

*Writing Selves Home at the Crossroads:
Anzaldúa and Chrystos
(Re) Configure Lesbian Bodies*

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I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry "home" on my back.
GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *Borderlands*

A soft old song for every lesbian who wants
to go home
again & can't
with her woman lover in her arms
holding hands in the streets simple in our love
CHRYSTOS, *Not Vanishing*

"HOMELESSNESS" IS A CONDITION frequently experienced by those lesbians who are at the crossroads, separated from their family by homophobia and located between cultures. Moving from the traditional female realm of the "home" and leaving behind the heteronormalized scripts for women that involve performing roles of wife and mother, devoting themselves to nurturing a husband and children, Anzaldúa and Chrystos recreate social spaces that fulfil their own desires and interests as well as those of the ones they love. Claiming the validity of their own desires that do not have a recognized space within traditional marital scenarios, they reject religious labels that define and split woman by the "virgen/puta (whore) dichotomy" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 31). Taking agency, they create many diverse "home" spaces, with language, the body, desire, and community as primary locations that often converge. In a postcolonial gesture, valorizing differences, Anzaldúa suggests the positive potential of lesbian connections across cultures: "As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian

I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me" in all races (*Borderlands* 80). This article engages Gloria Anzaldúa and Chrystos's writings in which they reclaim the right to take up space and thus refuse alienation from their own bodies and societies through their cultural offerings. Language facilitates reconnection with the self and creates opportunities to forge connections with others across fragile bridges.

Writing selves "home" is an ongoing process, a quest, a journey away from alienation and exile to self-discovery. Translating experiences into words facilitates structuring the experiences themselves, and through language the writer is able to organize, understand, and integrate past emotions and events into the present self identities. In her autobiomythography *Zami*, Audre Lorde speaks of "my journey to this house of myself" (43). Exposing multiple displacements, and describing her desire to find comfortable space for the "real me" in a fragmenting and isolating world, Lorde admits, "It was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference" (226).

Anzaldúa engages places of difference. She articulates her paradoxical site within patriarchal heterosexism and racism as she tries to decolonize and deterritorialize her body and mind: "In the Borderlands / you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other; / you are at home, a stranger" (194). Representing the body as a site of struggle and battle, she liberates her body and self from oppressive male-defined scripts of subjection and oppression.

Anzaldúa's introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul* addresses questions of subjectivity and identity which women writers of colour experience. She suggests that the writing process is a transgressive strategy to create a metaphorical "home" and meaning for the self through constructing reality in a social context; "By sending our voices, visuals and visions outward into the world, we alter the walls and make them a framework for new windows and doors. We transform the *posos*, apertures, *barrancas*, *abismos* that we are forced to speak from. Only then can we make a home out of the cracks" (xxv). Re-constructing and re-

configuring restrictive sociocultural walls and frameworks of traditional homes actively create a sense of self-worth. Exemplifying Anzaldúa's call for social transformation, Chrystos's contribution to *Making Face* begins by imagining and thus creating a reality of family outside of the patriarchal home: "Gloria, dear sister"; she notes her desire for a sense of "home," writing, "I ache to belong somewhere, to some place, to some compassionate fellow travelers, to an idea larger than myself" ("Not Editable" 225).

Anzaldúa and Chrystos encourage readers to understand the significance of their specific locations in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and geographical backgrounds. Chrystos was born and grew up off-reserve in San Francisco of a Menominee father and a Lithuanian/Alsace-Lorraine mother. A seventh-generation American in a Chicano family, Anzaldúa was raised in Hidalgo County, "the most poverty-stricken county in the nation as well as the largest home base (along with Imperial in California) for migrant farm-workers" (*Borderlands* 98). Juxtaposition of "home" and "migrant workers" ironically foregrounds the fluid, complicated living spaces many inhabit. In a deconstructive strategy, Anzaldúa challenges categories of fixed identities by foregrounding her transgression of race and sexual borders. Often deploying notions of fluidity and movement in her writings, she literalizes her idea that "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. . . . A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (*Borderlands* 3). Embodying the politics of identity in their self writing, Chrystos and Anzaldúa create "home" in multiple places, refusing fixity, invisibility, and silence.

With openly stated political motivations for social change, Anzaldúa and Chrystos address diverse sites of oppression. Speaking on their own behalf, they embody Foucault's notion of a "'reverse' discourse" that challenges and offers resistance to authority (*History of Sexuality* 101). Anzaldúa encourages others to "decolonize ourselves and to find ways to survive personally, culturally and racially" (*Making Face* xvii). Clearly representing her fragile lived spaces of "perpetual transition" and "cultural

collision," she argues, "*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (*Borderlands* 78). Finding "home" in the body and "flesh" through writing reverberates in Chrystos's self-interrogation as she queries, "*What good is a poet against secret police / Our tender fragile flesh*" (*Not Vanishing* 49). The creative act of writing is experienced as an act of re-creating the self and the body, as Anzaldúa claims, "When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body" (*Borderlands* 73).

Writing is a major source of subjectivity and agency, and is firmly grounded in the body. This dynamic is powerfully illustrated by Anzaldúa's introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul*:

In this anthology and in our daily lives, we women of color strip off the *máscaras* others have imposed on us . . . so that we may become subjects in our own discourses. . . . We begin to displace the white and colored male typographers and become, ourselves, typographers, printing our own words on the surfaces, the plates, of our bodies. We begin to acquire the agency of making our own *caras*. "Making faces" is my metaphor for constructing one's identity. (xvi)

Writing their selves into being within a community context imbricates the body, identity, subjectivity, textuality, and community. Jeanne Perreault describes "autography" as a process which "makes the writing itself an aspect of the selfhood the writer experiences and brings into being" (3-4). Perreault further elaborates on "autography": "The feminist texts effected by this process of self writing make the female body of she who says 'I' a site and source of written subjectivity, investing that individual body with the shifting ethics of a political, racial, and sexual consciousness" (2). Promoting social change in her embodied work, Anzaldúa exemplifies the "autographic" process: "Writing is my whole life, it is my obsession. . . . For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body" (*Borderlands* 75).

Anzaldúa's writing crosses several borders, gesturing "Towards a New Consciousness" (*Borderlands* 77), one able to live with

ambiguity and difference. Evoking Judith Butler's warnings on multiple exclusionary forces operative in defining what bodies are "within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (*Bodies That Matter* 2), Anzaldúa provokes a "Tolerance for Ambiguity. . . . a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (*Borderlands* 79). She names her complicated spaces of experience: "The lesbian is part of the writer, is part of a social class, is part of a gender. . . . There is no way that I can put myself through this sieve, and say okay, I'm only going to let the 'lesbian' part out. . . . I fear a unity that leaves out parts of me, that colonizes me" ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 253).

Desire to create "home" for self and others, to build bridges and open their writings to a wider audience imbues Anzaldúa and Chrystos's works. Telling and listening facilitate self-identity and also create community. They invite outsiders in to feel at "home" in their texts and experiences, mutually creating meaning. For instance, Anzaldúa writes, "Making meaning is a collaborative affair. . . . writing is a collaborative, communal activity not done in a room of one's own" ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 255). This focus on collaboration celebrates the reader's active role.

Chrystos articulates the relationship of the "act" of writing to her sense of self and to her ability to connect with others in community. She remarks, "I use writing, quite consciously, to survive. I let off steam, I celebrate, I feel less invisible when I write. . . . Perhaps I'm looking for the family who will take me in & allow me to be all of myself. . . . I write because I want to change how we relate to one another" ("Askenet" 245). The "desire to feel less invisible" provocatively supports identity politics; she writes elsewhere of "my fragile sense of self, direct result of living in a country that has made me invisible. . . . loss is not loss if we write about it" (*Dream On* 108).

Both Anzaldúa and Chrystos emphasize their desire for social transformation and their motivation to challenge the boundaries separating people from each other. Anzaldúa describes her conscious writing process as an "act" of agency: "Art is about identity, among other things. . . . Creative acts are forms of political activism employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms. . . . We build culture as we

inscribe in these various forms" (*Making Face* xxiv). Refusing to be relegated "outside" of culture, Anzaldúa builds culture and seizes space for herself, for other women of color, and for other lesbians. Observing that society constructs her as an "outlaw" for many of her ways of *being*, Anzaldúa coins the term "*lesberada*"; she comments on the "stigma" of being "the outsider, the outlaw from the greater society. It's taking that stigma and turning it around and saying, 'As a *lesberada*, as a *lesberado*, I am proud of who I am'" (Keating 125). Affirmatively, the pride she articulates creates a "home" space for others and refuses the impossibility of "home," which her culture and family prescribe. By flaunting their disorderly conduct and voicing a desiring physical body which is *outside* patriarchal norms and the safety of family, Anzaldúa and Chrystos refuse to be cast out by heterosexist policing forces.

Chrystos interrogates the borders and boundaries of age, class, race, gender, sexuality, and sanity. She creates "home" and community not only by sharing her own experiences with her readers and listeners, but also by putting other's experiences of oppression into words. In "'SHE IS TOO FRIGHTENED' to write this herself would not want me to use her name," Chrystos relates the story of a black woman on drugs and alcohol for whom there is "no place / where she's safe in america" (*Not Vanishing* 84); "Hungry & small her body is tight with scars where her adopted / mother beat her" (84) foregrounds the body as text to be read. The notion of "no place / where she's safe" echoes throughout these writings, underlying danger in homelessness in public society and also danger often present in the family "home."

Identifying the economic, psychological, and racist suffering of Chicanos who refuse to acculturate, and the resulting conflicts caused by not identifying completely with either Anglo-American or Mexican cultural values, Anzaldúa notes, "I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one" (*Borderlands* 63). Along with many others, Anzaldúa chose to leave "home" in order to find her own multiple spaces of self—a geographical and literary journey.

There are, however, other journeys here; through writing each returns to sites of trauma in order to self-heal. As Anzaldúa

argues, "in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make 'sense' of them, and once they have 'meaning' they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy" (*Borderlands* 70). After suicidal despair following rape by an uncle, Chrystos declares, "I write to thaw myself" (*Dream On* 114). Through writing years later of the repeated rapes, Chrystos exposes the violence and possession of her body, refusing a split self and alienation from her body. In "Re*Entry," she suggests that writing is a source of re-visiting and remembering abusive sexual acts, during which the child is powerless and experiences loss of control of the mind and body, and frequently is forced into frightening silence; offering her words as survival strategies for herself and potentially for others, she writes, "With these words I'm gasping out of disintegration. . . . I've dressed my loneliness grief rape in words. . . . These words got me out / *You can grab on too if you need them*" (*Dream On* 126-27). To be at "home" in her present body requires dealing with past pain through representing the experiences in words, and opening the words to others who offer witness to her traumas. The healing process involves others and thus forms community. Writing shares experiences and forges connections, refusing isolation.

Incest is a taboo topic which self writing exposes and confronts in an attempt to stop the abusive cycle. "Incest Keeps On Keepin On" according to Chrystos, as she relates her painful experiences as a child and adolescent (*Dream On* 63). The repeated rapes by an uncle are a trauma which recurs throughout her volumes of poetry. Remembering the powerlessness, she says, "I'm going back in time & cut his dick off with the rusty razor" (*Dream On* 115). Her imaginative acts cross the boundaries of time and help her to come to terms with the traumatic years of childhood sexual abuse. Taking agency in the present, she transgressively threatens to displace the male power of forced entry and the splitting of psyche and body. Her present words take the place of silences in the past that surrounded her, since at the time she felt unable to confront her abuser, and fearful to tell her parents; she writes, "I had learned so long ago that talking back meant being hit" (115). Her writings interrogate social silences regarding incest, including contemporary voices which still insist upon

questioning the child's (and later the adult's) memories of their experiences.

I. Body as Text

Foregrounding the body as a source of knowledge and a prime site of self identity, Chrystos vividly represents the violent inscriptions on the female body by powerful social texts. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz contends that the female body is "literally written on, inscribed" (60) and thus becomes a "sociocultural artifact" (115). In "Thrown Against the Wall," Chrystos exemplifies Grosz's theories; she writes, "I'm easy to read / graffiti common as a broken arm / Daddy did this rapist did this" (*Fugitive Colors* 55). She names the violent power imbalances and the boundaries inherent in gendered family positions: "A fist necessary to name the edges / boundary of a room of time / He did this because he could / I stood it because I'd learned how / Language of bruises broken open / hieroglyphic of power / sub rosa of men and women / adults and children" (55). The body is a text to be read, and the writing is not difficult to make out; it is all too clear. Chrystos testifies: "I remember the child I was before / my uncle sliced her into debris / I see a long ribbon of our lives / flashing with the hope of home / I thought couldn't be" (*In Her I Am* 76). The "hope of home" reverberates through these works. Violence in the family "home" threatens literally and symbolically to split the mind and body. Recalling that she often day-dreamed about being stolen and saved from "home" by gypsies, she poignantly writes, "I waited on childhood corners / anxious to be stolen / from my life of hunger beatings shame. . . . No water douses these flames of a child / who beaten down & with no home / hopes for a fire circle / surrounded by roses" (*Fire Power* 22). Most significant in her writings is the legacy of past trauma written on the body and replicated. Ironically, self-mutilation is a re-writing that offers an illusory sense of self-control over the body, but the resulting scars embody the self-hatred which society literally inscribes on her body. The *act* of slashing and scarring foregrounds the body as a performative text. The "razor" appears again in a sequence to Terry, another young woman she became lovers with in the psychiatric hospital.

They were separated because of the erotic nature of their love letters to each other. She writes to Terry: "You taught me how to slice my arms with razors. . . . Strip / us of memory pain the incomprehensibility of everything / they want us to *Fit In*. Maybe if we cut off our arms / we will. The illusive glamour of scars. In public I wear / long sleeves, tired of lying or explaining my scars" (*Fire Power* 103-04). The body constitutes a text from which her emotional and spiritual devastation can be read and interpreted; it is finally hidden in order to evade impossible questions. The destructive "pain" of not being able to "make" herself "*Fit In*" society and the response of self-mutilating slashing invoke Elaine Scarry's argument that "what is quite literally at stake in the body in pain is the making and unmaking of the world" (23).

Writing as a strategy to re-visit and re-create the past makes visible the complicated associations of the body in experiencing the world. One of Chrystos's revisionary projects is to re-visit history and name and claim experiences of her ancestors as integral to current life. To be at "home" in the present requires honestly facing the past and refusing the numbing and forgetfulness which patriarchal forces encourage; as bell hooks suggests, memory sustains resistance. While Chrystos delineates multiple painful and pleasurable experiences, she also marks the notion of memory connected to the erotic lesbian body. In "YOUR TONGUE SPARKLES" she conflates the erotic pleasures of lesbian lovemaking with her own ability to speak of her ancestors and her heritage: "sun on water now in my mouth memory rich as real / kisses I understand to my root to bone ancestors where red / & so new you speak without calluses despite our scars" (*Not Vanishing* 45). Speaking "without calluses despite our scars" evinces a powerful faith in the act of writing, the importance of remembering ancestors and history, and the significance of sexual acts of embodied connection. Foregrounding the scars which are etched on the body and the mind by colonization and homophobia, Chrystos opens the past to reinterpretation and to transformation.

"Memory rich as real" recalls Homi Bhabha's deliberations on "border lives" (1). He discusses postcolonial strategic resistances to cultural oppression at the interstices of difference which are

enacted by “women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities” (5). Bhabha names the “borderline work of culture. . . . Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7). Writings by Chrystos and Anzaldúa exemplify his suggestion that the “‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (7).

Self-discovery through writing, and the importance of voice to self-presence, permeate their words as they defiantly refuse oppressive silences which dominant cultures prescribe. In reference to racial oppression, Chrystos effectively articulates the space which writing carves out for her in sustaining survival: “Vanishing is no joke. . . . Vanishing is no metaphor” (*Not Vanishing* 40). At the 1989 Canadian Association for American Studies International Convention in Toronto, Chrystos remarked, “I do not have a ‘self,’ as defined by colonizer culture—I have a unique experience and view of life, as do all of us in this room. However, I carry in my heart always, my people, our history, our survival in the present time. I am not an individual—I am a continuance” (“Native Women” 1).

She negotiates the always troubling terrain where writing of the self and personal experiences may be negatively perceived by others as assuming to take agency as the representative voice of others. Writing of her self in community, Chrystos decisively chooses to refuse silence. Her writing makes visible the oppressions that impact many lives, thus refusing powerful forces that would silence the experiences of those “other” than the white, middle-class heterosexual male.

Chrystos and Anzaldúa delineate the “process” of the self changing through time as they name and face “homelessness” and “otherness” created by social conditions and oppressive intolerance. Since the past can never be left behind, it must be integrated into present realities. In a split voice, Anzaldúa explains that “‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. . . . Every time she makes ‘sense’ of something, she has to ‘cross over,’ kicking a hole out of the old

boundaries of the self and slipping under or over, dragging the old skin along" (*Borderlands* 48-49). "Identity is a river—a process," she suggests in her remarks on identity changes ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 253).

In the following discussion, my focus on the lesbian body as a site of symbolic resistance to the coherence and mastery of patriarchal heterosexual narratives and identities is grounded in Michel Foucault's theory that the "body manifests the stigmata of past experience. . . . The body is the inscribed surface of events. . . . [and is] totally imprinted by history" (*Language, Counter-Memory* 148), and his claim that sexuality and power are coextensive in the "regulated formation of the social body" (*The History of Sexuality* 140). Similar to Foucault's theorizing the body as a site of social imprinting and inscription, Elizabeth Grosz reconfigures the female body as a metaphoric surface on which a social text is written, as a surface "ready to receive, bear, and transmit meanings, messages, or signs, like a system of writing" (117). Representing the body as a social text to be read, Chrystos makes visible violent institutional marks on the lesbian body; in "Lesbian Air," she writes, "She dreams her hands are branded Dyke by the government" (*Dream On* 142). In their work, Chrystos and Anzaldúa represent the body as a source of knowledge, a site of subjectivity and resistance to oppression. Demonstrating the powerful forces (social, political, educational, legal, medical, religious) that inscribe the female body, they also celebrate the body as a source of pleasure and desires.

As Anzaldúa and Chrystos name and claim their experiences as women of colour and as lesbians, they articulate realities of those whose bodies have been profoundly affected by the material world and discursive, limiting frameworks. Anzaldúa describes the body as "a crossroads, a fragile bridge" (*Borderlands* 74). She astutely argues that "Marking is always 'marking down'" ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 250). She risks these multiple markings by writing her material body into visibility. Registering "real effects," she names the embodiment of writing in her statement on the empowerment involved in writing: "It's not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue—*organic writing* I call it" ("Speaking in Tongues" 172).

Claiming the intelligence and knowledge derived from the body, particularly the erotic lesbian body, facilitates experiencing the body as “home,” but also provokes the “homelessness” of rejection by one’s own race and by church. Frankly confronting the complex and problematic site of women of colour who are lesbians, by valuing their personal sexual desire over racial solidarity, both Anzaldúa and Chrystos expose themselves to anger from the men and women of their races. Chrystos claims, “It is risky & unsafe for me to be this open” and notes that “Because homophobia is still a part of my community as a First Nations woman, it is very difficult for me to publish this book” (*In Her I Am* 86, 87). Boundaries and borders become major issues when one becomes alienated for sexual nonconformity, and for those who self-identify as lesbian, exile from home is a frequent experience. In “Crooning,” Chrystos writes a “soft old song for every lesbian who wants / to go home / again & can’t . . . because we / can’t go home / Crooning for us my heart split” (*Not Vanishing* 76). Once borders are crossed, it is often difficult to renegotiate the territories lost. In “Water,” acknowledging the homophobia and misogyny possible, Chrystos articulates the desire for a place to be at home: “She wanted a place It had to be here in this white world / She could not be a lesbian on the reservation especially since she had / too many white ways” (98).

While Anzaldúa claims in *Borderlands* that her choice to be queer is “the path of knowledge,” she identifies the psychological dangers in resisting compulsory heterosexuality:

For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I *made the choice to be queer* (for some it is genetically inherent). It’s an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for *loquería*, the crazies. (19)

Anzaldúa articulates her multiple locations and creates zones of social life which are both livable and habitable. As she succinctly states, “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back. Not me sold out my people but they me. So yes, though ‘home’

permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home" (*Borderlands* 21).

II. Not Crazy

Chrystos also writes of the borderlands of sanity and madness between one's instincts and societal prescriptions. She foregrounds the tremendous power and violence that lie in the hands of those who have the institutional authority to define another's mental state: "it's such a fine / fine line / between my instincts & their sanity laws," she writes (*Not Vanishing* 1). Paradoxically, she reveals that the doctor "committed / me times when I didn't make sense to her / dangerous mystery I was so quiet & so loud" (9). To "make sense" of one's self to other people is frequently difficult when multiple borders and boundaries are crossed. She exposes the homophobia prevalent in psychiatric care situations and tells of her experiences which echo throughout lesbian writings: "They used to tell me that I had to be straight or I'd be crazy but I kept telling them trying to be straight was *driving* me crazy" (*Fugitive Colors* 35).

Perhaps the most fragile but determining borderline is that between life and death. Avoidance of physical and emotional pain through suicide is weighed against strong survival instincts by Chrystos. Admitting to the eight years she tried to kill herself, she speaks of the boundaries and the thin line between life and death which she tread during suicidal thoughts. Writing about her first suicide attempts at the age of thirteen after a brutal rape, she declares, "I still think about it as a solution to being in pain or numb" (*Dream On* 114). She represents the process of writing as an essential way to survive. Chrystos elaborates on the mind/body split from violent psychiatric "cures" inflicted on her body through shock treatments, drugs, and physical confinement. Her writings expose cultural constraints and medical constraints that produce alienation from the body and induce psychological and spiritual turmoil. While articulating the harsh violence she experienced, Chrystos claims subjectivity and self-defines her own body as a landscape marked by desire. Writing her desiring selves on the journey "home" within that territory, she decolonizes her body from the theorized male ownership of the gaze and from

domination and mastery by heterosexist narratives of the male hero penetrating passive, wild territory.

III. At "Home" In Desire and Sexuality

Marking a major transition from painful abjection to the celebration of desire, in one poem Chrystos engages the difficulties of lesbians communicating across race and culture, but also the fascination of difference which fuels sexual desire. She writes of loving a white woman and complicated boundaries of desire crossed, influenced by internalized social prescriptions:

Because sometimes dark eyes looking into
 dark eye hurts too much Because we've been brainwashed to see
 only blonde as beautiful Because there are so few of us that
 friendship is safer & lasts Because it is more comfortable to be
 loved by those connected to those who run everything White
 flowers tended to stay Driven by curiosity perhaps They'd say
You fascinate me What are you thinking. (Not Vanishing 97)

To be at "home" in desire often requires crossing traditional heterosexist and racial boundaries, since boundary crossings help to constitute desire. In "The Night Gown," her prose conclusion to *In Her I Am*, Chrystos notes, "As we've internalized all these criteria for attractiveness, we have also absorbed the erotic charge of dominance and power" (86). Positively associating difference with erotic possibilities, often she identifies the differences as a major source of desire and knowledge on the journey to self-discovery: "Your pink nipples near my dark brown ones tell the roads / & differences between us. . . . Thousands of kisses our tongues hold each one" (*In Her I Am* 14).

The desiring connection between lovers is extended to the readers of her work. Chrystos's erotic language connects her seduction with the reader, seeming to welcome a mutual coming into being, an interconnection which is all-embodied and intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and sexual; she imagines a lover's words to her: "when you finally / let me come / . . . Your hand inside me pulls apart sense / I speak in tongues weep / . . . You want a poem to make all the clits listening / hard" (*In Her I Am* 48). Her openness, sexually and textually, to both lovers and readers, evokes Elizabeth Meese's comments on crossing bound-

aries and surfaces: "to be pierced or penetrated by another body . . . is to open oneself up in a terrifying way, to risk disturbance or pain. Or perhaps to risk being affected deeply" (115-16). Chrystos's deliberate attempts to penetrate other's indifference and ignorance recall Meese's further comments: "Penetration involves a challenge to one's identity, to the integrity of the (closed off? intact? controlling?) body. A border crossing. A blurring of categories" (116). "Your hand inside me" echoes with the title of Chrystos's book, indicating the imbrication of self with lover and reader and her willingness to take the risk involved in both acts.

"Let me come" suggests both a sexual and textual coming "home" and coming into being and self-understanding. Combining and blurring the seductive actions of the tongue in language and lovemaking, Chrystos embodies the "cunning lingua" of desire" that Dianne Chisholm defines as "an erotics-poetics whose fictional dialogues and sexual dialects perform a blasphemous act of seductive illocution" (22). In her concluding essay to *In Her I Am*, Chrystos names her desire for her readers' pleasures; she writes, "this work is a gift given to other Lesbians . . . I'll wish you, my Dyke / friends, a very wet night, with as much satisfaction as you / can conjure" (88). *Conjuring* suggests also an excessive extrasensory ability to find "home" in erotic spaces far removed from Western philosophical rational thought processes.

Lesbian sexuality is a site and source of a sense of "home" and belonging in the body, transgressing patriarchal prescriptions on the masculine ownership of desire and woman as the object, not subject, of desire. Further to her discussion of differences and power, Chrystos stresses mutual consent in sexual behaviour; she explains, for "me the difference between exploitive pornography and celebration of our glorious sexuality is rooted in ethical decisions & mutual consent" (*In Her I Am* 87). She clearly identifies her political stance in defiance of a hypocritical lesbian sector which would silence and deny behaviours which are commonly practiced and yet kept hidden. Chrystos rejects "politically correct" sanctions and policing of sexual behaviours. She writes, "Much in our lives is dishonest Lying is a necessary cornerstone

of colonizer society, therefore lying about our sexuality feels ‘natural’” (86). Refusing lies, secrets, and silences that surround lesbian sexuality, Chrystos names and claims her attitudes and her behaviours. Through her writing she creates more open, permissive “home” environments for other lesbians—young and old, active and potentially active.

Chrystos frequently registers her anger and sadness over homophobic censorship both by the National Endowment for the Arts and by lesbians who prescribe “political correctness.” In 1990 Chrystos won a NEA grant, along with Minnie Bruce Pratt and Audre Lorde. They were required to sign agreements concerning what they would write during the grant tenure. Pratt, Lorde, and Chrystos published a joint letter that confronted homophobia and concerns over censorship; they stated, the “art that we create from the substance of our lives is not obscene. . . . lesbian celebration of our own bodies and relationships in art challenges sexist assumptions that women’s lives matter only as they are intertwined with men’s that women’s bodies exist only for male pleasure and use” (Chrystos, Lorde, and Pratt, “An Open Letter” 5).

IV. Mother Ties

In her poem, “MAMA WANTS ME TO COME,” Chrystos interrogates what she calls the “Better Homes & Gardens” visions of the home location and family dynamics. She records her defiant rejection of socially appropriate performances of “femininity” with these words to her mother: “I come to your vacant lot / put a teacup on my knee / watch you try to drape my queerness in ruffles” (*Not Vanishing* 25). Representing her mother’s attempt to drape “queerness in ruffles,” Chrystos exposes the frequent experience of lesbians who must negotiate space with mothers who complicitly perpetuate traditional gender roles and heteronormativity. Chrystos decries the territorial “vacant lot” that is created in place of a full and flourishing space of mother/daughter love. “[I] stare at the dried weeds of memory / We’ve nothing in common / different views of the same demolishing crew” (25), again imparts the arid and deathlike aura around both memories and the present when “different views” are not understood and inte-

grated into a relationship. Chrystos gestures toward understanding the perpetuation of violence and lovelessness across generations as she voices "My terror, which was my mother's legacy (which she in turn received from her mother) . . . I sometimes feel as though the only emotional trick that she has left up her sleeve, is to die. . . . My Lesbianism is an unpleasant aberration which we don't mention" (*Dream On* 137-38).

Both Chrystos and Anzaldúa acknowledge the powerful social forces that shape the mothers' lives; thus, their writing provides understanding for others. The mothers' complicity in perpetuating patriarchal oppressive binaries which subordinate women is clearly elaborated. Anzaldúa writes that "Through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: . . . Which was it to be—strong or submissive, rebellious or conforming?" (*Borderlands* 18).

She articulates her emotional response to rejection from significant segments of her culture. She describes the "Fear of going home and of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged" (*Borderlands* 20). In an interview with Héctor Torres, Anzaldúa discusses the clashes she had with her mother and her sister after the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*. Speaking openly about her lesbian sexuality directly resulted in breaking traditional loving family ties and provoked her exile from home for three years. In the end, her mother relented; after that, she admits that she realized "that I had not won, that both of us had lost" (9). Her confronting the complicity of home and society in policing lesbian existence recalls Bhabha's articulation of "unhomely" lives (9) which disrupt the boundaries of public and private, the visible and the hidden, resulting "in redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-is-the political; the world-in-the home"(11). Self-reflexively exploring diverse boundary negotiations, Anzaldúa and Chrystos challenge the status quo.

Gloria Anzaldúa and Chrystos's re/marking of embodied border crossings at the irreducibly complex intersections of

sexuality, race, class, and nationality reverberate through these writings. They reject alienation from their bodies and desires through sensuously celebrating the corporeal plurality of sexual pleasures. Inscribing their longings for connection, they offer themselves and their readers conceptual spaces in which to envision experience which crosses many borders. Within and through Anzaldúa's and Chrystos's writing and reading, their (re)configured bodies undergo journeys of experience to empowering self-understanding and sexual knowledge—to being at "home."

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