

PREFACE

Eros Ideologies is a collection of writings that explores the possibilities for individual and social shifts that move us beyond either/or binaries, beyond us-versus-them mentalities that dehumanize us all. In the end, I am not so much interested in who is to blame for racism, sexism, homophobia, abuse, and violence against women and our planet, and so on, but in what continues to drive such mistaken orderings so that we might think and act beyond them. The arts are among the most valuable laboratories for creating relevant new forms of thought often signaled by aesthetic innovation in their own nonverbal form. Experimentation in an artwork's form allows us to not only imagine things differently but also experience from a new perspective — to see that it is possible. Ideas about how things should be are received from the cradle as cultural assumptions. The work of reflecting on these, and when necessary rethinking these into new, personally and socially healthier directions, is a socially significant act of exercising personal power, and a gift, because social change begins with innovation and transformation in our thinking.

That creativity is a vein of gold in all walks of life and not only in that of the artist is suggested by common enough ideas like “life is an art,” “artfulness,” and so on. It is claimed as the secret of highly successful entrepreneurs in best-selling book after book. From spiritual and psychological perspectives, creativity is an enriching path toward greater personal authenticity, a way of discovering — beyond socially received conventions — what feels most



PREFACE.1 Mariana Ortega, *Cómeme el corazón* (2007).

appropriate in the continually shifting landscape of our lives. More collectively, through creativity we help envision and produce the neighborhoods, cities, countries, and planet we can enjoy in good conscience because they are more just and not the product of the suffering of others.

Learning to listen to our inner promptings, to trust our proverbial gut, to be — that is, to feel, think, and act — as feels right for us is a practice that integrates and synchronizes body, mind, and “spirit,” by whatever name we call the incommensurable, the enigmatic, and the unknowable in the natural world of which we form part. *Eros Ideologies* joins company with those writing and visually thinking about mind-body-spirit integration. This integration, I want to argue, is vital to decolonization. To the writings of spiritual teachers and healing professionals who follow spiritual practices from African diasporic, Buddhist, Hindu, Native American, and Western traditions, I add further reflections toward better understanding the decolonial as intensely embodied, personal, psychological, and spiritual practice, alongside cultural, economic, and geopolitical work. Sigmund Freud’s (1856–1939) concept of the superego, the normative authority-figure complex internal-

ized through the parents and other authority figures, made clear already to the generation following him, that of another great psychiatrist, Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) — and certainly by the generation of Frantz Fanon (1925–61), Michel Foucault (1926–84), and Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–2004), in their respective books, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) — that the psyche is the prime field on which ideologies of domination rationalized as “natural” or “normal” first take root.¹ The psyche was therefore key to these thinkers to gaining greater freedom, personal well-being, and self-realization, and was intimately related to external struggles for social justice and world peace. Decolonial thought and practice seeks to understand, move beyond, in a word, to heal, the wounding caused by the dehumanizing, fragmenting effects of the racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, patriarchy, and human centrism that we inherit through the histories of colonization of the Americas, as elsewhere in the “Third World.” But while many seeking human and social well-being observed the crucial place of psychology in social action theories, even the psychiatrist and anti-colonial guerrilla fighter Fanon was still immersed in European philosophy and knowledges, unable, under the reign of materialist science, to make use of other planetary philosophies and their differing worldviews of the nature and purpose of being. We are still immersed in literature, art, philosophy, science, popular culture, and “common sense” that still transmit pernicious views of human beings based on the color of their skin, ancestral cultures, gender, sexuality, class, legal (“citizenship”) status, religion, and so on.

In these writings, often in dialogue, even when indirectly so, with the images of artworks that accompany them, I depart from a decolonizing, cross-cultural philosophical-spiritual thought of the indigenous Americas (Martínez Parédez 1960, 1973; Macias 2017; Cajete 2000; Marcos 2006; Cordova 2007; Maffie 2014), the African diaspora (González-Wippler 1999; Vega 2000; De la Torre 2004), Buddhism (Trungpa [1984] 2009; Hanh [1987] 1998, [1987] 2005, 2006, 2007), and Hinduism (Nagler 2001; Gandhi 2004) that instead explore unity and difference as potentially simultaneous and harmonious realities: the human person as changing continuously and productively through respectful contact with people from all cultures and walks of life. In such thought, neither body nor sexuality in its multiple possible expressions,

including the queer, is demonized, nor is intellect supervalorized in hierarchical difference to the emotional or physical bodies. I join company in such a project with U.S. women of color thinkers and artists who have insisted on the reality and political and social importance of spirituality, in dialogue with non-Western or hybrid (Western and non-Western) thought regarding the nature and purpose of being. Women of color intellectuals — such as Gloria Anzaldúa, who developed the phrase *spiritual activism* (2009, 292); Paula Gunn Allen (1992); Chela Sandoval (2000); Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002); Leela Fernandes (2003); Lata Mani (2009); and M. Jacqui Alexander (2006) — are some of the decolonial thinkers who have labored to shift our understanding of being, freedom, justice, and power, in deep dialogue with non-Western spiritual philosophies of the interdependence of all life-forms.

I also aim beyond badly outdated and imbalanced ideologies centered in materialist philosophies, knowledge, and politics of Left and Right. What is necessary is the surviving, living wisdom of culturally diverse people from every corner of our country and the globe. In these diverse, culturally specific, and yet tellingly resonant ancient bodies of knowledge that have survived millennia of human destruction into the present, we find what I can only describe as a different reason based in deeper understandings of human and planetary realities. I strive to reimagine a sense of communal relationship and care for self, other, and the planet — an eros and an ideology centered in it — attentive to what our indigenous, African, Asian, and ancient European ancestors taught as common wisdom, and that elders from those cultures have been given for human and planetary safekeeping. Transmitted through millennia, we have with us highly intelligent, reality-based, deeply compassionate bodies of thought for the creation and maintenance of lives aimed at genuinely free, realized, peaceful, creative, and meaningful existence.

Guided by such thought, and mostly following the spirit of Audre Lorde (1984a, 1984b) and Chela Sandoval (2000), I write of the erotic, understood in its broadest sense, and not simply sexually, as respectful relationship and care for self and others, that is, as a socially and politically significant practice of love that is creative of authentic self and, in so doing, simultaneously world-making. Such practice of the erotic is politically ideological in its aim of individual and social transformation toward greater democratic freedom and well-being. Unlike materialist political ideologies of historically recent vintage of the Left and Right, still laboring under mechanistic and materialist notions of human,

social, and planetary bodies, eros ideologies define being through the body, feeling, and culturally multiple forms of reason that are nondualistic. The eros ideological is premised on the interdependent, multiple, and changing nature of identities and being, in a unified field of existence that is characterized by the plurality of created forms or life. The effectiveness and longevity of a social and political practice is more firmly rooted in self-awareness and self-love — that is, respect and care of our own being as a constantly changing, shifting, transforming, self-revealing, increasingly self-aware amalgam of “body,” “mind,” and “spirit,” which is unavoidably a work in progress.²

Studying literary, visual, and performance arts for nearly four decades, and spirituality for two, in *Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial*, I write from a mind tutored by something more than an intellect corralled by the tautologies of materialist empiricism. I write in an embodied practice and not solely a mental one. I research, reflect, think, feel, and write seeking truth, greater understanding of reality, and well-being beyond the intellectual, culturally limited, and indeed (neo)colonizing, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and heteronormative strictures that still dominate much of academic and mainstream intellectual cultures. I feel as I think and I write from yearning, from the unnamable, the barely known that I brush against when I take intuition, insight, dreams, and hope seriously.

To put it in the terms of psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo (b. 1932), in *Healing Civilization* (2010), I strive to write beyond patriarchy’s “patristic” shadow side, its hierarchical, emotionless performance of anonymous objectivity, and instead to think and feel from its positive manifestation, as *philia*, the love of and respect for things and people, and for wisdom, and not just data and fact. In his three-part model of the healthy human psyche, Naranjo identifies the caring and compassionate function of the psyche as the matristic second form of love known in ancient Greek literature and in traditional religious writings of the West as *agape*. He identifies the undomesticated elements in instinct, desire, the natural promptings of the body, and the playful, creative spirit with the childlike *eros*. Naranjo’s model of well-being is psychological, spiritual, and social and rooted in the capacity to express three of love’s functions: to respect, to care, to be happy — *philia*, *agape*, *eros*. The healthy human psyche and, by extension, the healthy human society are characterized by a harmonious balancing of these three types of expressions of being human. Essentially, healthy humanness is characterized by Naranjo as the integration of

different ways of loving, or caring that begins with the self, within one's own psyche and body, and therefore it can genuinely extend to others.

In my work, eros ideologies do not just describe the instinctual, the creative, the playful, the still unfully domesticated or socialized, aspects specifically identified with the function of eros by Naranjo and described by Freud as the libidinal and the special object of social and psychological repression (the Id), but they are central to art, as they are to the possibilities of personal self-realization and political transformation. As suggested by the subtitle of this book, *Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial*, erotic energy and power, in the intention and capacity to relate deeply and respectfully across differences, and receptivity to the unknown or different are at the heart of the potentially positive, transformative work that art, spirituality, and the decolonial can do. The great nonviolent anticolonial activist Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) repeatedly described “God as Truth and Love.”³ Mesoamerican indigenous sages added creativity to that troika: the creative *is* the Creative and characterizes life (Martínez Parédez 1960, 1973; Cajete 2000; Maffie 2014). I do not fully understand the relationship between art, creativity, love, and the well-lived personal and social life, nor do I think it possible to do so. However, I do feel, perceive, think, and know that they are intimately connected.

This collection of writings is unified across a plurality of writing styles and voices, from the literary, journalistic, heavily annotated academic text to the curatorial essay to more hybrid poetic theorizations and philosophical poems, from critical reflection to emotional gesture and autobiographical meditation. There are twenty-one chapters, some quite short and evocative, some thicker and denser; together they are meandering paths in what I lovingly offer as a garden of fruitful heart-thought. *Eros Ideologies* may be entered anywhere. Nevertheless, arranged as is, the chapters flow one to the other, together and cumulatively deepening and returning to the core themes announced in the title and sketched here. The table of contents therefore is also composed of thumbnail images that point toward the heart of each chapter. My aim through such a structure is to practice writing and reflection as a plentiful garden: a coexistence of different forms of knowing and expressing, a welcoming and integrating into the processes of thought and analyses, feelings, intuitions, hope, and faith in the verdant power of creativity and eros to make ourselves a way forward toward greater flowering of individual, collective, and planetary well-being.