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Nora K. Rivera

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## Chicanx Murals: Decolonizing Place and (Re)Writing the Terms of Composition

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Nora K. Rivera

## Chicanx Murals: Decolonizing Place and (Re)Writing the Terms of Composition

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Drawing from an interpretive decolonial framework that understands multimodal writing as the act of creating *co-composed* knowledge, this article analyzes Chicanx murals as multimodal compositions that exemplify the continuation of the Aztec *tlacuiloitzi* practice of writing with images. This work also invites rhetoric and composition scholars to reexamine Western understandings of history, particularly the history of writing.

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*When European combatants invaded, they were equipped first with an enduring Aristotelian syndrome, the rhetorical art of reinventing the cultural Other as a periphery that is declared as such from the colonizing center. As a consequence, local Mesoamerican composition traditions were considered insufficient and deviant.*

—Damián Baca

As drivers make their way through the intersection of highways I-10 and US 54, known to locals as The Spaghetti Bowl because of its twisting roads, in El Paso, Texas, they get a glimpse of the Lincoln Park murals, a

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Figure 1. Modern-day *tlacuilo* Gabriel Gaytán works on his mural *Wirikuta Tree of Life*.

place where Chicanas and Chicanos (re)write their history through images. Dozens of murals with images of pyramids, Aztec pictograms, ancient Mexican warriors, skeletons, lowriders, landmarks of the city, Pachucos

and Pachucas blend with illustrations of historical personalities such as labor leaders Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar, and Mexican agrarian leader Emiliano Zapata. Each mural stands as a statement of resistance against the traditional Western notion of writing, which for centuries has sidelined Mesoamerican pictographic aesthetics to the peripheries of society, bringing about a space where contemporary Mesoamerican rhetoric is *co-constructed*.<sup>1</sup>

To fully understand the rhetorical and writing practices displayed at Lincoln Park, we must challenge Western understandings of writing. We must also review the ancient Mesoamerican composition practice of pictographic writing, which has always existed among the various Indigenous cultures of the Americas in conjunction with oral traditions. This work argues that Chicana murals are part of a robust multimodal tradition of co-composing knowledge rooted in the ancient Mesoamerican practice of the *tlacuilo* (painter, writer, historian), also called *tlahcuilo* or *tlahcuiloque*. *Tlacuilos* recorded history and culture in pictographic codices made of animal skin called *amoxtli*, which European colonizers refused to validate as the first books conceived in the Western Hemisphere. Like *amoxtli*, Chicana murals chronicle the history and the stories of a culture and provide a rhetorical outlet that in each interpretation grants readers an active role in the process of meaning making. By juxtaposing a decolonial framework with interpretive epistemology, I aim at expanding our understanding of Chicana murals, a tradition rooted in Mesoamerican pictography, as multimodal compositions that uphold the use of culturally constructed symbols to *co-construct* meaning; hence, this work also invites rhetoric and composition scholars to reexamine multimodal writing as a fluid act of creating *co-composed* knowledge.

### **An Interpretive Decolonial Epistemology for Understanding Multimodal Composition**

During the inaugural ceremony of Lincoln Park's mural *Wirikuta Tree of Life*, dozens of people from the community quietly observed how Aztec performers danced beside the mural while two elder women walked around the dancers spreading copal incense. At every cardinal point, the women stopped and kneeled, and a younger performer blew a conch horn. Two young men played the drums while the dancers played the maracas, and the audience, the great majority Mexican American, observed with respect

and admiration. Throughout the performance, a man distributed brochures that contained a map of the site, information about the upcoming events at the park, and the website address of the Lincoln Park Conservation Committee (LPCC), the organization that maintains the park.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the ritual, the host—a member of LPCC—spoke in a combative tone about the upcoming construction of a new overpass that will affect an entire row of murals, and then he introduced Gabriel Gaytán, the modern-day *tlacuilo* who created *Wirikuta Tree of Life*—his twelfth mural at the site. After thanking the organizations that sponsored his mural, Gaytán gave a detailed explanation of the historical and cultural contexts behind the symbolism illustrated in his composition, ending his lecture with a call to honor and to celebrate Mexican American traditions rooted in Indigenous practices.

I begin with this anecdote to illustrate the multimodal range of mural composition. In this event alone, I witnessed a community-based practice that actively interacted with visual rhetoric, oral rhetoric, performative rhetoric, activism, alphabetic composition, and even computer-generated composition as the audience used mobile devices to take photographs and videos of the event to share in social media outlets. Understanding composition as a combination of different modes is not new. Societies have communicated in an extensive array of ways throughout history, but it wasn't until the rise of digital platforms that academic disciplines began carefully attending to the multimodal aspect of writing because computer-generated technologies, to a great extent, made it easier for us to compose knowledge combining alphabetic writing with other modes. Nonetheless, this bond between computerized technologies (e.g., images, sound, video) and alphabetic writing has caused multimodal theory to become another “Western frontier story” that ignores interactive writing systems that have existed for centuries (Haas, “Wampum” 82). And in spite of the computerized technology upsurge, educational environments continue to favor alphabetic composition. Why does academia continue to have a strong bias toward alphabetic writing? Is academia's favoritism caused by the idea that alphabetic writing carries more information than other modes, as some claim? Is this bias caused by our stubborn attachment to a Western value-laden tradition? Is the reason for our bias our own deficiency in nonalphabetic writing skills? This article also seeks to answer some of these questions. Notwithstanding, my intentions are not to question the significance of alphabetic writing and computer-generated

compositions but to stress the equally valuable contributions of other modes as knowledge-making practices.

With this in mind, I analyze mural compositions through an interpretive decolonial framework that understands multimodal writing as the act of creating *co-composed* knowledge that is (1) fluid and interpretive, as one *reads* a mural by construing its meaning with the help of different contexts, and one's interpretation might differ from someone else's; (2) connected to nonlinear historiographies of culture(s) and language(s), for the murals exemplify the continuation of the Aztec *tlacuilo* (also spelled *tlacuilo*) practice of writing with images, a system that has coexisted with alphabetic writing since the colonization of America; and (3) strongly linked to body and land because the park that holds the murals is located in the politically charged Borderland, and because ontologically the park is a commons area that challenges the Western institutionalized description of museums. Rather than examining each point independently in the following pages, I provide a more comprehensive analysis interconnecting these elements alongside an interview with modern-day *tlacuilo* Gabriel Gaytán (see Figure 1) as well as my interpretations of three murals in order to demonstrate how the Chicana murals of Lincoln Park confront Eurocentric views of history, rhetoric, and writing.

This work examines rhetoric as much as it examines writing, and it draws from both interpretive epistemology and decolonial theory. An interpretive approach to multimodality helps us understand the in-flux aspect of *reading* images and questions the traditional Western definition of writing as a static verbal representation with a fixed, objective meaning. Interpretive epistemology is commonly known for recognizing the presence of contextual interpretations vis-à-vis the objective universal facts of a positivist approach. From an interpretive view, all writing carries contextual interpretation, some more than others. For example, an academic article is composed of more alphabetic symbols than a typical poem, and written with less figurative language, thus bestowing on the reading less contextual interpretation. This does not suggest that there is a lack of contextual interpretation in academic writing. After all, when we synthesize an academic text, we are in fact providing a contextual interpretation of our own understating of the piece. We privilege truth based on the context we bring to a text (Myers). Murals, I argue, grant a reader greater contextual interpretation because murals rely on a few metaphori-

cal symbols, like poetry. Their meaning is co-constructed via an in-flux process that brings into play multiple contexts working simultaneously to co-compose each interpretation. In essence, the meaning of a mural is influenced by the contexts of the symbol(s), of the place, of the writer, of the reader, and of the secondary sources the reader consults—such as a tour guide, a brochure, a website, an article, a teacher, a friend, or a family member (see Figure 2). Additionally, and contrary to what some may argue, the process of interpreting the murals is not entirely subjective, because the contexts adjacent to the reader's context, although not always affixed, are not in constant change. Conversely, the reader's context, and thus the context of the secondary sources with which the reader confers, change with each reader. Interpretive epistemology acknowledges the reader's interpretation as part of the fluid process of co-constructing meaning when analyzing Chicana murals.

Whereas an interpretive approach questions the objectivity of writing, a decolonial framework problematizes our understanding of writing by ana-

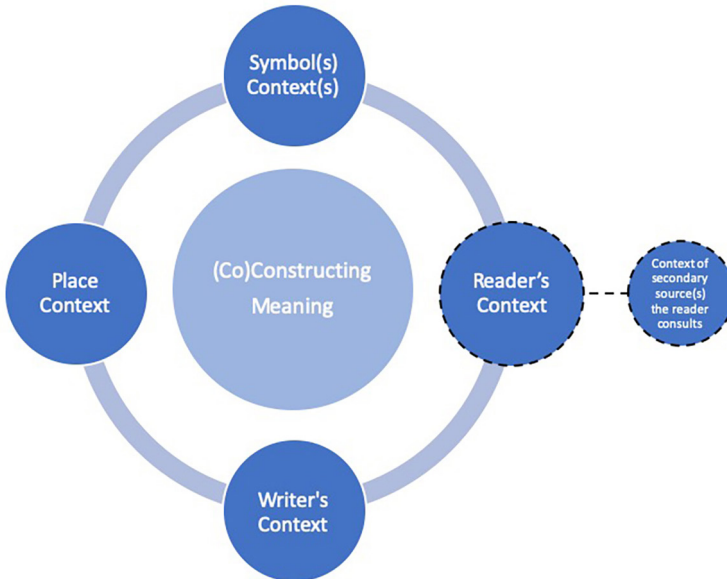


Figure 2. The in-flux process of co-constructing meaning when interpreting murals.



lyzing the effects of coloniality in our writing practices. It should be noted that my decolonial framework is strongly influenced by postcolonial theory. And to understand the differences between postcolonialism and decoloniality, we must recognize that these two terms came to the field of rhetoric and composition at different periods in time and from different geographic spaces. Postcoloniality is a term that, as explained by Victor Villanueva, “arises from political decisions following World War II, when much of South Asia and much of Africa were released from classical colonial control” (Villanueva v). In the late 1900s, the postcolonial option offered theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa the possibility of addressing issues of identity from the lens of the Other. Scholars of the 1990s associated Anzaldúa’s ideas with those of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Jacques Derrida because they occupied the same academic space at the end of the twentieth century (Lunsford). Decoloniality sprouted right at the turn of the century from Latin American philosophers who claimed that while Latin American countries had gone through a process of independence, these states were not decolonized societies.

Anibal Quijano, in particular, believed that Latin America had rearticulated “the coloniality of power over new institutional bases” that continue to “maintain and reproduce racial social classification[s]” (567–8). Villanueva argues, “Although the term *decolonial* is more recent than *postcolonial*, the decolonial’s [*sic*] history goes much farther back” (vi). Decolonial thought has been present in the Americas since the colonization of this land and has always struggled to engage knowledge in a “paradigm of co-existence” (Mignolo, *Idea* 107). Whereas postcolonial theory suggests that the social and political control that afflicted colonized lands are part of the past, decolonial theory insists that we still have to contest to coexist with colonial histories, languages, and societies. And yet postcolonial theory contributes important ideas with which we anchor the contemporary decolonial thought.<sup>3</sup> Decolonial methodologies and pedagogies, as stated by Angela Haas,

serve to (a) redress colonial influences on perceptions of people, literacy, language, culture, and community and the relationships therein and (b) support the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, histories, places, and spaces—and encourage respectful and reciprocal dialogue between and across them. (“Race” 297)

The colonization of America greatly altered Indigenous cultures and languages, some to the point of extermination, hence the significance of decolonial theory. Examining the murals at Lincoln Park through a decolonial lens redresses the histories and traditions of Mexicans on both sides of the border and, simultaneously, revives the Mesoamerican practice of writing with images.

### **Land at the Center of Colonial and Decolonial Scenes**

No place in the Americas is free from the painful awareness of coloniality. Colonialism produced historical, social, idiomatic, and geographical disconnections with traumatic and devastating consequences for native cultures (Haas, "Toward" 194). The disconnect is such that, for most modern North Americans, the histories of this land are foreign as if our ancient cultures were part of the chronicles of a faraway exotic land. Geography is, consequently, a central element of Chicana culture for it is charged with historical and political meaning. And because of their location, Chicana murals are a practice of resistance against colonial languages and colonial histories. But before analyzing the murals and their role in decolonizing place and writing, it is essential to review the conjunctions of history and land embodied in the concept of Aztlán.

Western European historiography tends to forget that ancient Mexicans inhabited the region surrounding the borders of the southwestern states of the United States and the northwestern states of Mexico before this land was colonized. Aztlán, where the Aztecs began their pilgrimage to central Mexico, was located somewhere in this region. Unfortunately, the history of the United States at best deems Aztlán as mythology, and at worst ignores it, with a complete disregard for its significance to the historiography of the region from Chicana's viewpoint. Walter D. Mignolo suggests that because Europeans first learned from Aztlán in pictographic form in places such as the "Tira de la peregrinación" (Strip of the Pilgrimage), Aztec history was "perceived as erratic narrative [with] unstable meaning" (*Darker* 133). Aztlán as the geographical birthplace of the Aztecs was mystified, diluted.

Aztlán returned during the Chicano Movement as a symbol of political resistance that challenged the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which annexed this Aztlantic region to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American war. In the late 1980s, Gloria Anzaldúa talked about Aztlán as the

US-Mexico border that was violated by Spanish conquistadores, by Anglos who “migrated illegally into Texas” in the 1800s, by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, and most recently by the US Border Patrol (27-33). In addition to the place of origin of Mexicans and a place of land tensions, Aztlán also embodies one of the first accounts of Mexican migration. Migrations are part of our tradition, Anzaldúa claims, maintaining that “[t]oday we are witnessing *la migración de los pueblos mexicanos*, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north” (33). Unmistakably, the US-Mexico border is a place of political and historical friction, *una herida abierta*<sup>4</sup> (an open wound), yet it is also a space of cultural, historical, and linguistic blending. Anzaldúa uses the Nahuatl word *Nepantla* (the space in between) to express this state of being in between two cultures:

It’s a hybridity, a mixture, because I live in this liminal state in between worlds, in between realities, in between systems of knowledge, in between symbol-ogy systems. This liminal, borderland, terrain or passageway, this interface, is what I call *Nepantla*. All of the concepts that I have about composition, all of the concepts that I have about postcoloniality, come under this umbrella heading of *Nepantla*, which means *el lugar en medio*, the space in between, the middle ground. (Lunsford 17)

Fast-forwarding to the context of today, Aztlán has become a decolonial concept that extends beyond the politics of land ownership and boundaries. It is a symbolic space of identity that is part of the narrative of Mexicans on both sides of the border, a space where Chicanxs can be part of the history of Mexico and part of the history of the United States.

The mural in Lincoln Park titled *Nuestra Reina de El Paso Ombligo de Aztlán* (Our Queen of El Paso Navel of Aztlán), painted by Carlos Callejo in 1992 (LPCC), alludes to Aztlán (see Figure 3). This painting displaying the significance of the Virgen of Guadalupe to the Mexican American culture not only states that El Paso is part of Aztlán but places this city at its center. Clearly, the latter is a metaphorical statement that supposes Aztlán as a cultural concept at the heart of the Chicanx community of El Paso. Thus, Lincoln Park moves from a space in between to a space in both. It is a place dedicated to sustaining a hybrid history that highlights Ancient Mexican, Mexican, and Mexican American memories while acknowledging their interconnections with African American and Anglo American histories.



Figure 3. Inscription on *Nuestra Reina de El Paso Ombligo de Aztlan*, painted by Carlos Callejo in 1992.

This park is a space where the old *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (neither from here nor there) ends to claim a new possibility that belongs to both sides of the border because Aztlán is from here and from there. Ultimately, this place brings a layer of historical and cultural context critical to what the murals mean to Mexican Americans.

In my interview with tlacuilo Gabriel Gaytán, he explained that the murals honor the Mexican American culture and its Indigenous roots; they are created to remember the struggles of this minoritized group and, therefore, also pay tribute to those who have been part of the struggle of

minorities—such as Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy. “That’s why we do this,” Gaytán explained, to tell American history from the point of view of the people of the Americas. The park is a “public art gallery,” Gaytán added. Ontologically, the park decenters colonial institutions such as art museums, history museums, and libraries founded on Western European notions of knowledge and modernity. Historically, Chicax people have been marginalized by institutionalized views that prioritize Eurocentric historiographies in which native narratives fit only at the margins. Take the case of the El Paso Museum of Art (EPMA). Even though this organization often brings exhibitions with subject matters meaningful to the Borderland, its permanent largest collections are primarily European. EPMA holds one of the largest collections of Spanish colonial paintings with religious themes—titled Mexican Retablos—and houses the Kress Collection described by EPMA’s website as a “remarkable collection [that] spans more than five centuries [from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries] and encompasses Italian, Spanish, French, Flemish, and Dutch masterworks from the most celebrated names in the history of art” (EPMA). Another example is the El Paso Museum of History, which originates the history of this region with the arrival of European and European-descent immigrants in a traditional, chronological way.

The idea to compose Chicax murals on the pillars of Lincoln Park came from artists who had worked on murals in a park in San Diego during the 1970s. Chicax artists painted murals on the columns of the park beneath the Coronado bridge in San Diego as a way to reclaim a disputed land. A parcel was promised to the residents of Barrio Logan to build a recreational space for the community. However, the city decided to construct the California Highway Patrol station instead. The community, along with students from Chicano studies courses, organized a protest that evolved into an occupation of twelve days. When at last the land became the Chicano Park, Chicax artists began painting murals to embellish the place and to honor their culture (Chicano Park). In the 1980s, Felipe Adame became involved with the park in San Diego and in 1983 was asked by the Lincoln Center director to paint murals for the community of El Paso (LPCC).

The park in El Paso holds a building that has also been disputed over the years. In the early 1900s, Lincoln School was built on the land where Lincoln Park rests. The building became part of El Paso Independent School

District, which sold it to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) in 1970 to be used as a field office in the construction of highway I-10. From 1977 to 2006 the city operated the Lincoln Cultural Center in this building, but it was closed down with claims of issues of mold and asbestos; the claims were dropped in 2012. Since then, the community, with the help of LPCC, has been fighting against the demolition of this building and hopes to turn it into a cultural space for the community of El Paso (LPCC). Those who protect the park are also facing the construction of a new overpass that will eliminate a full row of columns covered by murals. TxDOT has promised to allow the repainting of the murals once the construction is finished; however, it is not yet clear who will pay for the expenses that this new quest will incur.

Lincoln Park has a total of forty-five double-sided columns, which translate into ninety sides available for murals. As of today, local artists have painted forty-five sides and plan on continuing the tradition until all ninety sides are covered with murals. Different organizations from the community get involved to maintain the park. LPCC maintains all paintings to ensure that retouches are done when needed, and TxDOT places lights in all the columns for a better view of the murals at night. The latter also guarantees that no anti-graffiti paint is placed on any of the columns as it would be nearly impossible for artists to paint over anti-graffiti paint (Gaytán). Other organizations that are at the core of preserving and promoting the park are lowrider car clubs, which not only organize events to promote the site but also pay sponsorship fees to place their club names in the murals. Sponsorship money is a means to supplement the grants given by LPCC to buy material or to pay artists (Gaytán).

Gaytán sees Lincoln Park as a public art gallery where each mural tells its own story. The park is like a nonlinear book that is constantly rewriting itself to reclaim a history that has been forgotten by colonizing views of history. “I do [this] for the community. I do it for my raza. And, also for people to understand la raza, our Mexican American culture.... Our ancestry is rich, we just need to learn about it, study it, and celebrate it,” Gaytán explained. And that is precisely what the murals demand from those who visit the site. We must engage with the histories and the stories behind the images in order to *interpret* the murals.

## (Re)Writing the Terms of Composition

Contrary to what European colonizers assumed about the Aztecs, this culture maintained a sophisticated system to record *itolaca* (history). Nahua historian Miguel León-Portilla maintains that *itolaca*, loosely translated into “what is said about someone or something,” was documented in codices that were stored in *amoxcalli* (libraries) (112). Pictographic books, *amoxtli*, were read by looking at the pictures while narrating the story the pictures depicted. Walter Mignolo argues that because “the interpretation changed when the interpreter changed and, mainly, when the ruler for whom the interpreter worked changed,” Western Europeans found Aztec practices of preserving memory and history “erratic” and “unstable” (*Darker* 133). Pedro de Gante, the first Franciscan priest to arrive at Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, after its fall, wrote to the Spanish monarch that Amerindians were “people without writing, without letters, without written characters, and without any kind of enlightenment” (Mignolo, *Darker* 44). And only sixty years after the fall, Juan Bautista Pomar, a descendent of both Amerindians and Spaniards, wrote in his chronicles of Texcoco a dull description of the Aztec’s writing practices:

And it is clear that if they had possessed letters, they would have come to grasp many natural secrets; but as paintings are little capable of retaining in them the memory of the things painted, they did not advance, because almost as soon as the one who had made the most progress died, his knowledge died with him. (Mignolo, *Darker* 45)

Bautista’s ideology, already imbued with European sight, regarded letters as a supreme technology in which to preserve history and knowledge. He simply echoed a Western European thought that understood alphabetic writing as a symbol of human progress. And clearly through this lens, pre-Columbian societies had not evolved enough to create such technology; therefore, ancient Mesoamerican cultures were deemed inferior. It was decided, in spite of finding a sizable number of codices—most of which were burned—Amerindians had no writing, thus no history.

Mesoamerican *amoxtli* were doomed to go down in history as unreliable historical records that did not employ “true writing.” Thus, regrettably, rhetorical and composition inquiry “reduces them to quaint artifacts of an apparently extinct culture” (Baca, *Mestiz@* 76). “[M]isrepresentation of native knowledge and culture,” as argued by Jennifer Ramirez et al., “has largely

occurred because of the dominating white American view that only written knowledge is valid” (212). While Western European ideology intended to “write over”—to put it in Damián Baca’s terms—Aztec’s writing tradition, this practice continued, mutating into various artistic-social-cultural-historical expressions, such as mural composition. Baca maintains that murals have emerged in the midst of turmoil to stand out against injustice. At the end of the Mexican Revolution, for instance, Mexican muralism led by Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco gave way to an artistic movement enveloped in a social ideology that responded to the matters addressed by the Mexican Revolution (Carter 283). Without undermining the complexity of this upheaval, the Mexican Revolution was the result of the thirty-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, whose dogma consisted of promoting *latifundios* (large plantation-style estates) that only enriched the rich and neglected the needs of the poor. Díaz’s government was strongly influenced by foreign ideas; therefore, it was only natural that in the decade after the Mexican Revolution the government was swayed toward a nationalistic view. In the 1920s, Mexican muralism placed the Mexican identity at its core, and even though it was a movement criticized for its strong political influence, the murals’ rhetorical messages clearly conveyed the class struggle of the powerless.

In like manner, Chicanas and Chicanos utilized the discourse of murals that instilled pride in Mesoamerican roots to support and encourage social and political changes in the United States during the civil rights movement (Baca, *Mestiz@*). Chicax artists from both Chicano Park and Lincoln Park have also been significantly influenced by Mexican muralism. For instance, in 1971 Salvador Torres—one of the founders of the Chicano Park in San Diego—attended the inaugural ceremony of the Siqueiros Polyforum in Mexico City, a cultural center designed by David Alfaro Siqueiros that houses his largest mural, *La Marcha de la Humanidad* (The March of Humanity) (Chicano Park). Another example is Carlos E. Flores, an artist who during the mid-1980s painted several murals in the now closed Lincoln Center located on the grounds of Lincoln Park. Flores studied at the prestigious school of arts Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City, the first school of arts in the Americas and the same art academy where Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco studied (LPCC). Indeed, the Mesoamerican practice of writing with images has always been in the minds of muralists on both sides of the border.



In Lincoln Park, *tlacuilo* Gabriel Gaytán advocates for the proliferation of Indigenous writing practices:

What I'm trying to do is what the Aztecas and the Mayans, and the Huicholes, and all the Indigenous people of the Americas did. They used picture writing instead of words. . . . It was an illustrated word . . . kind of a universal language . . . they used picture books. Some in the north used sand painting or leather, you know, they would use leather. In central Mexico, they would use a bark of a tree to make paper and to make their books. (Gaytán)

Gaytán possesses a great deal of cultural and historical knowledge associated with his Mexican American identity, and during our interview he did not hesitate to succinctly narrate the colonization of knowledge that ancient Mexicans withstood during the sixteenth century. “Unfortunately, the invaders burned libraries of books from Mexico. . . . They [European colonizers] didn't know what they [*amoxtili*] were, and they didn't want the Indigenous [people] to be empowered,” he explained. Whereas at first glance Chicana artists might seem exclusively painters of a marginalized culture, modern *tlacuilos* such as Gaytán immerse themselves in Mesoamerican culture, history, and semiotics for a better understanding of their ancestry in order to (re)write their stories through images.

Since he became involved with LPCC, Gaytán conducts special presentations to teach the El Paso community and, most importantly, Chicana artists about Aztec and Mayan history and semiotics. Although the park holds murals with images of well-known Mexican and Mexican American figures such as Pancho Villa, La Catrina, and César Chaves, Gaytán believes that it is important to continue adding lesser-known histories to the park, such as the histories of Dolores Huerta, César Chavez's counterpart during the Chicano Movement; Comandante Ramona, the female commander of Indigenous origin who became the voice of women during the Movimiento Zapatista; and the Huichol Indigenous community of Mexico. “We want people to know about the history beyond the books,” Gaytán firmly stated during our interview.

That's a form of empowerment to Mexicanos. 'Cause I do presentations, and people come back [and say] “I didn't know that, I thought we were dumb Mexicans,” and I say, “no we're not, man.” That's what people think we are, but we're not. . . . We have a very intelligent and well-rounded Indigenous history . . . but how can you fight 500 years of lies.” (Gaytán)

And although—five hundred years later—steps toward including visual rhetoric and multimodal writing in composition classrooms have been made, most universities continue to teach the history of rhetoric and composition centered on the Greek tradition, excluding Aztec pictography from their curricula altogether as if it never existed. Surprisingly, as early as last decade most academics still claimed that writing was restricted to verbal representations:

Writing, most of us would agree, is restricted to verbal representation (we do not write paintings or photographs). Rhetoric, on the other hand, is not bound to a particular mode of representation; it is inherently (or at least potentially) multi-representational, and it may be practiced in any medium, including writing. (McComiskey 188)

Today, most visual rhetoric scholars center their work on modern technologies such as print, television, and the internet. Even multimodal studies favor the Western dogma of linear progress by highlighting primarily the computer-generated realms of multimodality. For instance, multimodal scholars Gail E. Hawisher, Cynthia L. Selfe, Gorjana Kisa, and Shafinaz Ahmed believe that “we daily witness the emergence of a new literacy ideology,” and by *new literacy ideology* they mean computerized digital literacy, for they argue that “multimodality has become a key feature of much of the current work in computers and composition studies” (Hawisher et al. 57). Responding to these trends, Angela M. Haas calls for a decolonial understanding of “digital” that is not limited to computer-generated realms but one that “denotes ‘of or relating to the fingers or toes’” (“Wampum” 84). From this perspective, Haas asserts:

American Indians have a long-standing intellectual tradition of multimodal, digital rhetoric theories and practices—or theories and practices of communicating via the encoding of information with our fingers and toes using a variety of media. Thus we must be critical of the stories we tell ourselves about being “technologically advanced.” (94)

That is neither to say that (computerized) digital composition studies aren’t significant nor to ignore the assistance that these systems have given to nontraditional historiographies by providing scholars with immediate access to information and by disseminating nontraditional practices, but to argue that Aztec pictography is a multimodal writing practice that is as

worthy of study as traditional composition practices and should be included in our curricula as both an ancient and a contemporary writing practice that rewrites our understanding of writing by embodying a complex in-flux process of co-constructing meaning while disseminating Indigenous and Mestiz@ histories that have been covered under what Gaytán calls “500 hundred years of lies.”

Is it possible to reconcile Western and pre-Columbian notions of writing? The most recent position statement by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) on “Understanding and Teaching Writing: Guiding Principles” defines writing as “the act of creating composed knowledge . . . [that] serves different purposes” for an audience in a variety of contexts. NCTE recognizes that within the elements of writing we find content, style, and form, which may include symbols and images. Most importantly, this statement leaves behind the archaic and fossilized definition of writing as a representation of speech and acknowledges the *value* of writing as a powerful instrument to preserve and maintain knowledge, histories, and ideologies. The Aztecs knew this, and for this reason pictographic writing became the most practical system to communicate among the numerous Indigenous languages in Mesoamerica. The Aztec concept of writing, *tlacuilotlitzli*, was intertwined with painting, so much so that writing was also referenced as the action of using the red and the black ink, the wisdom of the past that guided the path (León-Portilla). And interpreting writing rather than reading was essential. According to Mignolo, “a book is not an object whose essential property can be identified, but rather a cultural and regional interpretation of a specific kind of object. Writing, although it refers to an activity rather than an object, follows the same logic” (*Darker* 119). In essence, ancient *tlacuilotlitzli* had the same function as writing today, to convey meaning and to preserve knowledge, but with a higher consideration for interpretation, much like poetry.

Precisely like ancient *tlacuilotlitzli*, one *reads* a mural by interpreting its images, and each meaning-making experience is influenced by the contexts surrounding the symbol(s), the place, the writer, and the reader. And given that most sightseers visit Lincoln Park with family members or friends, and most visitors carry a smart phone with instant access to (computerized) digital information, mural readers are frequently assisted by a secondary source (e.g., a tour guide, a brochure, a website, a friend, a family member, a teacher) that not only adds another layer of context to the

meaning of the murals but also adds another level of modality when this additional source converts information from one mode to another—from visual to oral or to print or to a computer-generated mode, performing what Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen call *transcoding*. The multimodal aspect of the murals is also embodied by the languages employed in their creation, for they are composed of images with alphabetic inscriptions in English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Laura Gonzales asserts that a multimodal practice “encompasses the use of various modalities and technologies (e.g., visuals, sounds, and words),” and thus it “entails the rhetorical navigation of these communicative tools to make meaning and accomplish action across languages and cultures” (42). Chicanx people, as Gonzales affirms, “inherently work outside the boundaries of the ‘single language/single modality’ spectrum” to communicate “in between identities” (49). The park is a rhetorical production that engages numerous modes of composition, various contexts, and thus multiple interpretations.

The symbols on a mural convey a particular cultural meaning, but the overall interpretation of a mural vary with each reader, in the same way that the interpretations of Aztec pictograms changed with each interpreter (see Figure 2). Like pictograms, murals are not illustrations of “erratic” and “unstable” writing but are instead examples of a multimodal composition practice that is aware of the fluidity of language and that doesn’t presume that the writer has total control of an objective meaning. Laura Gonzales affirms that language is in a perpetual state of motion, and how we describe the murals now will too change over time. As the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges asserted, “each reading of a book, each re-reading, each memory of that reading in our imagination renews the text; the text is continuously changing. The text is, like us, the ever-changing river of Heraclitus.”<sup>5</sup> Simply put, the Chicanx murals at Lincoln Park are illustrations of a multimodal writing practice that grants readers an active role in the in-flux process of co-constructing meaning, a process that, to a greater or lesser extent, is part of all modes of writing.

While Lincoln Park murals clearly resist an alphabetic tradition that has underrated pictographic practices for centuries, the murals also, without a doubt, promulgate historical, social, cultural, and political knowledge among the community. The park is a rhetorical production that persuades audiences to explore the nontraditional history and culture of Chicanxs. When visiting the park, we are swayed to take a heuristic approach and

inquire about the story behind the images to comprehend their meaning. Whether we attend one of the numerous events organized at the park or conduct a quick search online through our smart phones when visiting on our own, we can certainly learn to interpret the message(s) behind this Chicana *tlacuilocoltli*.

### **Interpreting Three Murals**

Analyzing the forty-five murals currently in display at Lincoln Park is not possible in this article; therefore, I selected three murals to include in this investigation: *El Corazón de El Paso*, the most photographed mural at the park; *Wirikuta Tree of Life*, the most recent mural thus far; and *El Chichihuacuauhco*, the only mural in the park composed primarily of alphabetic text thus far. The murals emphasize the importance of ancient Mesoamerican pictographic discourse, and their text requires for readers to actively participate in the in-flux process of co-constructing meaning in order to (re)learn historical and cultural facts from the Chicana and Chicano sidelines. It should be noted that my interpretations, founded on a decolonial interpretive framework, provide explanations that are neither absolute nor exclusive for they rely heavily on my positionality. As a Mexican American, I am familiar with prominent Chicana cultural material, and as a scholar, I have access to historical documents that might not be readily available to some audiences. The following section provides an explanation of my own process of co-constructing meaning, which interlaces contextual information from the symbols, the place, the author(s), and which is influenced by my own positionality.

#### ***El Corazón de El Paso***

This mural was composed by Gabriel Gaytán in 2009 (see Figure 4). In this mural, Gaytán used symbols easily recognized by El Pasoans; therefore, as an El Pasoan, I inferred the meaning of the symbols and did not need to corroborate the writer's context, because I had already interviewed Gaytán and was aware of his purpose as a *tlacuilo*. I, however, researched historical sources in order to explain the significance of the context of this place to the mural's interpretation. I began my reading by connecting the inscription in the bottom of the stem, "Lincoln Park El Corazón de El Paso Chicano Park," to the green grass-like shapes that envelope this inscription. If these images of grass represent Lincoln Park, then the heart pumping in the



Figure 4. *El Corazón de El Paso* by Gabriel Gaytán, 2009.

middle of twisting highway-like arteries at the juncture of the stem and the crossbar represents what locals call The Spaghetti Bowl—the roads at the intersection of highways I-10 and US 54, which is located at the center of the city and is supported by the pillars housing the murals. The right arm of the crossbar shows the Franklin mountains of El Paso with their iconic star, and the left arm displays Aztec pyramids. Because there is also the prominent presence of a sun over the Aztec pyramids that radiates over the mountains on the east side of the arm, I was inclined to deduce

that the west side of the arm represents the Mexican past and the east the Mexican American present.

To someone else, this mural might simply be a metarepresentation of the park. But for an El Pasoan, this mural places Chicax culture at the heart of the city. Like the highways I-10 and US-54 that interconnect El Paso, the arteries of the heart hold together the stem and both sides of the crossbar, suggesting that the Chicax culture amalgamates both the Mexican and the Mexican American culture. The color serves as a continuous unifying element; both the mountains and the pyramids are illustrated in purple, and both hold similar shapes accentuating the connections between the Mexican past and the Mexican American present. Although the sunset on the pyramids alludes to a dying past, the sun rays extend to cover the mountains, insinuating that the traditions from the past continue to influence Chicaxs of today. Additionally, this mural conveys a strong sense of resistance when looked through the lens of the Mexican American history of the region.

Whether we believe the information recorded in the “Tira de la peregrinación” is a myth or a historical fact, according to this Aztec record, their ancestors emigrated from Aztlán, a place located in what we know today as the Borderland. In the sixteenth century, America was colonized by Europeans, and thus the Western history of this land began. Spanish and Anglo American records show that Piros, Mansos, Tiwas, and Sumas inhabited the region at the arrival of the Spaniards (Campbell; Lockhart). This land became part of the New Spain (giving birth to the Mexican Mestiz@) until Mexico gained its independence in 1810. In 1848, México lost nearly half of its territory to the United States to seal the end of the Mexican-American War in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, and this region became part of the United States. Although in modern times thousands of people from central and southern Mexico have migrated back to this region, tens of thousands of people of Indigenous and Mestiz@ origin have always lived in the Borderland, hence the importance of the context of this place to interpret *El Corazón de El Paso* as a mural that puts the Chicax culture at the heart of this land.

### ***Wirikuta Tree of Life***

With Huichol art and traditions in mind, Gabriel Gaytán painted his mural *Wirikuta Tree of Life* in the summer of 2018 (see Figure 5). Although I im-



Figure 5. *Wirikuta Tree of Life* by Gabriel Gaytán, 2018.

mediately recognized some of the symbols, the story behind this mural—as intended by the author—transpired only after its author *interpreted* its meaning during our interview. As explained by Gaytán, the mural depicts a *Wirikuta*, or peyote tree, made of Huichol bead art; the buds on the branches



in both sides of the tree represent the peyote flower, and the tree trunk depicts Huichol bracelets. A symbol of the sun god is emphasized in the middle of the tree crown overseeing and illuminating the entire universe of this painting. On the bottom of the tree, two blue deer face each other to represent the duality of the male and female spiritual guide. And behind the deer, the imposing face of Subcomandante Marcos wearing a black ski mask and a Huichol hat appears. Subcomandante Marcos was the Mexican insurgent at the head of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)—Zapatista Army of National Liberation—who defended the rights of the Mayan Indigenous population in the late 1990s. His ski-masked face became almost as popular as the image of Che Guevara. Although Subcomandante Marcos did not fight for the rights of the Huicholes, Gaytán added this iconic image as a symbol of protection to allude to a recent court case in which the Huicholes fought against a Canadian corporation that intended to profit from the peyote trees (Gaytán). The mural dedicated to *Wirikuta*, or the tree of life, honors Huichol traditions, culture, and art by illustrating images of great importance to this Indigenous community.

Admittedly, without the contextual interpretation given by Gaytán, I would have been a little confused about the image of Subcomandante Marcos wearing a Huichol hat, and I would have completely missed the chronicle related to the Canadian company intending to profit from trees considered sacred by the Huichol community. In this case, the context of the symbols, through the perspective of the writer, became of particular importance to understand a historical and cultural background that is not well known to most of us. And thus I was compelled once again to consult a secondary source to learn more about the Huichol people and their peyote hunt ceremony.

The Huichol Indigenous people live in the northwestern part of Mexico. Agriculture is their main source of income, although the popularity of their bead art has increased in recent years. Their religious beliefs are essential to their cultural traditions. According to anthropologist Barbara G. Myerhoff, among the dozens of deities in which they believe, the father sun, *Tayaupa*, stands out as the one who brings light and illuminates the world, and *Kauyumari* is their spiritual guide who, in the form of a deer, leads the shamans onto their visionary trails; because spiritual guides for Huicholes are not associated with a particular gender, their sacred deer is represented as a duality of both male and female (Gaytán). Huichol peoples use peyote as medicine; therefore, the plant is sacred in their view.

For centuries, they have organized a peyote hunt pilgrimage to “hunt medicine” in the desert area near San Luis Potosi where the *Wirikuta* tree grows; the ceremony to “hunt medicine” is a ritual that, in their view, heals them from any wrongdoing and returns them to the source of life (Myerhoff). Interestingly, Myerhoff acknowledges that even her own interpretation of the peyote hunt as an anthropologist is incomplete: “With each passing year since I first encountered the Huichols’ return to Wirikuta I have found in this ritual new dimensions, meanings, and beauty that I barely apprehended in the beginning” (51). Symbols, especially sacred symbols, “are alive and full of power and present new possibilities when beheld at different times and by different people” (51). I too found a new meaning in this mural during its inaugural ceremony. Observing the performers and the reaction of those watching them and participating in conversations about the mural at the end of the event allowed me to see the experience of co-constructing meaning as a community-based practice. Evidently, Indigenous communities of the Americas have always been aware of the fluidity of the meaning of symbols.

### ***El Chichihuacuauhco***

Patricia Muñoz painted *El Chichihuacuauhco* in 1999 (see Figure 6). It is the only mural that is written primarily using alphabetic writing in the park thus far. This partial interpretation lacks the context of the author, for I was unable to contact her, and thus leaves a question unanswered: Why did the author choose to use such a large alphabetic inscription at a place committed to communicating primarily through images? Perhaps she wanted to provide more information to those unfamiliar with the *Chichihuacuauhco*. I don’t mean to imply that alphabetic writing carries more information; what I am suggesting here is that this alphabetic inscription carries more symbols from which a general audience can decode. Moreover, in my interpretation I also consulted a secondary source with the intention of learning more details, as the mural narrates only a portion of the Nahua beliefs about the afterlife, and I used some contextual information that Gabriel Gaytán offered during our interview.

The minimalistic design consists of a yellow milk-like stream that runs from the bottom of the stem to the crossbar, where figures of babies of different colors float. The stream runs throughout the branches of a tree with magenta and blue leaves, and a sun behind a grey symbol oversees the design connecting the crossbar with the stem of the mural. The grey spiral-



Figure 6. *El Chichihuacuauhco* by Patricia Muñoz, 1999.

like symbol seems to be the author's interpretation of what Gabriel Gaytán identified as *Téotl*, the supreme divinity, which possesses the beginning and the end, and the end and the beginning. This unique design contains the following alphabetic inscription in Spanish running throughout the stem of the mural:

Esta obra simboliza un lugar, El Chichihuacuauhco, que era un lugar a donde iban los niños muertos, según la cultura Nahua. En este lugar existía un árbol que de sus ramas goteaba leche para dar de alimento a los bebés que algún día volverán a vivir en el mundo cuando la raza que les habitaba se destruyera. Esta era sólo una de las cuatro creencias de la muerte según la mitología de esta raza que vivió hace más de tres mil años en América.

(This piece symbolizes a place, *El Chichihuacuauhco*, which was the place where dead children went, according to the Nahua culture. In this place there is a tree, which from its branches drips milk to feed the babies who someday will come back to live in the world, when their race is destroyed. This is only

one of the four beliefs about death according to the mythology of this race that lived more than three thousand years ago in America.)

To understand the meaning of this mural, one needs to become familiar with the Nahuatl religious beliefs about the afterlife. Since ancient times, the Nahuatl religion subscribes to the idea that the dead could journey into one of four places: *Tlalocan*, where those who died in water-related accidents continued to serve the god of water in the afterlife—considered a sacred death; *Tonatiuhilhuicac*, where warriors who died in battle or women giving birth continued to nurture the sun god—also considered a sacred death; *Mictlán*, where those who died of natural causes went to receive a final death; and *Chichihuacuauhco*, where children who died while still lactating waited to be born again (De la Garza 92–112).

From a Western view, this mural might simply reflect an ancient myth; nonetheless, for the many Nahuas who still profess their traditional religion, *Tlalocan* and *Tonatiuhilhuicac* and *Mictlán* and *Chichihuacuauhco* are as real as heaven and hell are for Christians around the world. Based on the context of the place where this mural is located, a commons place dedicated to the Chicane culture, I choose to believe that the *Chichihuacuauhco* ontological story inscribed on this mural metaphorically prophesies the attempts to annihilate the Nahuas and their rebirth in the bodies of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The inscription seems to prompt Chicane people to embrace their identity as the descendants of ancient Mexicans. However, if I were to visit this mural on October 31, my interpretation might take a more spiritual turn since, according to the Day of the Death tradition, this is the day to honor those who died as children. After reading the inscription of *El Chichihuacuauhco* and understanding it at a surface level, however, the reader is free to interpret this inscription as a religious idea or as a myth or as a metaphor that is open to further interpretations of who or what are the babies in this story and who or what is the tree that feeds them milk while they await resurrection.

## Implications

Lincoln Park embodies a writing tradition that has always been multimodal and has always been aware of the fluidity of language. Each mural urges us to reconsider our notions of writing, particularly the writing of history, as a subjective practice. Each mural demands a revisit to Chicane historiog-

raphies from the lens of Chicana people. Therefore, Lincoln Park certainly raises questions about teaching monocultural composition curricula in a pluricultural society. Why isn't the history of Mesoamerican *tlacuilocitli* in our American curricula coexisting with the history of alphabetic composition, a practice introduced to us by Europeans? Why do composition instructors favor multimodal texts that fit in with the current computer-generated multimodal tradition? No doubt that each reader of this article will have a different answer. Nevertheless, as affirmed by Octavio Pimentel, composition instructors have the responsibility to challenge dominant assumptions about traditions such as the one addressed in this analysis.

Including nontraditional concepts in the study of rhetoric and composition is never quite as simple as that. Unfortunately, for most rhetoric and composition scholars *tlacuilocitli* is as foreign as Chicana historiographies. And it is easier to teach rhetoric and composition utilizing texts with which we are familiar and texts with which, assumingly (because we assume that all students in US colleges know, and accept, Western histories and ideologies), students can easily contextualize than to teach writing and rhetorical practices that we do not fully comprehend. The value-laden tradition of alphabetic writing has made us see and teach multimodality in a very limited way that can, as I demonstrate in this article, benefit from more decolonial orientations to writing, composition, and technology. If we want to provide a just education that acknowledges the contexts of all students, we have to have a curriculum expansive enough to incorporate writing practices that resonate with the millions of Latinx students sitting in our classrooms.

As *co-composers* of knowledge, teachers also ought to be able to provide that extra level of contextuality when teaching non-Western concepts, particularly when discussing and practicing multimodality. Without this context and without an emphasis on decolonization, the in-flux process of co-constructing meaning is incomplete. Taking this into account, imagine the pedagogical possibilities when juxtaposing pictures, or videos, of the murals with texts by Mignolo or Anzaldúa or Haas or Gunther Kress to teach multimodal writing or visual rhetoric. The murals are also suitable for bridging the instruction of the complex philosophies of Octavio Paz or José Vasconcelos or Miguel León-Portilla or Anibal Quijano or Maria Lugones. And what if we shift the paradigm by applying the in-flux process of co-constructing meaning presented in this article to the Western philosophies

of “good writing”? Will our interpretations of Western philosophies change? What if we use the murals to question Western understandings of history and *truth*? Giving serious consideration to the study of both ancient and contemporary *tlacuilocoliztli* presents an exciting opportunity to explore a writing practice imbued with the unique histories and traditions of a community that, albeit imprinted by European genealogy, is native to this land.

Furthermore, the *tlacuilos* at Lincoln Park have been involved in *tlacuilocoliztli* pedagogies throughout the years by teaching students their practice. LPCC has included local students in the production of many of the murals. The murals dedicated to Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, and Che Guevara, to name a few, engaged young artists from the Canutillo Independent School District. Students from the El Paso Independent School District were involved in the creation of *Nuestra Reina de El Paso Ombligo de Aztlán*, and numerous young artists from the 2007 Youth Initiative Programs participated in the composition of at least seven murals (LPCC).

The park has found ways to withstand Eurocentric narratives by creating its own. To promote the park and its contents, LPCC in conjunction with Latin Pride Car Club and other community organizations coordinate four annual events in Lincoln Park: Cesar Chavez Day in March, Lincoln Park Day in September, Día de Los Muertos in November, and La Virgen de Guadalupe Day in December. Events to promote new murals, such as the inaugural ceremony described at the start of this article, also take place at this site. “We have taken it upon ourselves to take care of the murals, to recruit artists, to maintain the park, and then to have events,” Gabriel Gaytán explained in our interview. During Lincoln Park Day, he added, “over 3,000 people show up. We have over 200 cars, lowrider cars, that participate. And we have bands, folklórico, danza Azteca and then we have music going on. We have food trucks, and so forth.”

The murals are what Damián Baca calls “revisions of geographical colonialism” because of their location and because ontologically the park is a common area that challenges the Western institutionalized description of museums (“Chicano” 574). As Angela Haas affirms, museums “perpetuate the collection of ‘vanishing cultures’ or ‘wards of the state’ and the rhetoric of ‘primitive’ artifacts and tribal people, traces of the uncivilized in civilized, Western ‘masterpiece’ culture” (“Toward” 194). Through a highly interpretive multimodal writing practice that has endured for centuries, the park gives an identity to a group that has been fractured by colonial-

ism again and again. Simply put, Lincoln Park offers an opportunity to expand composition studies into a dynamic multimodal writing arena that engages an overlooked community in ways in which a single mode of writing may never will.

### **Final Thoughts**

The park is a place that has been constructed over several decades by numerous *tlacuilos* and apprentices, and therefore I need more time and additional pages to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of this site. This article only examines the park's historical connections to land and writing and interprets merely three murals of forty-five. Moreover, I do not address the palpable matters of gender in some of the images recorded in the murals. A critical analysis of female embodiment in the murals—which reflect Chicana cultural attitudes—must also be conducted to truly accomplish a thorough study. Additionally, it is very plausible that these murals are one of the few records in the city of El Paso of largely unknown Indigenous accounts such as the story of the *Chichihuacuauhco* or the cultural traditions of the Huichol communities, hence their importance.

This analysis seeks to begin a conversation about an Indigenous multimodal tradition that views writing through a collective lens. This analysis does not intend to undervalue the importance of alphabetic writing or the significance of computer-generated texts, but rather to enhance our understanding of *tlacuilotzli* and to advocate for its coexistence with Western writing traditions in our curricula as a possibility for more dynamic multimodal composition theories and practices. By blending ancient Mesoamerican practices with Western traditions, the “intellectual possibilities” multiply and the world is perceived as “coexisting territorialities within the same conceptual space” (Baca, *Mestiz@* 137). In the end, Lincoln Park is an exceptional place for the Chicana community of the area because of its location, its unique way of (re)writing histories, its acquiescence to contextual interpretation, and because it places a historically minoritized culture at the heart of the Borderland.

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## Notes

1. In “The Chicano Codex: Writing against Historical and Pedagogical Colonization,” Damián Baca recognizes the *Codex Espangliensis* as an example of contemporary Mesoamerican rhetoric because it combines ancient Mexican pictographic traditions with contemporary writing practices to convey new ideas.
2. The Lincoln Park Conservation Committee (LPCC) is the organization at the core of maintaining and promoting the park. LPCC publishes a brochure with a map of the murals and maintains an informational website of the site and its events, available at <http://lincolnparkcc.org>.
3. Because both the *post-* and the *de-* resist coloniality and expose its effects, it is difficult to discuss one without the other—so much so that theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Walter D. Mignolo are often associated with both *postcolonial* theory (because of the ideas of the era in which these authors became known) and *decolonial* theory (because of the ideas of the place from where they write).
4. Gloria Anzaldúa denotes the border between the United States and Mexico as an “open wound” that is in constant bleeding as a result of the perpetual political and social struggles caused by prejudice against Chicanxs (*Borderlands*).
5. Heraclitus was a Greek philosopher famous for this quote: “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.”

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## Nora K. Rivera

Nora K. Rivera is a PhD student in the program of rhetoric and composition at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her research interests are technical communication and cultural rhetorics, particularly the rhetorical practices that take place in the visual and oral realms. Her work as a co-organizer of the first International Unconference for Indigenous Language Interpreters in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico, will be published in a chapter of a book detailing the proceedings of this event.

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