what it means to think and know. In this chapter I begin by considering danza as a form of *tlacuiloiztli* – writing/painting without words or beyond words – and also as a way of reading, of recording knowledge. Danza as coming-to-know gestures at these Other literacies.

In an Anahuacan cosmovisión, it is difficult to think about reading or writing in the Westernized senses of these terms. The Anahuacan literary form of the *amoxtli*, however, does provide a way to begin thinking about “writing without words” (Boone and Mignolo 1994). Often (mis)translated as “codex,” the *amoxtli* is an important medium of *tlacuiloiztli* (writing/painting). Of course, the word “codex” is a misnomer, a term originally meant to refer more specifically to early Christian forms of writing and book making. This renaming of the literary form is a colonial mistranslation, a Euro-centric superimposition. Instead, an *amoxtli* must be understood and read as its own sovereign Indigenous modality. Linguistically, the word *amoxtli* combines *amatl*, paper fiber material, + *oxtli*, that which is compiled, conjoined. An *amoxtli* is a sacred, living text that is written, read and related to through ceremony. It is not a book, nor a codex. As Mignolo (1994) argues, “the translation of *amoxtli* as ‘book’ does not capture the differences in the conceptualization of the activities related to the object (book, *amoxtli*)” (258). He continues, “while it is possible to generalize by saying that writing is an activity common to several cultures, the *conceptualization* (i.e, the ‘meaning network’) associated with the word and with the conceptualization of the activity is *culture specific*” (Ibid., his emphasis).⁹²

In this way, the first purpose of this chapter is to linger with the ways in which danza informs and transforms these forms of literacy and modalities of recording – since danza is an important part of how reading and writing are conceptualized in an Anahuacan cosmovisión. This helps demonstrate how the differences between the book and the *amoxtli* are in fact colonial differences (Mignolo 2005). Furthermore, my contention is that these distinctions can be traced through the variable of danza as a way of knowing insofar as *amoxtli* are dancing, while books – like anthropologists – don't dance. Thinking about and from danza – through a mitotiani epistemology – I

⁹² In the case of the *amoxtli*, the colonial difference between the book and the *amoxtli* can even be found in the geometry of how these texts are read on the page. Books are read from top left to bottom right, from “beginning” to “end.” *Amoxtin* (plural for *amoxtli*), on the other hand, can be read in different ways and through different languages. They can be read from bottom right to top left, in zig zags, in circles, in spirals, in *xical colihqui* (“stepped fret motif”) (fieldnotes Spring 2020).

explore how artesanía (hand-made artisan/crafting practices) exists within the danza tradition as a contemporary extension of tlacuilociztli praxes – that is, as ceremonial artmaking practices that emerge from a xochicuicatl philosophy of science/art/spirituality. Furthermore, I will trace how danzantes engage with archaeological texts and museum collections through ceremony in ways that radically transform and subvert colonized approaches to the study of archaeology, art history and art practice. Through ceremony as a catalyst, danzantes practice tlacuilociztli in ways that unsettle Westernized notions of aesthetics, poetics, beauty and creativity.

Tlacuilociztli

In tlahcuilo: tllili tlapalli, tllatlyalvil toltecatl, tlachichihuahqui... In cualli tlahcuilo: mihmati, yolteotl, tlayolteuiani, moyolnonotzani. Tlatlapalpoani, tlatlapalaquiani, tlacehuallotiani, tlacxitiani, tlaxayacatiani, tlatzontiani. Xochitlahcuiloa, tlaxochiicuiloa toltecati.

[The good painter is a Toltec, an artist; they create with black and red ink, they prepare the black, they ground it and apply it, Creator of things in black water; The good painter, understanding, has the Creator in their heart; They bring divinity to things with their heart; They communicate with their own heart; They know the colors, they apply, they shade; They draw the feet, the faces; They draw the shades, achieving perfection; They apply color to everything; They paint the colors of all the flowers; As if they were a Toltec.] (From Codex Florentino, Sahagun 554, translation based on León-Portilla 1963: 172)

Tlacuilociztli is a form of Anahuacan creative practice that is most often translated as the art of writing/painting (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). They who write/paint are known as the *tlacuilo*. The *tlacuilomeh* (plural for *tlacuilo*) study and practice writing/painting with *tamacazqueh* (spiritual authorities) and *tlamatinimeh* (elder philosophers) in Calmecac (house of knowledge). In this way, they record *tlamatiliztli* (knowledge) through *tlacuilociztli*. In this tradition, the act of writing is always already an oral practice, an embodied and collaborative way of coming-to-know. In contrast to the solitary, quiet and word-based writing methodologies of the West, *tlacuilociztli* requires a ceremonial protocol to open a spacetime of intergenerational knowledge and pedagogy. Therefore, *tlacuilociztli* is another spacetime of *ceremonial consciousness* and a *xochicuicatl* state of mind. In other words, *tlacuilociztli* is closely related to *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza* (danza) in that they are ceremonial theoretico-praxes – embodied and communal ways of knowing. Reading, writing, thinking, recording, listening – in an Anahuacan cosmovisión, all these are considered sacred, ceremonial tasks (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2020).

The tlacuilo will learn to paint the Anahuacan systems of pictorial symbols that illustrate the creative energies of the universe, finding their own style in the process. This practice embodies the tlamatiliztli/tlamachiliztli (inherited knowledge/created knowledge) duality par excellence. According to Maestra Chicueyi Coatl (Fieldnotes, Spring 2020), historically the tlacuilo would always write/paint while listening to the xochicuicatl (flowering songs), the ancestral sung poems of the tlamacazqueh and tlamatinimeh – Anahuacan spiritual and philosophical authorities. In this way, tlacuilociztli is another way of recording xochicuicatl epistemologies – transcribing flowers and songs, or “the only truth on earth” (León-Portilla 1963: 75). Tlacuilociztli as a ceremonial cargo (role), like all sacred work, requires discipline and humility, and is considered a tremendous responsibility. This is because in the act of tlacuilociztli one *becomes* a Creator themselves – embodying the creative energy of the universe (teotl) – becoming a finely tuned antenna for the in xochitl, in cuicatl of Ipalnemohuani, the flower and song of the Giver of Life.

Put another way, the Creator is also a tlacuilo – they who paint/write the cosmos into being. This aspect of the Creator as tlacuilo links the human and the cosmos through the “creative and artistic process since teotl endlessly fashions and refashions itself *into* and *as* the cosmos” (Maffie 38, emphasis in original). Tlacuilociztli then is an interactive embodiment of *teotl* (creative energy of the cosmos), since “artistic creation is fundamentally transformative. The artist transforms disordered raw materials into well-ordered finished products: for example, raw cotton in the woven fabric, words in the song-poems, and mineral ore into jewelry” (Maffie 39). In this way, tlamatinimeh (elder philosopher-poets) “commonly characterized the cosmos as an amoxtli” (Ibid.). Furthermore, Maffie (2014), through León-Portilla points to the notion of living in talticpac (on the surface of the earth as living in a “*tlacuilocitec*,” where the world is understood as a “house of paintings” (Ibid.), where life is a work of art.⁹³ Maffie and León-Portilla also point to the location of the Creator as “*motlacuilopani*,” as “the painting place,” the interdimensional space from which the Creator writes/paints the cosmos into being (Ibid.). In this way, León-Portilla (1994) translates the following xochicuicatl (sung poem):

*In noncuica amoxtlapal,
ya noconyazozoutinemi,
nixochialotzin,
nontlatetotica
in tlacuilocitec ca*

*Yo canto las pinturas del libro
lo voy desplegando*

⁹³ This is something that Don Miguel Ruiz (2017) explores at length in his work, *The Toltec Art of Life and Death: Living Your Life as a Work of Art*.

*soy cual florido papagayo
mucho es lo que hablo,
en el interior de la casa de las pinturas*

[I sing the paintings of the amoxtli
I unfold them
I am as a flowered parrot
I say all of this
Within the house of the paintings]

(León-Portilla 1994: 14, his Spanish translation, my English translation)

Similarly, “reading” in the context of *tlacuilociztli* takes on a particular form. Just as the *tamacazqueh* (spiritual elders) and *tlatinimeh* (philosophical elders) sang *xochicuicatl* (flowering songs) as the *tlacuilo* wrote – these songs would be sung again as these *amoxtli* where “read.” The reading of *amoxtin* took place in the context of ceremony – a spacetime of embodied community and ceremonial consciousness. In circle, the community would gather around the elders for ceremonial story-time. Cleansing copal smoke would be rising from the *sahumadores* (incense holders), an altar would be built and adorned with flowers, musical instruments creating a soft soundscape for the *xochicuicatl*. When the *amoxtli* would be opened, the *atecocolli* (conch shell trumpet) would wail. Only then can the elder begin reading/singing the *amoxtli* into being (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2019). In this way, an *amoxtli* is a compound text – it is writing, painting, singing, dancing and praying. It is an inter-dimensional, transdisciplinary palimpsest. It contains instructions on how to live in harmony, it tells the story of the people, it is a form of musical notation, it is “a play’s script” (Boone 71), it is a reorientation to the cosmos – it is all of these things at once.

These are the elements of *tlacuilociztli* that embody the *Toltecayotl* (the way of the Toltec). This is why the *cualli tlacuilo*, the good painter, is “like a Toltec” (León-Portilla 1963: 172). They re-member a *Toltecatl* way of knowing – writing/painting to give shape to the cosmic energies. The *Toltecatl* is *tolli + tecatl* – they who live in harmony with the water, like a bundle of rush growing from the marsh, they who live according to the measured movements of the cosmos (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Fall 2018). The *tlacuilo* embodies *in tllilli, in tlipalli*, they who follow the inked path of the red and the black. In other words, they are wise. *Tlacuilociztli* is a ceremonial modality of sacred art/science/spirituality, a creative midwifery.

From this Anahuacayotl-Toltecayotl perspective, Westernized notions of aesthetics as the philosophical study of “beauty and good taste” are radically limited by their colonial gaze and worldview through which they theorize “art” as such (“Decolonial Aesthetics”). León-Portilla (1963) signaled this problem within his own studies of *tlacuilociztli*, stating that it has been difficult for Western scholars to:

understand and enjoy ‘the message’ of Nahuatl art. A number of scholars have attempted to formulate an ‘indigenous aesthetic,’ but many of their works are disappointing. The degree of success achieved has depended on the extent of their ability to divest themselves of modern Western intellectual and emotional attitudes (166).

One source he holds up that provides a sort of opening in this way is Justino Fernández’ (1959) work on *Coatlicue*, who advances that Anahuacan “culture and art have a deep dynamism hidden beneath an apparently static quality. The essence, the *being* of their concept of the world is dynamic” (Fernández 249 quoted in León-Portilla 221). More contemporaneously, these critiques have also been taken up by Laura Pérez’ (2019) efforts to frame art “from a decolonizing politics that resituates Eurocentric perspectives and aesthetics as such, as perhaps mainly relevant for European and Euro-American cultures” (32). Mignolo (2018) thinks of this decolonial task through a process of “delinking” that follows “two routes: decoloniality and de-westernization. In both cases, although to different ends, epistemic and emotional (and aesthetic) delinking means conceiving of and creating institutional organizations that are at the service of life and do not – as in the current state of affairs – put people at the service of institutions” (126). While I am not advancing that danza should be considered an “institutional organization” in the conventional sense, I am positing that danza serves as a contemporary theoretico-praxis that contributes profoundly to this desire to decolonize aesthetics as such.

De-linked from Eurocentric lineages of aesthetic philosophy, a *tlacuiloliztli* aesthetic instead emerges from a *xochicuicatl* philosophy of art/science/spirituality. The art “object” is never static. The materials – be they volcanic rock, paper fiber from plants or molten metals – are always already alive and in motion towards transformation. The *tlacuilo* is merely a facilitator of this rebirthing and shapeshifting process. Aesthetics in the Westernized sense are problematic again in that they are *anthropocentric*. The *tlacuiloliztli* question is not what is beautiful or tasteful for the human, but what is beautiful, and harmonious, for the Creator, for the cosmos. I know to turn to the ways in which contemporary *danzantes* are performing this decolonial work – thinking-doing and creating beyond an aesthetic teleology that colonizes the imagination as a space that is assumed to always already be on its way to the museum. Whether it be in clay, in stone, in paint, in dance, in word, in feathers, the *danzante* as *tlacuilo* always seeks to “be like a Toltec” – humble, committed, with a wise face and heart.

Danza as Tlacuiloliztli

The *tlacuilo* trans-scribes. *Cuiloa* as a root word in Nahuatl means “to write, to scribe, to paint, to sing” (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). One can in-scribe across media – in stone, wood, paper, and song. Contemporary *danzantes* practice *tlacuiloliztli* as they

“paint with their feet” (Fieldnotes, Jefe Luis, Fall 2018). Reading the symbolic, gestural language of danza in this way, danzantes are *tlacuilmeh* in that they become cosmic intermediaries for the creative energies of the universe. The dancing Anahuacan body gives shape to these energies in ways that vividly enact the “deep dynamism” (León-Portilla 163: 221) of an Anahuacan *cosmovisión*. *Mitotiliztli as danzando palabras* (dancing words) is writing and re-telling cosmic stories – such as the movements of planets, the creation of the universe and the elements of nature – through a *mitotiani, xochicuicatl* epistemology, an embodied art/science/spirituality. This approach to creativity as an act of cosmic communion is practiced throughout the danza tradition.

Another medium through which contemporary danzantes become decolonial *tlacuilmeh* is through the work of *artesanía* – as artisans and craft workers who create ceremonial instruments and regalia as “wearable prayers” (Chicueyi Coatl 2019). Maestra Chicueyi Coatl (2019), reflects on the *xochicuicatl* process through which she creates her ceremonial *trajes* (regalia) for danza:

How can I convey that it is not me who is trying to ‘get ideas’ from somewhere? Instead, torrents of feelings come to me in many forms without my asking. These feelings come to me through dreams, while in ceremony, while practicing *teomania* (Anahuacan meditation), while working with my beloved obsidian mirror, while offering water in a sweat lodge, while working with the sacred fire, while performing a *limpia*, while sharing sacred Anahuacan knowledge, while praying through danza with my whole body...It is not me at all; it is the sacred cosmic energies that come and flow through me and push me, literally, to start working on a new design, a new dress, a new *maxtlatl*, a new skirt, a new *huipil*...a new skin, a new wearable prayer...Sometimes, my Westernized mind takes over and wants me to find a ‘logical’ reason for this. Luckily for me, a dream comes to the rescue and commands me to “not give in to ‘logical reasoning,’ to not waste my time. You should now speak through your *maitl* (hands), through your *yollotl* (heart), through the *ayatl* (fabric), through the *nextiyol* (design), through the symbols” (117-18).

These “wearable prayers” (Chicueyi Coatl 2019: 117) are created in dialogue with the energies of the cosmos, a way of build loving relationships through *practicing/listening*. Sacred, cosmic relatives call on the danzante/*tlacuilo*, such as “Huehucoyotl, the Old Coyote, inviting me to dance with him; Itzpapalotl, the Obsidian Butterfly, demanding me to connect with her through her symbol while praying for us all. Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, the Morning Star, seducing me in the early hours while facing the east” (Chicueyi Coatl 2019: 118). *Tlacuiloliztli* therefore is one way in which danzantes work with their *tonalli-nahualli*, practicing *tonalismo-nahualismo*, manifesting and externalizing their conscious and unconscious minds

through shape-shifting and transformative processes of creativity in ceremony. Danza ceremonies themselves are rich sites of this type of creative and visionary labor. Building beautiful and abundant altars, working with feathers and flowers, designing ceremonial spaces as microcosmic containers of macrocosmic harmony.

While contemporary *danzantes* practice *tlacuilociztli* through feather work, flower work, sewing and painting, *danzante*-scholar Verónica Valadez (2012) writes of traditional tattoos and Indigenous body art in *danza* as literal embodiments of these *tlacuilociztli* praxes. Through inscribing Anahuacan cosmographics on the Anahuacan body, these *danzantes* become “dancing *amoxtli*” (Valadez 2012). *Danzante* body art is an eloquent and vivid example of *danzantes* as both *tlacuilomeh* (writer/artists) and *tlacuilocitl* (paintings/sculptures) in the flesh. The presence of traditional tattoos and piercing in contemporary *danza* is also a rich way of remapping *danza* as a living embodiment of cultural memory and *cosmovisión*. For Valadez (2012), Anahuacan body art mediates *danzantes*’ relationships to Indigenous knowledge and their own Xicanx/Latinx Indigenous identity. She argues that:

danzantes’ choosing of particular symbols for their *trajes* and tattoo designs, illustrates their yearning for truth and understanding of their existence and purpose on earth as indigenous peoples...In essence, *danzantes* embody visual representations of Nahuatl metaphorical symbols as they transform themselves into contemporary ‘dancing codices’ or ‘dancing *amoxtli*,’ infused with the spirit of their ancestors and a resistance against the marginalization of their indigenous heritage (117, 151).

Tetlacuilolli

While I have considered the question of *tlacuilociztli* through the media of *amoxtin* and how these images are animated through *danza*, I turn now to the Anahuacan tradition of working in sculpture and stone, as *tlacuilociztli* praxes that are also transformed in relation to *danza*. I follow queer decolonial scholar Zairong Xiang (2018) when they argue that “it is possible to read not only the familiar book-like codices but also the statues and calendar stones as more than just artistic representations, but as ‘texts’ or mediums that convey knowledge” (229). Quoting Marc Thouvenot, Xiang (2018) advances that “*icuiloa* also means to sculpt (on stone or wood), and ‘the action of sculpt — *icuiloa* — stones is not limited to small objects, but it is also used to refer to big works, such as palaces called ‘*tlacuilocitl* of stones’” (230). *Tetlacuilolli* then is the art of writing as *transcribing in stone*, or what Godoy (2004) has called “*pensamiento en piedra*” – thinking in stone, or stone thought. This form of *tlacuilocitl* includes different media that are categorized in the West as pottery, sculpture and architecture. *Tetlacuilolli* could be working with a stone the size of your hand, or as large as a Huey Teocalli (the Great Temple).

This understanding of tetlacuilolli, as thinking in stone, provides another avenue through which we can “delink” from Western ways of knowing, and animate what the Western mind might otherwise see as inanimate material objects. As has been established, however, in an Anahuacan cosmovisión there is no such thing as an inanimate object. The creative process of working with stone to create sculptures and design buildings is another practice rooted in a xochicuicatl philosophy – in that it is the process of giving shape, color and material expression to an energy that is already present in the cosmos in another form. It is a way of recording “the only truth on earth” (León-Portilla 1963: 75). The stone tetlacuilolli of *Coatlicue Mayor*, for example, is not a static two-headed serpent-faced literal representation of a “goddess,” but a living, breathing, moving metaphorical representation of the cosmic movements of the earth and the sun, the mother and the father, the earth and the sky. We only need eyes to see, and hearts to feel, in order to perceive how she moves.



Figure 14:
The Dynamics of Coatlicue Mayor
(Source: Luidger 2004, *Wikimedia Commons*, based on Godoy 218)

From this perspective, based on Mexican poet and scholar Iliana Godoy Patiño’s (2004) *Pensamiento en Piedra*, we can view centrifugal motion, a monolithic stone sculpture that is folding and unfolding upon itself vertically and horizontally. This is a stone body that is spinning on its axis, that is dancing. This movement is further evidenced by seeing the same tetlacuilolli from other vantage points.



Figure 15:

Right: Left side view of Coatlicue Mayor (Source: El Comandante, *Wikimedia Commons*, 2009)

Sculpted in the round, this tlacuilolli depicts interconnected and dynamic metaphors of cosmic movements – of the earth, the sun, the stars and the universe itself. The skull represents *miquiztli*, death as rebirth – in this case, the death/rebirth of the sun himself, who is gestating in the womb belly of the cosmos. The eagle talons, symbols of the sky, are on the earth, while serpents, symbols of the earth, are in the sky. According to Maestro Yaoehcatl of Calpulli Meztcualo Tonalzeytli (Fieldnotes, Fall 2017), this unlocks Coatlicue as a metaphor of the earth at night, when the sun is in *mictlan*, in the underworld. Understood within the oral history of Coatlicue as the mother of Huitzilopochtli (the sun) and *Coyolxauhqui* (the moon), these are all astronomical, cosmological metaphors. In this way, every morning Coatlicue re-births Huitzilopochtli, the sun as a fluttering hummingbird in the morning sky, to fight off his sister Coyolxauhqui, the moon. This is the eternal, everyday celestial battle between the darkness and the light. Viewed in this way, Coatlicue as a cosmic Earth mother is perpetually spinning, doing somersaults, constantly rotating and dancing with the movements of the cosmos.



Figure 16:
View of Underside of Coatlicue Mayor
(Source: National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City)

Perhaps this is one reason why the *tlacuilo* also inscribed the underside of this *tetlacuilolli*. This is the view of the underside of Coatlicue Mayor. At the bottom of the image, one sees the eagle talons reaching over from above, marking the front of the sculpture. Represented here is another moving, living, folding, unfolding cosmic energy – *Tlaltecuhтли*, they who protect the earth, the masculine energy of the heart of the planet. This symbology provides yet another dimension of movement to Coatlicue Mayor. It is likely that very few humans actually saw this part of the sculpture, as it was touching the earth beneath this monolithic structure. Nonetheless, careful, creative and masterful detail was given to express the energy of *Tlaltecuhтли* as the energy that makes contact with the earth. This is evidence of another Anahuacan aesthetic intervention, where art making is not simply creating objects to be observed and admired by humans, but technologies to be felt and received by the Creator – instruments attuned to the creative energies of the cosmos. In this way, *tlacuilocliztli* then, is a praxis of art making that is a modality of *evocation*, creative praxis as the building of ceremonial relationships with cosmic energies – energetic bodies that the *tlacuilo* respectfully and humbly comes to know.

Dancing upon this path of *conocimiento*, I now turn to the current institutional home of Coatlicue Mayor – Mexico City's *Museo Nacional de Antropología* – as a contested site of power and meaning. The museum is a location of the colonial difference, insofar as its usage represents different ways of knowing – ways of knowing that chart the interface that lies between the cultural space of a museum *vis-à-vis* a *tlacuilocalli* (house of *tlacuilocli*). The distance between these spacetimes –

experiences that are interwoven as layers upon the same place – lies in how those inside relate through “systems of symbolic representation” (Wynter 1995). In other words, the museum as a house of art/archaeology vis-á-vis tlacuiloliztli. Traversing the spaces between these ways of knowing, we will be dancing across worlds and worldviews, bridging the colonial difference itself.

Decolonizing the Museum

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history (Smith 1999: 34).

The museum cannot be seen as a neutral institution; it is an expression of the modern/colonial power. It holds epistemic and aesthetic power. It contributes to the articulation of modernity as the dominant order of representation by determining the canon, and by configuring a history of aesthetics as primarily the history of the West. Concurrently, in its coloniality the museum functions as a tool of exclusion. The modernity/coloniality framework enables us to examine the museum’s function to establish the aesthetic and epistemic canons of modernity while paying attention to its coloniality—that is, the role it plays in the erasure of other worlds, of other forms of sensing and meaning (Wevers and Vasquez Melken 1-2).

Jefe YaoEhecatl of Calpulli Metzcualo Tonalyeztli is an academically trained historian and danza leader in Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Mexico City). Each month he offers guided tours of the Mexica Room in the *Museo Nacional de Antropología*, Mexico’s National Museum of Anthropology. As the county’s largest and most visited museum – itself a product of a nationalist surge in the mid 20th century – *La Sala Mexica* serves as a lively site of historical debate and different interpretative experiences. As a danza leader, Jefe Yao specifically offers this guided tour to other danzantes who wish to learn more about the important collection housed in this space. Epistemically, this move is significant. When discussing and providing his perspectives on different tlacuilolitin, Jefe Yao also offers specific points of interest “for danzantes” present on the tour (Fieldnotes, Fall 2017). This implies that

danzantes already have a different relationship with these objects of study than those who do not dance in ceremony.



Figure 17:
Jefe Yaohecatl of Calpulli Metzcualo Tonalyeztli leading a guided tour of the Mexica Room
(Source: Photo by the Author)

Decolonial social theorist Rolando Vásquez Melken theorizes this aesthetic and epistemic dynamic in relation to a coloniality of power. For Vásquez, the study of “aesthetics, while being central for the arts and museums, remains a question that goes beyond the arts. It illuminates how modernity and coloniality contribute to the experience of the real and come to shape our senses. It determines how we have been taught to see, how we have been taught to talk, how we have been taught to listen and perceive the world” (Wevers and Vásquez Melken 3). In other words, the colonial difference is a difference in *cosmovisión*. For *danzantes*, visiting the Mexica Room is connected to a larger process of re-membling – recuperating and maintaining a living relationship with *tlacuillo*. This shift in perception is an interruption of the colonial gaze – understood here, through Vásquez (2019), as an interruption of colonial ways of perceiving and sensing the world. As living representations of vital parts of an Anahuacan *cosmovisión*, *danzantes* study ancestral *tlacuillo* as sculpted and painted ways of representing the same energies that one feels and embodies when one is dancing in ceremony – energies we have felt and come to know in the flesh. As *danzantes*, we learn the *pasos* (steps) and gestures for specific *danzas* to

honor and communicate with, for example, Coyolxauhqui – she who wears *cascabeles* (bells) on her cheeks, the great feminine energy who cries silver tears, our Grandmother Moon. Here at the museum meet another one of her representations, this time in stone, as an engorged, decapitated head in the center of the Mexica Room. Another potent example is the *Huey Cuauhxicalli* (Mexica stone to count time and space), itself one of the densest sites of symbolic representation that *danzantes* come to know through ceremony, is displayed on the far wall.



Figure 18:
Danzantes in the Mexica Room
(Source: Lucero Luz 2018)

These interruptions of colonial ways of knowing and being in the Mexica Room are no better represented than by the yearly ceremonies that are held at the museum every Earth Day – which take place every April 22 in the modern Gregorian calendar. Understood in this context as an opportunity to honor Tonantzin Tlalli Coatlicue (Our Beloved Mother Earth who wears a skirt of serpents), *danzantes* gather at the feet of *Coatlicue Mayor* to offer copal (purifying smoke), *atecocolli* (conch shell trumpet), *alabanzas* (traditional songs), and, of course, *danzas*. *Danzantes* enter the Mexica Room in ceremony, asking permission and making offerings to the abundant *tlacuiloctin* and other relatives that are present in the room, *moving in a good way*. With the creative, collective body in ceremonial motion – *danzantes* from many different traditions and lineages come together to bring the space to life, transforming an otherwise colonial space of containment and collection, to an active place of healing and ancestral continuity of aesthetics, philosophies and social relations.



Figure 19:
Danzantes in ceremony with Coatlicue Mayor
(Source: Lucero Luz 2016)



Figure 20:
Danzantes playing atecocolli in ceremony with Coatlicue Mayor
(Source: INAH 2009)

These uses of the Mexica Room by danzantes represent an important decolonization of spacetime and knowledge. These are enactments of a mitotiani epistemology, of creative subversion and reappropriation of colonial institutional spaces such as the museum. Through the catalyst of ceremony, danzantes relate to ancestral knowledge in the present tense. Knowledge of the past is not a bank of information to be accumulated, memorized and contained in collections. Instead, tlacuiloliztli as ceremonial sculpting/painting is reactivated as a form of counter-

knowledge that survives within and despite this Westernized aesthetic space and Eurocentric art history. Even in these carceral institutions, these places of colonial capture and enclosure, Indigenous ways of knowing are re-membered through danza and ceremonial consciousness.

At the time of writing, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl and Calpulli Huey Papalotl have been planning a similar effort in this way at the British Museum in London, UK (Fieldnotes, Spring 2020). Chicueyi Coatl herself has been in contact and received permission from the museum to view specific ceremonial objects contained in their collections. Significantly, when this trip is realized, the museum has agreed for Calpulli Huey Papalotl to honor these sacred instruments through ceremonial protocol. These interactions, however, further illustrate the museum as a colonial and carceral institution. It is the British Museum, who received and acquired these tlacuiloltin through imperial conquest and theft, through plunder, that is given authority over these decisions. The “collection” is understood as their “property” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2020). Something similar could be said for myriad other sacred relatives, human or otherwise, that remain enclosed in museums. For example, most of the surviving amoxtin (“codices”) are also contained within museum collections in Western Europe and the United States. Visiting these tlacuiloltin in museums mimics visiting an incarcerated relative, where one must follow institutional protocol in terms of dress, language and comportment, in order to visit loved ones who remain locked up. The struggle to rematriate⁹⁴ these sacred relatives⁹⁵ is thus another front in the worldwide struggle to free all political prisoners. Nonetheless, when Calpulli Huey Papalotl is finally able to honor these tlacuiloltin in ceremony, this will be one of the first times they have been related to as such in many centuries. This is another way in which danzantes are at the frontline of intergenerational healing and survivance.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have defined and expanded the historical and contemporary Anahuacan practice of tlacuiloliztli. As a creative process rooted in a *xochicuicatl philosophy* and *mitotiani epistemology*, this is a practice that is, at once, artistic/scientific/spiritual. In this way, working with feathers, flowers, stone or the body itself, tlacuiloliztli is another way danzantes are re-membering right relations. Danzantes body art serves as a particularly vivid medium through which to understand this dynamic, as symbolic representations of cosmic bodies are inscribed upon the flesh of the Anahuacan body – a “theory in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983) incarnate. Dancing these cosmic symbols into being, danzantes re-learn

⁹⁴ Indigenous women-led organization Sogorea Te Land Trust has developed this concept as a matriarchal alternative to repatriation.

⁹⁵ And now I am thinking explicitly of ceremonial instruments as well as the thousands of human ancestral remains that are also kept in these collections.

Anahuacan science/art/spirituality as a communal, embodied and ceremonial theoretico-praxis. As humble macehualtin (human beings), they enter the settler museum space of “anthropology” – a human science – and re-member an Other human, and Other science. Thinking/dancing from tlacuiloliztli and mitotiliztli \leftrightarrow teochitontequiza, working with their maitl (hands), danzantes reach across time, space and media – subverting genocides/epistemicides (Grosfoguel 2013) through “inner work, public acts” (Anzaldúa 2002).

Chapter 7

Xochiyaoyotl: Danza as Spirituality, Ethics and the Path of the Warrior

The arguments of different indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult arguments for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. These arguments give a partial indication of the different world views and alternative ways of coming to know, and of being, which still endure within the indigenous world. Concepts of spirituality which Christianity attempted to destroy, then to appropriate, and then to claim, are critical sites of resistance for indigenous peoples. The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and the West. It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control...yet (Smith 1999: 74).

Xochiyaoyotl

In Western anthropology and archaeology, the concept of *xochiyaoyotl* is often translated as “flowery war” (León-Portilla 1963: 164). This history recounts ritualized warfare that was staged by the Triple Alliance of Anahuac to capture prisoners of war for the purposes of massive human sacrifices. However, this ancestral concept survives in danza in myriad ways, through re-articulations and re-definitions of war in the 21st century. Xochiyaoyotl, or *yaoliztli*, or *yaotecatl* – all reference the central concept of *yaotl*. *Yaotl* is most often translated as “warrior” or “enemy” (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). However, here we must again resist a coloniality of translation (Xiang 2018) that reduces these concepts in this way. *Yaotl* is not an “enemy of war” in the Westernized sense of the term. Instead it could be better translated, through an Anahuacan cosmovisión, as an “opponent” or “adversary.” Remember, however, the importance of “agonistic inamic unity” (Maffie 2014) – life is a constant oppositional movement. With this context in mind, an “opponent” can also be a companion, an opposite, a duality. The energy of conflict that is not *balanced*, that is “war.” It is unnecessarily violence. It is a disequilibrium of the inherent conflictual and tension-based energy of the universe. One way to resolve this tension, is through *yaoyotl*, the way of the warrior. However, within an Anahuacan cosmovisión, which is a ceremonial way of life, this war is nonetheless, a search for harmony.

In this way, *xochiyaoyotl* emerges within danza in a few important and illustrative ways that help define war in Other terms. When entering into ceremony, *danzantes* may ask “*ya listo para la batalla?*”, “are you ready for battle” (Fieldnotes,

Fall 2019). This colloquialism is a reminder that danza itself is a form of war. Ceremonial regalia and instruments are our “*armas de guerra*,” weapons of spiritual war. We enter into the circle of ceremony with this energy of heading forth into battle. This military discourse is embedded especially in the Conchero tradition through the use of “*capitán*,” “*sargento*” and other Westernized military terms for different ceremonial roles and ranks. This is another translation within danza that reflects its ongoing negotiation with the invading forces of colonialism, Catholicism and cultural genocide over the past 500 years. Nonetheless, these concepts offer another way of understanding danza as an Indigenous form of *martial arts*, as an Anahuacan art of war.

One of the postures of a ceremonial warrior is to always be ready, to never be caught off guard. As Maestra Chicueyi Coatl teaches her *danzantes*, “the warrior is always prepared,” “the warrior always has a plan” (Fieldnotes, Spring 2017). This attitude is put to the test in ceremony. One is confronted with many unknown variables at all times and from all directions. A fellow dancer may bump into you – though this is something *danzantes* avoid, precisely to maintain harmony in the circle. Nonetheless, we are human beings, in circle, in community, and any number of things can occur (by mistake or intentionally) that creates conflict within the ceremonial spacetime. While in ceremony, if a fellow *danzante* (usually a more experienced *mitotiani*) approaches to dance in duality, this is one form of *xochiyaoyotl*. They will confront you, face to face, and begin dancing in mirror image, usually only for a few moments. As a *danzante*, one who always seeks harmony, this form of *xochiyaoyotl* presents an opportunity to find grace, and perhaps even joy and fun, in this moment of mutuality and temporary opposition. Since we are otherwise dancing in circle, this is a temporary break in the protocol, for the sake of testing a younger *danzante*’s ability to stay focused and nimble. Other examples of unforeseen challenges in ceremony are the presence of police, of people intoxicated and disrupting the ceremony, of the heat or cold becoming unbearable, physical fights breaking out between *danzantes*, etc.

All these situations are reflective of another level of *xochiyaoyotl* – which is, of course, the battle within. One of the teachings of Tezcatlipoca, through the *nahual* of *Necoc Yaotl*, is that our ego mind is our “own worst enemy” (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Spring 2018). *No makane huanu ni yaotl, yo mismo soy mi propio enemigo*, I myself am my own worst enemy. This is another way Tezcatlipoca emerges in ceremony – in the form of doubt, tiredness, laziness, losing focus, or other inner, mental challenges that arise while in circle. Each moment is an opportunity to come back to the present moment, witnessing our minds and the ceremony around us as an interwoven, inter-dimensional matrix of *xochiyaoyotl* relationships – seeking flowers and beauty where there is war.

This is a way to understand *xochiyaoyotl* as an embodiment of a *xochicuiatl* epistemology – a poetic/scientific/spiritual way of knowing. Returning to in *xochitl*, in *cuicatl* as the spacetime of truth, of cosmic consciousness – this is also a place of

war, conflict and tension. Harmony remains the goal precisely because without a conscious, intentional focus on harmony, the world – in fact, the universe – will move quickly towards chaos, entropy and imbalance. The circle, as a microcosm of the universe, is one level of the *xochiyaoyotl* of the cosmos. Therefore, the *danzante* is one level at which harmony is either maintained or compromised by the energy we bring in, create and interact with while in ceremony.

These principles of living in harmony are the ethics that ground a *danzante*'s ceremonial commitment. They are *cosmic ethics* – a responsibility to maintaining peace by any means necessary. It is a militant commitment to justice as equilibrium and equanimity. This is how I also seek to define *spirituality* itself – not as an abstract notion of “spirits” or the “esoteric” in relation to the “mundane” or “material.” On the contrary, the definition, and practice of spirituality I seek is precisely about finding harmony *in relationship* – it is itself, as David Delgado Shorter (2016) argues, the practice of *right relations* and *intersubjectivity*. If matter is a reflection of spirit, they are not somehow separate planes of reality, they are profoundly and intimately interconnected worlds that we as *macehualtin*, as human beings, traverse and mediate. As creative, capable beings, it is a tremendous responsibility to serve this inter-dimensional role, it requires respect and humility. The training and rigorous discipline it takes to maintain this attitude is the path of the *danzante*, which is the *path of the ceremonial warrior*.

Spirituality as Relationality and Intersubjectivity

In previous chapters I have traced the ways in which *danza* is an embodied form of creativity and science. Here I will focus on *danza* as a spiritual technology, as a means of maintaining right relations in community and introspectively. Shorter's (2016) critique of spirituality as a key term in Indigenous Studies cautions that Eurocentric mistranslations of religious and spiritual concepts can exist on a slippery slope that reduces questions of spirituality to individual “beliefs” about “spirits,” or something “supernatural” or otherwise categorically opposed to “matter.” Shorter situates these hasty generalizations into a long history of harm that has characterized ethnographic and religious studies in particular. My own study follows Shorter's (2016) intervention in that “being related” is a better translation than “spirituality” (18) when thinking from many Indigenous worldviews. However, I do not completely shed the term “spirituality” because the term is used widely and often in *danza* circles, as well as within *danzante* scholarship. Therefore, I choose to define and trace spirituality *through* these notions of how *danza* embodies an Anahuacan approach to relationality and intersubjectivity. *Nochtin nomecayotzin*, all of my beloved relatives, circulates in the *danza* tradition as key spiritual philosophy that guides the *danzante*. “All my relations” is embodied in the *technology of the circle* and the *tequio* (work) of ceremony.

Teoyahualli - The Technology of the Circle

What the initiate Mexcoehuani Danzantes do not yet understand is that La Danza Azteca, (with its rituals of kindness, its trans-generational communication, and its creation of sacred place) creates what I call the “*teoyahualli*” the sacred circle that is the reformulation of the family. This teoyahualli was not created in one day, one year, or one century. It has taken over four centuries of negotiation (Aguilar 553).

Danza takes place in circles. Circles that move through time to form spirals. Organized in concentric circles that radiate out from the central momoztli, danza expresses the movements of the cosmos by bringing them to tlalticpac, the surface of the earth, where we can step inside cosmic movement through ceremony. The circle carries a rich symbolic language. The circle has no beginning, no end, it is infinite. The circle represents interconnection, a closed system of relationships, a spider-webbed ecology that threads danzantes together through the medium of ceremony. The circle is the family, the community, the calpulli. The circle is a 0 – the spacetime from which all other numbers are born. In other words, it is a womb. The circle represents the feminine, the mother, the creator, the giver of life. We dance in circle, we sing in circle, we speak in circle. Honoring the four directions within the circle, we honor the square, the masculine, the finite structure within the infinite. The circle spins on its axis, on the surface of the earth, joining the cross-dimensional cosmic dance of planets, galaxies, cells, atoms and the universe. The circle, moving through spacetime, therefore is also the spiral, is also the sphere.

The ceremonial circle/spiral/sphere creates a cosmic and communal totality. In other words, within the circle is community, within the circle is the cosmos. Through this design, danzantes are all on the same level, embodying the danzante teaching that “*no somos más ni menos que nadie*”, “we are no better, nor worse than anyone” (Fieldnotes, Jefa Irma Piñeda, Fall 2017). This ceremonial geometry also extends from the Mayan teaching of *In Lak Ech*, a spiritual, moral philosophy of intersubjectivity that permeates throughout danza. As Luis Valdez (1990) – Chicano playwright, elder and student of danza Maestros Andrés Segura and Mexicayotl intellectual Domingo Martínez Paredes – writes, “Porque la patada of existence is in/BEING JUST/and the best way to be/just is to treat everything/like you treat yourself/because (even if you can’t/grasp it all de repente)/YOU ARE EVERYTHING” (186). This is because the circle is a mirror (Fieldnotes, Chicueyi Coatl, Fall 2017), “somos espejos para cada uno./We are mirrors to each other” (Valdez 191). The circle as a mirror is a metaphor that is taught through danza to understand how the community reflects itself in each individual danzante, how the ceremony will show us our true selves, and acts as a space of inner/outer accountability and witnessing.

Each ceremony opens and closes in circle. This is also taught through the pedagogy of palabra, the teachings of the talking circle, ceremonial protocol that closes each and every ceremony. The *sahumador*, the incense holder, smudges, protects and cleans the circle and each person by way of closing. As the smoke moves around, so does the *tlahtolli*, the spoken word. If time and capacity permits, each and every community member is given a chance to speak from their heart. Otherwise, elders or leaders representing each member of the circle will speak on their collective behalf. *Danzantes* may offer songs, prayers or teachings from their experience in the ceremony. In general, elders speak first, those who traveled far and wide to be present for the *danza*. If errors were committed during the ceremony, if conflict needs to be addressed, it is done so in circle, in community, where accountability is created through collective and intergenerational witnessing. All these circles – dancing, singing, praying, speaking – take place around the sacred *momoztli* center. With this belly button, axis mundi connection, the circle is grounded in cross-dimensional and intergenerational dialogue – a conversation that includes ancestors, human and non-human relatives and future descendants at once.

Cosmic Ethics: Humility, Impeccability, Discipline

Dancing, speaking, singing in concentric circles, *danzantes* remember cosmic ethics. Moral philosophies of the ancestors, “which they derived from studying the sun spots./Their communal life/was not based on intellectual/agreement/it was based on a vision/of los cosmos/porque el hombre pertenecía/a las estrellas” (Valdez 174). These are interstellar ethics because the human belongs to the stars. The *danzante* seeks harmony in all our relations because *danza* takes place in the cosmic community of the universe. In the following section, I will trace how the cosmos teach *danzantes* three core ethics: *humility*, *impeccability* and *discipline*.

These values are taught through an *ixtliyollotl* pedagogy, a ceremonial approach to education that seeks to cultivate a “wise face and firm heart” (León-Portilla 1963: 152). *In ixtli, in yollotl* is another Nahuatl diphthong, a double-worded concept, that guides aspects of the ceremonial protocol and embodied teachings of *danza* circles. Literally meaning “the face, the heart,” in *ixtli* in *yollotl* refers metaphorically and philosophically to the human being, the individual personality traits and energetic signatures of a person. The *ixtli* is the *rostro*, the facial likeness of a person’s energy, “the very element which removes (their) anonymity” (León-Portilla 1963: 113). Through the eyes, the face, the gaze, one can see windows to the mind, to the *ihiyotl* (the liver-body of feelings and emotions), and also the *teyolia/yollotl*, the heart-body. The eyes and the visual plane carry their own embodied wisdom within the Anahuacan cosmovisión. In *danza*, one is taught to always dance with one's full range of vision engaged – seeing with our central, temporal, and peripheral systems at once. These exercises of the eye carry the philosophical metaphor of the gaze as a way of seeing different aspects and levels of

reality. When one is peaceful, well-rooted and present, one can see this in the eyes, in the facial gestures that manifest our conscious and unconscious thoughts. Cultivating the *ixtli* is something that must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually practiced.

In *yollotl*, the heart, the other side of this double-edged concept is the metaphor for *teyolia*, the heart-body, a place of vitality, feeling, knowing, and memory. The *yollotl*, from the root word *-ollin*, implies the heart is in movement, is a site of dynamism and truth-seeking through introspection and interiority (León-Portilla 1963: 114). This is because “*teyolia* is a vivifying energy essential to both humans and the cosmos, the shape and pattern of which are defined by *olin* (sic) motion-change” (Maffie 194). The *yollotl*, receptacle of *teyolia*, is the *corazón*, the core of a person.⁹⁶ *Danza* seeks to cultivate a strong and steady heart, an interiority that remains firm and equanimous amidst the ever-changing, dream-like reality of in *tlaltipac*. *Danza* re-members this *huehuetlahtolli*, this original word, these instructions from the elders, through ceremony. In this way, *danza* is a way of knowing human ethics that are cosmic ethics, ways of being in ceremony and in community that maintain humility, impeccability and discipline.

Humility

Here is what you are to do, what you are to realize: It is that which is guarded, that which is bound; the secret knowledge the old men, the old women...our forefathers left as they departed. For they came to live on earth; for they came to live with others...They practiced the bowing of the head, the lowering of the head, the bending of the neck, the weeping, the tears, the sighs (León-Portilla 1991: 74).

Through *danza* as a site of ancestral knowledge and cultural memory, *danzantes* embody *huehuetlahtolli*. Humility is an embodied act: bowing the head, lowering the head, bending the neck, weeping, sighing. The head, as a site of *tonalli*, as the place of the *ixtli* – the site of the individual personality and energy – must remain humble. The *danzante* bows as they enter the circle, bows as they greet the altar and the energies, remains humble as they greet the elders and fellow *danzantes* in ceremony. We are humble *macehualtin*, human beings that must work to remain as such. Humility entails respect, gratitude and reciprocity. Here I return to *danzante*-scholar Ernesto Colín’s (2014) notes on *danza* as *macehualiztli*, where he writes:

Macehualiztli means the art of deserving and generally speaks to a worldview embedded in *Danza* (in ancient times and now). *Macehualiztli* is about more than bodies in motion; there is a focus on

⁹⁶ And also, of any entity in the universe, all beings have a *yollotl*, a place of *teyolia*.

fostering humility through dance. The word reference signifies humankind's position in the world. In anthropocentric cultures, humans are given dominion over nature, or humans are the measure of all things. On the other hand, some cultures, like that of indigenous Mexica, held a worldview where humans are integrated with or connected to all living beings. The ancient Mexica acknowledged that without all the elements of the universe, including the sun, rain, plants, and animals, one could not live. The ancient Mexica worldview equated human life to a gift from Creation, a debt that must be paid through human productions. Two requirements are central to this worldview: gratitude and reciprocity. Danza was a vehicle to offer gratitude and gifts in return for precious gifts received. If people received energy and sustenance from the universe, what precious things could they give in return? The answer was total effort, prayer, and energy (in the form of dance), and in the most beautiful things that people could gather or create – things like poetry, works of art, flowers, incense, jewels, food, and so on (98).

Why else would danzantes dance for so many hours on end in the hot sun, in the freezing rain? Staying up all night to sing to the ánimas? Travel far and wide, spending whatever resources we have in order to keep dancing? “The humbling, the bowing, the inclining, the weeping, the tears, the sighing, the meekness, these are nobility, the estimable, the valued; these are honor” (León-Portilla 1991: 76). Take care of the elders. Arrive early, leave late. Be of service. As human beings, given the gift of life by the Creator and all our relations, we must make offerings, to the community, to the cosmos, to remain in right relation, to walk in a good way, to be a proper human being. The labor of danza is a work of dignity and honor, of respect and reciprocity. It is an embodied prayer of gratitude that is substantiated by diligent work, sweat, blood, tears and service. Tequio, the ancestral value of collective work for collective benefit, guides a humble danzante. Take nothing for granted. “Give utmost attention. Be deliberate. Take much care” (León-Portilla 1991: 72).

Impeccability

Impeccability means “without sin”...Religions talk about sin and sinners, but let's understand what it really means to sin. A sin is anything that you do which goes against yourself. Everything you feel or believe or say that goes against yourself is a sin. You go against yourself when you judge or blame yourself for anything. Being with sin is exactly the opposite. Being impeccable is not going against yourself. When you are impeccable, you take responsibility for your actions, but you do not judge or blame yourself (Ruiz 31).

While humility guides the path of the *danzante*, discourses of impeccability also shape a danza-based ethical commitment to right relations. Rooted in a Toltecayotl philosophy, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl dedicated an entire year of Calmecac (Anahuacan higher education) sessions to the study of Tezcatlipoca, working with the obsidian mirror so her *danzantes* could become impeccable and walk the path of the warrior (Fieldnotes, Fall 2018). This year-long cycle saw many *danzantes* leave the circle and learn hard lessons by literally looking at one's self in the mirror. This is another aspect of the circle as a mirror, the community again reflects our true nature, is a reflection of our own interior battles and "sins," insofar as sins refers to the self-destructive or self-sabotaging behaviors mentioned by Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) above. If a *danzante* has abused alcohol or drugs, not eaten healthily, not exercised or slept regularly, or is dancing with anger, or arrogance, one will be held accountable in ceremony – not by anyone else but themselves. As *danzante*-scholar Inés Ávila-Hernandez (2004) shares, through the teachings of Capitana Generala Marí Teresa Mejía Martínez, "*La danza protege/La danza cura/La danza alivia/Pero también la danza castiga*," (1-2) danza protects, danza cures, danza soothes, but danza also punishes.

Being impeccable is the path of the warrior, insofar as the warrior is also grounded in humility and discipline. Impeccability is "the proper use of energy," (Castañeda 22) as opposed to self-importance, which is a common waste of energy. The warrior must take inventory of their actions and take responsibility for each of their decisions. To teach this to her *danzantes*, Maestra Chicueyi Coatl trained them in "*recapitulación*," (Fieldnotes, Fall 2017) a regular nightly reflection on one's actions throughout the day. As one lays down to sleep, *danzantes* are asked to remember their actions and interactions throughout the day. At each juncture, one must ask, why did I act this way? If I became angry, or depressed, what could I have done better? How can I save my valuable personal energy? How did I waste my precious personal energy by giving it to others or spending it on arrogance and self-importance? How can I become impeccable in all my relations? If conflicts arise in ceremony, *danzantes* are also encouraged to reflect on why and how we responded, recapitulating our energy, learning from our mistakes as one takes responsibility for their actions. However, as Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) writes, impeccability is not about blaming nor judging oneself. This is another misuse of energy. Instead, the warrior is always prepared, always taking stock of their actions, and learning from the obstacles in their path – each conflict is a challenge, an opportunity to learn, to adapt and remain impeccable (Castañeda 1991).

Discipline

Danza requires many forms of discipline. One must train mind, body, spirit, and emotion. Humility and impeccability are cultivated through the discipline of danza. As Jefa Xochitezca Yaocihuatl of Chikawa Conroe writes, translating and re-interpreting the work of Baile Folklórico Maestro Gerardo Romero, "Discipline is

probably the only way that exists to reach the highest and most ambitious goals, such as dance, for example” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2016). She reminds her danzantes of the historical continuities between dance and the art of war. She writes “dance, like many other arts and sports, is characterized by demanding a very strict, almost military discipline. In fact, dance and militia were once the same thing” (Ibid.). She clarifies, “One must understand that discipline does not mean obedience. Quite the contrary, discipline helps us to open our minds, to see things from another perspective; Martha Graham would say, discipline makes us free. Discipline is the strongest and most effective way to face life, in and out of danza” (Ibid.). To illustrate what disciplined behavior looks like for the danzante, within and outside of ceremony, Jefa Xochitezca provides the following list of examples:

Discipline is to:

- Arrive on time for rehearsals
- Warm up before each class, rehearsal or function
- Remember to remove earrings, bracelets, and watches
- Do not chew gum during practice
- Respect dress codes: clean clothes, hair pulled back
- Remain silent, listen to the teacher and ignore distractions
- Listen to corrections from others with respect and learn from them
- Do not compete with the teacher, nor show off, or be arrogant. Learn with respect, with tolerance, with the conviction that the teacher is a human being who does not know everything and yet is willing to share their knowledge
- Write down in a notebook or in your mind and review corrections before your next dance and remember not to make the same mistakes
- Ask permission to enter the circle
- Do not leave trash
- Maintain silence
- Do not exaggerate or invent injuries and pains to draw the attention of fellow dancers, pretending to be a martyr. Listen to the body in silence and know how to detect injuries that need attention, without making a fuss
- Be able to take public transportation, or walk three or more blocks in the rain to get to dance
- Stay to practice when others go on holiday or go to parties; and yet enjoy as much as them
- Eat salad instead of cake, roast instead of junk food, water instead of soda
- Do your homework well and complete it without anyone having to ask you
- Give your best to be the best: at work, at school, and in dance

- Knowing the exact time to work, to study, to have fun and relax
- Turn off your phone, tablet or smartphone during practice and when we are with family or friends
- Develop and maintain the habit of reading
- Assist in household chores without needing to impose or dictate
- Have the courage to openly admit that you have done wrong; accept the scolding, punishment, or the consequences
- Discipline is not submission and blind obedience. Nor is it anarchy or rebellion. It is to reflect on the orders, analyze and execute them when you have the conviction that it is right
- Wash hands before eating and brush teeth and tongue three times a day. Be careful with personal hygiene
- Review things twice
- Yield, use the bridge and crosswalks, no littering, respect civil standards
- Read the news, be aware of what is happening and actively participate in political, social and cultural issues in your country
- Pay debts. Save and learn to manage personal finances.
- Be happy with what is done and what has to be done, do not see these commitments as a burden, do not be bothered when asked for a favor
- Try to be disciplined even knowing your parents, your family, your friends and/or those around you are not
- Do not need to be monitored and controlled, because you yourself are aware of your obligations to fulfill
- Have the ability to control your language, do not use big words and take care how you express yourself to the people around you
- They who manage to act with discipline also manage to get away from vices and addictions

I challenge you to take a personal test. How many of the previous points do you identify with and how many do you not? Do you have the necessary discipline to be dancing? Would you be able to become someone disciplined to achieve the dream of dancing as we should (Ibid.)?

Through these teachings, we witness danza as a way of transmitting the ethics of discipline. As a Maestra of danza, Jefa Xochitezca offers instructions on social comportment, transportation, personal hygiene, listening skills, finances, diet, exercise, dress code and education. In each of these activities, the ceremonies of

everyday life, the danzante must remain disciplined. This is because danza is understood as “one of the highest and most ambitious goals” (Ibid.) of the human. One earns the privilege of dancing through discipline. To dance is to “achieve the dream” (Ibid.). And as Jefa Xochitezca reminds her danzantes, “the distance between dreams and reality is DISCIPLINE” (Ibid.).

In Cuauhtli, In Ocelotl: Of Eagles and Jaguars

“Our ancestors...

They did not come here to be arrogant;

They were not seeking;

They were not greedy.

They were such

That they were highly esteemed on earth;

They came to be eagles and (jaguars)”

(León-Portilla 1963: 149)

The Anahuacan concept of the warrior is embedded in the diphrasm *in cuauhtli, in ocelotl*, the eagle, the jaguar – sometimes combined as *cuauhocelotl*. Embodying the eagle, the yaocuauhtli (eagle warrior) is a solar warrior, able to see the bigger picture, from above. The *cuauhtli* (eagle) is a metaphor for the daytime, the sun, for splendor, and victory. An ocelotl (jaguar), on the other hand, is the nocturnal jungle cat, able to see in the dark, from within. The ocelotl is a metaphor for the underworld, the night, and fierceness. Combined, cuauhtli ocelotl, is an agonistic inamic unity (Maffie 137) – finding balance in the oppositional space between the heart of the sky and the heart of the earth, embodying the static/electrostatic energies of masculine/feminine, light/dark, and external/internal (Maffie 154).

These concepts emerge through danza in myriad ways. For example, in the names of groups, such as Yaocuauhtli meaning “Eagle Warrior” from Salinas, CA or Ocelocuauhtli from Mexico City (Fieldnotes, Fall 2018). Symbols of eagles and jaguars abound on ceremonial danza regalia, painted on cotton or tattooed in the flesh. Eagle and jaguar imagery is especially present in *copiltin*, danza headwear that allows danzantes to shape-shift into eagle and ocelotl subjectivities. Ceremonial armas de guerra, instruments/weapons of war traditionally reserved for eagle/jaguar warriors, such as the *macuahuitl* (obsidian blade club-sword) and *chimalli* (ceremonially-feathered shield) are omnipresent in contemporary danza. Lineages of eagle and jaguar warriors are also evoked through yearly rites of passage ceremonies, known as Jaguar ceremonies for young men, and Xilonen (young corn) for young women (Fieldnotes, Fall 2016 and Summer 2018).

Tracing the ancestral concept of in cuauhtli, in ocelotl through contemporary danza provides an important (re)definition of Anahuacan warriorship in the 21st century. The notion of a modern warrior in the Westernized sense could be hastily

translated as a soldier, which in the context of U.S. empire becomes an agent of military intervention and illegal wars of aggression – an individualized and embodied extension of a military industrial complex. A ceremonial warrior, on the other hand, is quite a different figure. A ceremonial warrior, in a contemporary Anahuacan sense, is a *danzante*, an agent of harmony. They embody forces of integrity, trustworthiness and service in their communities. They are brave and not afraid of conflict – within nor without. The ceremonial warrior is one who embodies humility, impeccability and discipline. They are a *tecuhtli* – a noble protector, “a knight” (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary*). The concept of *in cuauhtli*, *in ocelotl* carries the teaching that all external conflicts are merely reflections of the conflicts we do not resolve within – through introspective, meditative and diligent reflexive work. It is *ceremoniality* itself that radically transforms and shapes this figure of the *spiritual warrior*, a warrior in the context of *mitotiliztli* ↔ *teochitontequiza*.

Some *danzante*-scholars have argued that the contemporary *danzante* can be understood as a sort of warrior due to their participation in social movements and political activism. Though it remains an active debate within *danza*, many *danzantes* do participate in political and social activism in their respective communities. In her study of *danza* as, among other things, a form of activism, *danzante* and scholar-activist Jennie Luna (2011) concludes:

La Danza provides...social, moral and community goals to live by, while providing a spiritual bridge for Xicanas/os seeking their roots and connection to ancestors. Activism and political organizing is viewed as a natural part of this process because borders and assimilation policies have sought to deter us from this knowledge...In this sense, politics and spirituality intersect. In order to maintain our spiritual ways, we must engage in political resistance. In order to have successful political movements, they must incorporate spirituality. It is part of a historical legacy—not one of victimization, but one of resistance and triumph for future generations (355).

Danzante-scholar Ernesto Colín (2014) begins his book on *danza* through his reflections on the actions of May 1, 2006 – an historic day of protests worldwide for *im/migrant’s* rights, where *danzantes* from Calpulli Tonalehqueh took a “symbolic place at the head of the serpentine mass” march through San Jose, CA (1). *Danzante*-scholar Citlalcoatl (2010) weaves *danza* into a lineage of social movements that includes *Magonistas* and *Zapatistas*, arguing that these revolutionary movements in Mexico in fact helped preserve the *calpulli* system and teachings of the path of the warrior that circulate in *danza* today (41).

My own experience in *danza* has included regularly participating in community activism as a *danzante*. Working to organize our communities and supporting political and social movements and causes is a regular occurrence for our Calpulli

Huey Papalotl. From Standing Rock in 2016, to the Women’s March of 2017, and yearly May 1st marches, there are countless examples of danzantes participating in grassroots social movements in Anahuac. While there are some elders who discourage this overlap between danza and politics, there are other lineages that see activism as a necessary continuity of the path of the danzante as warrior. I consider this debate, along with Jennie Luna (2011), in the context of larger conversations that exist between spirituality and politics – problematizing depoliticized spiritualities on one hand and despiritualized politics on the other. Perhaps danza as an embodied form of in cuauhtli, in ocelotl can be thought of as a form of *spiritual activism*, to use an Anzaldúan (2009) discourse – that is, “inner work, public acts” (225).

Conclusions

¿Como te has comportado

Guerrera Mexica?

¿Como te has comportado

Guerrero Mexica?

Quintimohuicatepe yaocihuatl mexica?

Quintimohuicatepe yaotecatl mexica?

[“How have you behaved, masculine/feminine Mexica warrior?”]

(Danzante medicine song)

In this chapter I have returned to the question of ceremonial protocol and comportment in danza as ways to evidence the huehuetlahtolli – the ancestral knowledge of right relations and intersubjectivity – that is transmitted through mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza. Reconsidering paso de permiso (from end of Chapter Three) from this ethico-political, spiritual vantage point, one witnesses the embodied and communal performances of ceremony as ways of knowing *cosmic ethics*. Asking permission with the body, paso de permiso entails a bowing of the head, the bending of the neck (León-Portilla 1963: 74), becoming humble and impeccable before the momoztli altar. As Jefa Xochitezca teaches, asking permission is an act of discipline (Fieldnotes, Summer 2016). The process through which danzas are distributed, the protocol itself (which is outlined in Chapter Three as well) is a performance that seeks balance and harmony. Each danzante is given the opportunity to pray in the circle, whether they lead a danza or not. Balance is maintained through respecting ceremonial protocol – re-membering the Conchero principles of “*unión, conformidad y conquista*” [unity, agreement, conquest]⁹⁷ – concepts that teach unity,

⁹⁷ Conquest in this context does not refer to domination, but to “conquistando corazones,” when danza wins over hearts, brings in new danzantes, and changes people’s life paths. See also: Aguilar 2009.

solidarity and liberation. Quoting Martha Graham via Jefa Xochitezca, “discipline makes us free” (Fieldnotes, Summer 2016).

Decolonizing these terms, through danza praxis, empowers danzantes to become warriors in a hostile and unkind world, a settler colonial, genocidal “paradigm of war” (Maldonado-Torres 2008). Through philosophers and theologians of liberation Frantz Fanon, Eduardo Levinas and Enrique Dussel, decolonial philosopher and theologian, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) theorizes the modern/colonial world in this way. He defines a “paradigm of war” as a “way of conceiving humanity, knowledge, and social relations that privileges conflict or *polemos*,” through which “conquest (gives) birth to a world in which ideas, ethical codes, and conceptions of the self that defined war (become) normalized” (Maldonado-Torres 3). Dancing in a world where white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism and other systems of oppression define dominant relations of power – a paradigm of imperial warfare – danza retells stories of survivance to remember right relations – an act of spiritual warfare. In this ethico-political milieu, danza teaches *cosmic ethics*, ways of relating that are guided by ancestral teachings of living in harmony and reciprocity despite but amidst social violence. As a ceremonial practice that has survived genocide and colonialism through creative acts of subversion – such as the techniques of the Concheros (see Chapter Two) – danza carries the possibility of re-humanizing the danzante and all their relations. In a dehumanizing world, this is nothing short of radical, decolonial love.

Conclusions Danza as Decoloniality

An Other Way

We might in the same way seek and find in dancing, singing, and traditional rites and ceremonies the same upward-springing trend, and make out the same changes and the same impatience in this field. Well before the political or fighting phase of the national movement, an attentive spectator can thus feel and see the manifestation of new vigor and feel the approaching conflict. He will note unusual forms of expression and themes which are fresh and imbued with a power which is no longer that of invocation but rather of the assembling of the people, a summoning together for a precise purpose. Everything works together to awaken the native's sensibility and to make unreal and unacceptable the contemplative attitude, or the acceptance of defeat. The native rebuilds his perceptions because he renews the purpose and dynamism of the craftsmen, of dancing and music, and of literature and the oral tradition. His world comes to lose its accursed character. The conditions necessary for the inevitable conflict are brought together (Fanon 1963: 243-244).

Sensory perceptions are molded by cultural epistemologies; abstract conceptualizations refer to cultural specific sensory orderings. All our actions in the world are at the same time interpretations of the world...Movement, in other words, combines felt bodily experience and the culturally based organization of that experience into cognitive patterns. Ways of moving are ways of thinking. Different ways of moving are different ways of thinking (Sklar 4).

Considering danza as a complete knowledge system (Battiste and Youngblood 20) requires that we conceive of Other ways of knowing. My research has explored this question at length – how is it that danza is a way of knowing? I have analyzed danza as an embodied form of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, ecology, spirituality, writing, ethics and political resistance. I have spun a web that threads poetic/scientific/spiritual knowledge with flowers and songs – cultivating faces and hearts, flying into battle with eagles and jaguars. I have traced the ways in which danza is a catalyst for ceremonial consciousness and cultural memory – a way of shifting perception and cosmovisión. I have reflected upon danza as a theoretico-praxis – as a thinking-doing, a moving-knowing. Theorizing in the flesh (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983), I have sought to re-member to relate. Following Fanon's (2008) sociogenic diagnosis of colonialism as a structure and culture that perverts our

relationships, re-membering to relate is a decolonial act. Being in right relation, in the context of a modern/colonial matrix of power, is the struggle for decolonial love (Sandoval 2000). In this way, danza is re-membering: putting ourselves back together again, awakening cultural memory, renewing our membership in the cosmos (Fieldnotes, Tio Samuel, Spring 2011).

Throughout this study, I have also considered the question of the decolonial through danza. Danza as a decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2008) is a pivot, a spin, a jump, a squat. It is a martial art, a ceremonial survivance. Danzando on this path of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa 2002), I have found that danzantes think differently. Or perhaps more correctly, they/we know Otherwise. A central aspect of this alterNative way of knowing is the explicit recovery of the sacred (LaDuke 2005), engagements with and through the ceremonial – insofar as the ceremonial refers to a spiritual/poetic/scientific way of knowing and being in the body and in community. Seeking harmony in all our relationships, danzantes produce ways of knowing where every day and every step is a prayer. Ceremony is a way of life. When we ask permission, through a *paso de permiso*, we are acknowledging this each time. Before we do anything, we ask permission, with humility, with respect. This is a constant, everyday practice. Before we do anything, we must ask permission, to do it in a good way. This is a ceremonial act, for it asks for consent, which is the beginning of any harmonious and reciprocal relationship. This is not only a philosophical intervention. Like survivance (Vizenor 2008), this is not a theory, but a practice. Dancing the decolonial turn – in ceremony, in body, in community – these shifts in consciousness are pivots of the geo- and body-politics of knowledge (Mignolo 2005).

In this way, I posit that the decolonization of knowledge and power cannot be reduced to an intellectual, philosophical, nor even political problem. Decolonization is not a metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012), but it is a metaphysics – it requires an Other view of totality (Rivera Cusicanqui 2014). Since our decolonial strategies hinge on what and how we define the crises of modernity-coloniality-colonialism – what, then, is our locus of emancipation? As a danzante I have witnessed (and at times participated in) the struggles that have come to the fore in our times – at Standing Rock, Wallmapu, Mauna Kea, Wet'suwet'en, the Shellmounds of Huichin, Palestine, Nican Anahuac (Nicaragua) and other sites of contemporary colonial antagonisms. I have come to know that these are not *only* confrontations with colonial developers nor with industry, these communities are not against science or the advancement of technology as some would have us believe. Blocking the development of settler infrastructure in the form of oil pipelines, roads, extremely large telescopes, overpriced condominiums – these Indigenous-led movements bring into question the frameworks through which we understand what is real and what is not.

These are not *only* oppositional movements, but also *differential* (Sandoval 2000) ones in that they open up spacetimes that re-member right relations and multiple ways of knowing. These are struggles to interrupt abusive relationships – situations where there is no respect, nor humility, nor permission. These movements

– as was made crystal clear at Standing Rock – are not about protest but *protection*. They include a resistant politic and oppositional confrontation with the death world of colonialism, but this decolonial power is rooted in ceremonies of survivance, in praxes that re-member right relations between peoples, places and more-than-human peoples. “Prayerful direct action” is what I heard at Standing Rock. Mauna Kea protectors commit to “kapu aloha,” “Ku k’iai Mauna”...“we are mountain protectors.” Land protectors, water protectors – *tecuhtli* warriors – a stance where ceremonial protocol, traditional ecological knowledge and political strategy converge. These are stories of survivance (Vizenor 2008), prophecies of decolonization.

These are not just “different interpretations of the same event; they belong to two different paradigms” (Mignolo 2005: 3). These are not “the basic philosophical differences between liberals and conservatives,” but a “fundamental difference” (DeLoria 61) that requires “changing the terms and not only the content of the conversation” (Mignolo 2005: 3). Or, as Cree-Saulteaux, Muscowpetung First Nations professor Blair Stonechild (2020) argues, “We are faced with a clash of two very different ideologies – one that places high priority over harmony with nature against one that believes that nature exists primarily to be exploited for financial gain. The roots of this ideological divide go well beyond European contact with North America. The rift actually occurs at the point of the rise of civilization, at which time humanity decided to dominate nature.” This is the end of “normal science,” where “incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practicing science in it” (Kuhn 2012) includes incommensurability as “an acknowledgement that decolonization will require a change in the order of the world” (Fanon 1963, quoted in Tuck and Yang 2012).

This is a “paradigm shift” – a “scientific revolution as a change of world view” (Kuhn 2012). Except this time, instead of Einstein or Copernicus, we have (r)evolutionaries like Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Grace Lee Boggs – decolonial scientists who are also warriors, poets, mothers and spiritual activists. We have Corrina Gould, Pua Case, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, Maria Huenuñir, Pat McCabe and other matriarchs of decolonization. These are the times of decolonial prophecy: the Eagle and the Condor, the Ayacaxtli and the Huehuetl, La Consigna de Cuauhtemoc, the Black Snake. “Tell me what the prophecy looks like! This is what the prophecy looks like” (Estes 14)! But as Oceti Sakowin, Lower Brule Sioux activist-scholar Nick Estes (2019) clarifies “prophets and prophecies do not predict the future, nor are they mystical, ahistorical occurrences. They are simply diagnoses of the times in which we live, and visions of what must be done to get free” – they are “revolutionary theory, a way to help us think about our relationship to the land, to other humans and other-than-humans, and to history and time” (Ibid.).

As danzantes – and Xicanx-Latinx Indigenous peoples more broadly – we have an important role to play in this work, within and across our communities. The practice I have sought to honor here is nuestra querida danza cósmica Anahuaca, what I have been calling a theoretico-praxis of mitotiliztli ↔ teochitontequiza – re-

membering right relations through *danzando* with the Huey Cuauhxicalli – finding “nuestra identidad cósmica” (Chicueyi Coatl 2014) by embodying what Toltecayotl danza elder Mazatzin Aztekayolokalli has called an “Ancient Mexika Chronological System, a Human Experience Towards Personal Transcendence, With Global Consequences” (“Tonalmachiotl”). This is a question of cosmic identity, of remembering who we truly are. This a question of *cosmovisión*, of an Other worldview – that is, a way of life, a way of relating, of “always becoming” (TallBear 2020). These are not ways of belonging that will come from DNA tests, passports or other settler technologies, but only through the messy, humbling work of being human in relation – seeking *neltiliztli* – that which stands true, that which remains tall, after all the settler borders and identities have fallen.

Through medicine such as *danza* we can remember “rituals of kindness” (Aguilar 2009), the ways in which our ancestors lived in peace. As the descendants of a so-called *mestizaje* process, a euphemism for mass genocide and sexual assault, we must find harmony and self-love in our heart of hearts, and in the hearts of our communities where this transgenerational trauma continues as cycles of violence and harm against ourselves and each other. An important lesson I take from the Conchero tradition in this way is to always seek harmony, by any means necessary. By this I mean, to always see the beauty of the cosmos in every relationship, even in symbols of profound oppression such as the Christian cross. To be sure, I do not mean to romanticize or erase the genocidal, settler colonial violence that was, and continues to be perpetrated against millions of our ancestors and relatives here in *Abya Yala*. Instead, what I am suggesting is that these ways of resisting, of surviving, of survivance, found ways to “use both worldviews for the same purpose” (Macias 319) – by, for example, seeing the Nahui Ollin within the cross, even as they were experiencing this violence firsthand. The fact that today we can dance, “without being sent to the Inquisition” as Maestra Chicueyi Coatl says, is a privilege we enjoy thanks to these radical visions of an Indigenous future, guided by the certainty that the truth always comes to light. These ancestors didn’t see *mestizaje* as acquiescence, they saw continuity through radical co-existence. As the descendants of these “*heridas abiertas*,” (Anzaldúa 1987) we must open up all of our cultural medicine cabinets, to find the right *remedios*, in a good way.

As Ethnic Studies scholar-activists, we have a lot of work to do in this way as well – that is, needing to honor the profound sacrifices and liberatory visions of those who made any of this possible. The original principles of the 1969 Third World Liberation Front are still radical – meaning they still get to the root of the problem at a Eurocentric, colonial, imperial institution such as the university. Solidarity, unity, building coalition, self-determination, transdisciplinarity, a “relevant education.” This is how the TWLF won – what the settler university, not the TWLF, eventually named “Ethnic Studies.” I suppose this was one of the only ways the white, heteropatriarchal university could try and make sense of what was being developed. Through their existing, Eurocentric worldview, they just needed to combine all the fields where an

ethno- prefix signaled some sort of engagement with non-Western subjects: ethnomusicology, ethnobotany, ethnomathematics, ethnoastronomy, ethnohistory and so on. In many ways, the university is still struggling to make sense of Ethnic Studies as a project, including Ethnic Studies scholars ourselves. Some are still operating under a dominant institutionalized framework, applying the methods of “the botanists and the mathematics” (Fanon 2008) to social problems faced by Black, Indigenous and communities of color – changing the content but not the terms of the conversation (Mignolo 2005: 3). Others are blatantly seeking to assimilate and advance their personal careers at the expense of the hard-won battles of generations of student-activists, the descendants of what TWLF veterano Ysidro Macias (2013) described as “moscas” (289). Or as Shoshone-Bannock historian and TWLF veteran Dr. LaNada War Jack (2019) remembers, “the intent was to create a level of truth in history, experience, and understanding of the natural world” (138).

These radical youth who are now radical elders and ancestors, envisioned and created an approach to education intended to more directly water the seeds of our ancestral ways of knowing. They understood the global, transnational Third World solidarity movements taking place as the fertile soil in which to plant and germinate these seeds, that would allow for future generations to remember who we truly are – and never forget the true purpose of knowledge, which is to (re)learn the principles of living in harmony, how to remain peaceful and humble people, how to live in right relation – with ourselves, our families, our friends and communities, the land, the water, and all our relations. As Kanaka Maoli scholar, Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008) reminds us, “knowledge that does not heal, bring together, challenge, surprise, encourage, or expand our awareness is not part of the consciousness this world needs now” (7). These ways of knowing are the only reason we are still here today, as a species – perhaps this is the most “relevant education” of all. This is also part of how I have come to understand the demand for “truth in history” (War Jack 138). Not only do we need to teach and remember the difficult and violent histories that are often silenced or erased through the “master narrative” (Takaki 2008) of history and dominant cultural memory. We also need to remember the truth in history that our ancestors developed “complete knowledge systems” with their “own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity” (20). As a species, let alone as a universe, we have a much longer and deeper history than 500 years of colonial wounding. Taken to its end, perhaps the biggest truth in history we can retell is that we are in fact part of the universe story (Swimme and Berry 1994) – that the recovery of ancestral knowledge systems through projects such as Ethnic Studies needs to depart from the basic fact that *the stars are our ancestors* – and that they know the way.

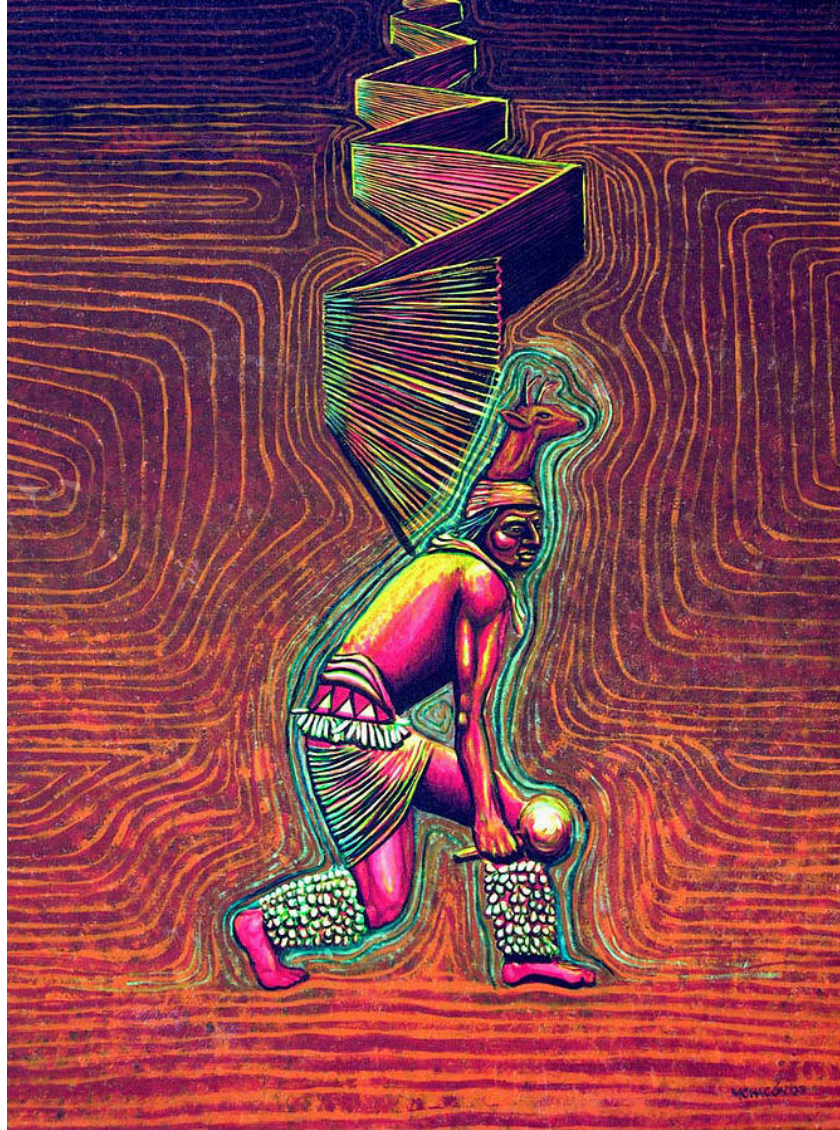


Figure 21:
Danzando en Nepantla
Source: Mario Chacon, artist, 2010

Danzando en Nepantla

“Danzando en Nepantla/Dancing in Nepantla – Nepantla is the Aztec (Nahuatl) word for mystical place in the middle – neither here nor there, between order and disorder. This painting depicts the borderlands at the end of the border. Unlike the end of the rainbow there is no pot of gold but in most cases a wasteland in need of profound spiritual healing to remove the atrocities against our grandmother earth, its creatures, plants, and of course human kind. Here the Yaqui Deer Dancer dances the negotiation between good and evil casting dark spirits back to whence they came.” – Mario Chacon’s (2010) artist’s statement

By way of conclusion, I write these notes in conversation with Chicano artist Mario Chacon's painting *Danzando en Nepantla* (2010). Both as an image, and as a concept, this painting gives shape, color and beauty to the notion of dancing across worlds, being in ceremony at the intersection, at the confluence of oppositional energies. The Anahuacan concept of nepantla has been theorized and engaged by many decolonial theorists, and also serves as the name of an important journal of decolonial studies, *Nepantla: Views from the South*, which ran for four years (2000-2003). Many Chicana scholars turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's usages of this concept to understand an interstitial, queer experience of existing in-between worlds (Keating 2006; Elenes 2013; Aguilar-Valdez 2013). However, Anzaldúa's more contemporary applications of this concept to questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation are themselves reimaginings of nepantla's original meanings.

In its original Anahuacan context, nepantla is a fundamental, expansive and important cosmological concept. For example, in reference to astronomical phenomena, nepantla is used to refer to mid-day (*nepantla tonatiuh*), midnight (*yohualnepantla*) or the zenith sun (*tonal nepantla*) (Maffie 384). Nepantla is also used to refer to different ways of relating: "*nenepantlazotlalo* ('to love each other'), *nenepantlazotlatia* ('to create bonds of friendship between people')...*nepantla quiz titlantli* ('messenger between two people')" (356) and in reference to the act of sexual intercourse itself as "*nepanoa*" or "*nenepanoliztli*" (357). Studying "teotl as nepantla," philosopher James Maffie (2014) argues "Aztec metaphysics conceives the cosmos as a grand nepantla-defined weaving in progress...Nepantla motion-change...plays an essential role in the becoming and processing of the cosmos and all its inhabitants" (403). One intervention here is to shift from understanding nepantla as a meeting of *two* opposing forces, and instead expand towards understandings that consider the way in which Anahuacan cosmology locates nepantla in the center of a *four-cornered cross*. The borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987), as it were, are not only the meeting of two, but of four, where "cruciform motifs both depict and embody nepantla" (Maffie 401). Nepantla sits at *onepanco*, at the meeting of the "crossroads" (Ibid.).

The practice of opening ceremony by honoring nauhcampa, the four directions, places danzantes precisely in the spacetime of nepantla, in the center of a cosmic crossroads. In this middle place, in this space of abundant in-betweenness and interstitiality, we dance. Finding graceful movement, in community, in ceremony, with the cosmos, *danzando en nepantla* seeks harmony amidst oppositional and conflicting energetic confluence. *Danzando in ceremony*, as *danzando en nepantla*, contemporary danzantes surf the interstitial flux – balancing and spinning between order and chaos. This spacetime, this place of ceremony, re-members nepantla as a way of being, a way of life, dancing in the heart, in the middle of the folding and unfolding flower of the universe.

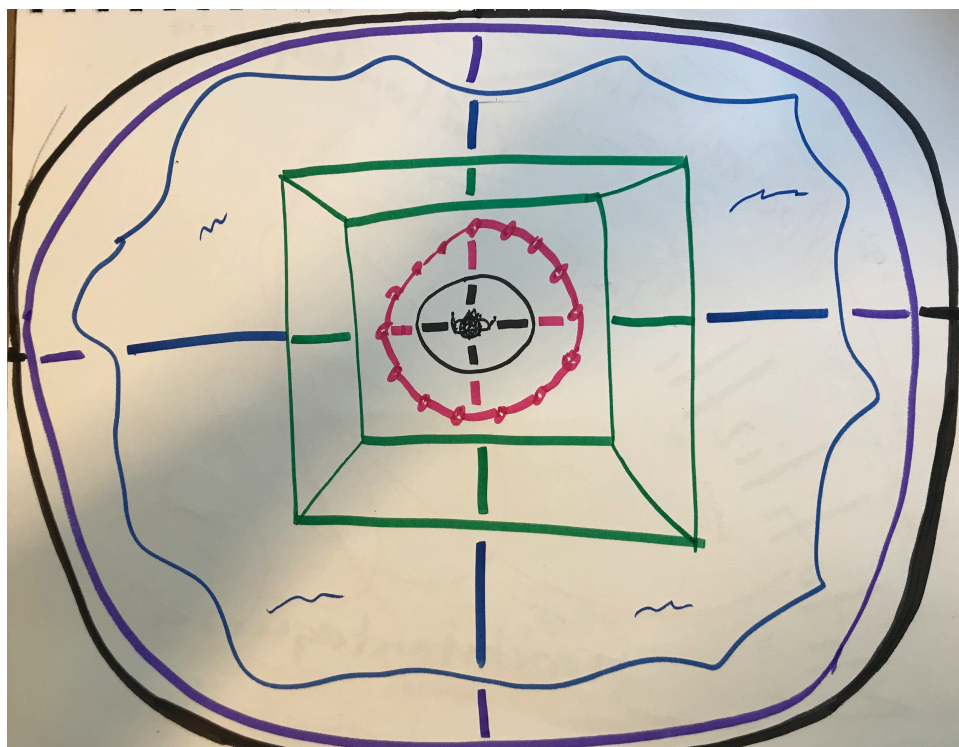


Figure 22:
 Danzando en Nepantla: After Mario Chacon
 Source: Drawing from Author's notebook (2020)

Danzando en nepantla then, is *danzando en el universo*, dancing in the cosmos. For the danzante moves on a four petalled flower. This flower unfolds to the dancing community, concentric circles of elders, children and human relatives. This circle has been opened with its own *nauhcampa* (four directions), its own *nepantla*, its own spacetime of *mitotiliztli* \leftrightarrow *teochitontequiza*. This circle dances in relation to the *teocalli*, the structure of energy of the local architecture and place on which we dance. This space has its own *nauhcampa*, its own *nepantla*, its own *mitotiliztli* \leftrightarrow *teochitontequiza*. These buildings, trees, rivers, dance, to become *Anahuac*, its own four cornered place - its own *nauhcampa*, its own *nepantla*, its own *mitotiliztli* \leftrightarrow *teochitontequiza*. *Anahuac*, the place surrounded by water, is a lake, is Lake Texcoco, is Mexico-Tenochtitlan, is the *altepetl*, the city and the watershed. Floating on this lake, is floating on the lake of the planet, *Cemanahuac*, the place surrounded by one water, the totality that is surrounded by water, in other words, Mother Earth. This globe, the Earth as a spherical planet, has its own *nauhcampa*, its own *nepantla*, its own *mitotiliztli* \leftrightarrow *teochitontequiza*. Now the *nauhcampa* in which the danzante is in ceremony is a double-equatored line that wraps around the world, East-West and North-South, longitudinally/latitudinally hugging the world, radiating from wherever this *xictli*, belly-button-center geometry is drawn upon and through the body, in community. Dancing in *tlatlcpac*, on the surface of the Earth, we feel the earth dancing in *Mixcoanahuac*, the Milky Way galaxy, around the central altar of *Tonatiuh*, Our Father the Sun.

This level of nauhcampa, of nepantla, of mitotiliztli \leftrightarrow teochitontequiza extends out towards the infinite corners of the universe. That is, until it reaches another danzante's ceremonial consciousness, who perceives this danza again from in tlalticpac, this time by looking inwards. Returning from the infinite/the dark to the material/the light, this danza returns as a quark, a subatomic particle, the smallest perceivable units of analysis that can be sensed through the Anahuacan body. As this pattern re-enters our perception horizon (Samanta-Laughton 2006), it becomes atoms that form molecules that form cells that form organs that form organisms. Each their own nauhcampa, their own nepantla, their own mitotiliztli \leftrightarrow teochitontequiza – dancing through each level of physical reality before arriving back to the danzante from within, from below. This infinitely expanding and contracting *danza cósmica* emerges from and folds back upon the danzante in ceremony, re-membering the xicalcolihqui geometry of consciousness, an Anahuacan body that is danzando en nauhcampa, danzando en nepantla, danzando en mitotiliztli \leftrightarrow teochitontequiza.

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