Abstract: (word count - 107)

Even in Latinx feminist scholarship, which variously theorizes the multiplicitous subject, the existence of an “I” is still debated. Maria Lugones claims that there is no “I,” while Mariana Ortega insists that there is. We argue that their differences hinge on different theories of memory. Our paper will offer a third way between their theories. By attending to the spiritual dimensions in Anzaldúa, in particular her descriptions of cultural and childhood memories as “ghosts,” our spiritualistic interpretation of memory as visitation imagines a middle ground between Lugones and Ortega, and theorizes a/peracernos, or the ways we seem to, and appear to (or haunt) our various selves.

Traditional Paper (word count - 2984)

Introduction

Unlike many theories of the self found in western Philosophy, Maria Lugones and Mariana Ortega argue that subjectivity is multiplicitous in ways that defy the either/or logic of colonial western thought. They also center liminal subjects, take seriously embodiment, and position multiplicitous subjects as always in the borderlands. Their accounts of multiplicity are grounded in their lived experiences. Nevertheless, Lugones and Ortega disagree on the ontological and existential statuses of the multiplicitous self. While Lugones defends ontological pluralism and the discontinuity of experience which dissolves any unified “I,” Ortega defends existential pluralism and the continuity of experience, retaining an existential “I.”

Though Lugones and Ortega are prominent voices in Latinx feminism, the differences between their theories are underexplored. Our first section fills this gap by 1) summarizing their respective theories, and 2) demonstrating how their differing perspectives on memory lead to irreconcilable understandings of the multiplicitous self. Currently, one must choose between understanding memory as facilitating either discontinuity or continuity, Lugones’ ontological pluralism or Ortega’s existential pluralism.

In response, we exhume a third option from within the Chicanx tradition that keeps Lugones’ ontological pluralism and Ortega’s existential pluralism, while providing

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1 For instance, modern era theories of the self including those set forth by Descartes, Locke, or Hume.
2 Including but not limited to women, persons of color, and those that reject heteronormative standards.
a theory that explains communication between multiple selves. Our second section follows Anzaldúa into a kind of spirit-thinking, an epistemic and ontological project that takes seriously spirits, ghosts and others whose voices rupture the experiencing “I”. We analyze Chicana feminist depictions of La Malinche as a cultural ghost, from another world and time, who haunts present-day Chicana persons.

In section three, we draw on decolonial understandings of the relationship between immaterial spirits and material selves, where memories of past selves are understood as ghosts or spirits. Here we posit a new understanding of multiplicitous subjectivity: the haunted subject. The haunted subject is located in one world at a time, experiencing a necessary lack of unity with her selves from other worlds, even as she remembers them. Rather than understanding memory as maintaining existential continuity, we suggest these memories function more like Anzaldúa’s cultural memories of her ancestors and childhood self, which she describes as visitations by spirits. By attending to the spiritual dimensions in Anzaldúa, our spiritualistic interpretation of memory as visitation imagines a middle ground between Lugones and Ortega, and theorizes a/peracernos, or the ways we seem to, and appear to (or haunt) our various selves.

I. Two Accounts of Multiplicity

We argue the differences between Lugones’ and Ortega’s theories hinge on memory. For Lugones, the impossibility of a coherent “I” begins with her experience and memories of herself as both a playful and a serious person. Lugones understands these as not simply different traits of one self, but as different selves existing in “different worlds.” We argue Lugones understands worlds in a somewhat logical sense, as domains where certain relations between signs, objects, persons, and states of being obtain. Lugones argues these plural worlds constitute an ontological pluralism. Importly for our ghostly manifesto, worlds can contain aspects that are constructed through absence or difference, and while necessarily inhabited by “flesh and blood people,” worlds can also be inhabited by imaginary people or specters. Occupying many worlds is a kind of “world”-traveling, an epistemic shift to alternative worlds of sense. ‘Traveling’ between worlds means becoming different people in those worlds. Because world-traveling subjects experience themselves differently and signify different things within the different worlds they inhabit, they resist what Lugones calls the “logic of

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4 María Lugones, Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions, (New York, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), 20. However, Lugones does claim worlds, in her sense, are contemporaneous. This differentiates the worlds she speaks of from the possible worlds of classical logic, where alternative relations between signs are only possible in non-existent, potential worlds.
5 Ibid., 58-59; She even insists, that space itself is composed of “multiple, intersecting, co-temporaneous realities” (16).
6 Ibid., 87-88.
7 Ibid., 16-20.
purity” and “love of unity,” which reduce multiplicity to an underlying unity “through abstraction, categorization, [and] from a particular vantage point.”

When Lugones travels from world to world, she has “this image, this memory” and “visions” of herself in other worlds. So subjects do remember themselves from different worlds. But these memories create a “double image,” like looking into a house of mirrors (91). Because memories are contextualized, temporalized, and partial, there is no “I” who extends beyond the present, unbound by the sense-making of her particular world. Lugones claims, “the I is always experienced in the first person”; thus, there is an “I” who experiences memories, but she will be experienced as memory by her selves in other worlds. Contrary to accounts of memory as a faculty that sustains a coherent sense of self through time, memory in Lugones’ sense facilitates the subject’s rupture, bringing her into contact with absence and discontinuity. Thus memories cannot constitute a coherent subject; they demonstrate its impossibility. The “I” is not a thing in itself, but the possibility of conflicting experiences and memories.

In, In-Between, Mariana Ortega disagrees with Lugones that selves must be different in different worlds. If that were the case, then “does the self have multiple sets of memories?...And what constitutes such a first-person experience?” Ortega writes, “The crucial role that memory plays in the active subject’s ability to resist leaves [Lugones’] account too closely connected to the very vision of the self that [she] criticizes. Lugones’s description continues to return to the ‘I,’ even though there is an attempt to...disperse it.” Not finding answers in Lugones’ theory, Ortega posits her own.

Ortega claims multiplicitous selves experience a sense of “mineness” with their various selves via embodiment and what she calls existential continuity. Existential continuity establishes the sense of an “I,” and is explained through Heideggerian temporality. For Heidegger, past, present, and future temporalities are intertwined: the present self projects toward the future while being informed by the past. For Ortega, this means the multiplicitous self might travel worlds in Lugones’ sense, but she maintains continuity through memory. Rather than becoming fully different selves when world traveling, Ortega understands her experience as largely continuous,
“highlight[ing] different identities in different contexts.”¹⁶ Unlike Lugones, Ortega argues one does not completely move in and out of worlds, rather they are always *in-between* worlds. Thus the multiplicitous self is both plural and individual in a view she names *existential pluralism.*¹⁷

Like Ortega, we wish Lugones clarified how selves from different worlds encounter and remember one another without integration or unity. After all, Lugones speaks, for example, of a younger version of her self who perceived her mother arrogantly rather than lovingly.¹⁸ In this moment, Lugones’ childhood self is *present*—appearing from another time and place— but also *absent*—a less familiar version of herself. Akin to the encounter between her playful and serious selves, this visitation seems characterized by a play between presence and absence, continuity and discontinuity. While Lugones’ theory of loving perception focuses on improving encounters with *others* from other worlds, like her mother, she does *not* sufficiently theorize positive and ongoing contact between our multiple selves.

Yet by emphasizing continuity, Ortega also struggles to hold the tension between familiarity with and distance from her various selves. For instance, she describes the irreconcilability of her Latina and lesbian selves, given the Latino community’s homophobia and the Anglo lesbian community’s exclusion of women of color.¹⁹ Ortega dissolves these tensions by proposing one existential “I” who highlights different selves in different worlds. However, she acknowledges the possibility of discontinuity when “an experience or set of events is disruptive to one’s sense of having a continuous flow of experience.”²⁰ Yet while Ortega’s account admits the possibility of experiential ruptures, such events are neither sufficiently theorized nor supported. Can we better articulate the equal play of continuity and discontinuity between our selves across worlds? Or must we choose between these accounts of memory?

**II. “Exorcising” Cultural Ghosts**

We develop an account of memory that affirms discontinuity *and* continuity, recognition of and unfamiliarity with our various selves, by turning to the borderlands between the spiritual and the physical in Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa’s references to the spiritual ground her concepts of subjectivity, resistance, and experience, with spirits and hauntings even playing important roles in memory. Throughout her work, Anzaldúa insists spirits be taken seriously, exemplified when she writes: “...it is evident to me now that the spirit world, whose existence the whites are so adamant in denying, does in fact exist.”²¹ Moreover, she claims “spirituality is the only weapon and means of protection

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¹⁶ Ibid., our emphasis, 79.
¹⁷ Ibid., 89.
¹⁸ Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages*, 78-79.
¹⁹ Mariana Ortega, *In-Between*, 198.
²⁰ Ibid., 82.
oppressed people have,” it is necessary for changing oppressed conditions. In what follows, we explore the relation between spirits and memory in Anzaldúa to better understand how subjects relate to their various selves across worlds.

Culture is one way spirits and ghosts impact subjects. For Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, decolonization is partly driven by understanding, “exorcising,” and reimagining the narratives of cultural ghosts. In particular, Chicanx feminists have focused on “the three “madres” - Guadalupe, La Malinche, y La Llorona...,” each of whom is still impacting Chicanx people.22

To articulate how hauntings by cultural ghosts affect the living, we focus on La Malinche, also known as Marina. Marina was born an Aztec princess in pre-colonial Mexico. As a young woman, she was sold to Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortés. Marina was gifted in languages and coerced into becoming Cortés’ translator, which enabled his conquest of Mexico.23-24 Marina is also said to have had a child with Cortés: the first mestizo of Native and Spanish ancestry.25

In twentieth-century Mexican literature, La Malinche has been called the “Mexican Eve,” signifying her “betrayal” of the native peoples to the Spaniards.26 Octazio Paz, famously and controversially, interpreted La Malinche’s legacy as “the cruel incarnation of the human condition and, thus, of an innate female vulnerability which leads to all women being ‘chingadas.’”27

In the 1970s, Chicana feminists reclaimed La Malinche as a positive cultural mother. They understood her as similarly positioned in the in-between, always both present and absent, a victim of androcentric and oppressive interpretation. Crucially, the project of restoring her cultural reputation became a project of restoring their own. “For Anzaldúa, it was not La Malinche who perpetrated the great betrayal, but rather, the dominant discourse that made women believe that the Indian within all of them is the traitor.”28 Echoing this sentiment, but further emphasizing her liminality in the Chincx imaginary, Moraga claims: “there is hardly a Chicana growing up today who does

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23 It should be noted that her own motives and the extent of her agency are highly debated.
26 Pilar Godayol, “Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina,” 64.
27 Ibid., 66.
28 Ibid., 70.
not suffer under her name even if she never hears directly of the one-time Aztec princess.”

Anzaldúa and Moraga seem to describe La Malinche as a kind of “cultural ghost,” haunting Chicana women whether or not they feel her presence. The imperative to “not be like La Malincha” to “not be a traitor or whore” is thrust upon them. Thus, Chicanx women become divided, their image doubled, their physical selves accompanied by a sexualized, traitorous specter who could manifest at any moment. In this way, the ghosts of one’s cultural past rupture the sense of a unified self.

But, as with all ghosts, one can be “haunted by them” or “live peacefully with them.” The Chicanx tradition strives to positively communicate with cultural specters, who are also other versions of themselves. For Chicanx feminism, reclaiming La Malinche’s legacy does not rid them of her presence—she is here to stay—but it does “exorcise” the violent internalized myth, allowing her and them new voices.

One might argue we are simply describing cultural memory: when shared cultural memories of historical events are passed down through generations. We are. But we’re also making a spookier claim. Anzalduá points toward the ongoing existence of the deceased in the spirit realm in ways irreducible to memories of them. We claim La Malinche is a cultural ghost in the sense that her trace is still felt and affecting in ways irreducible to memories of her. In this way, La Malincha has an agency and life beyond those who recall or invoke her. The continued presence and irreducible alterity of those who are absent but not gone is what we call a “ghost.” How else can we understand the way our other selves appear to us or seem to us even as they are us? Perhaps it’s time to invite a visitation.

**III. A/peracernos: Appearing To/Seeming Like Ourselves**

Anzaldúa’s account of how spirits interact with the living comes from a subjugated ontology in which the mortal and spirit worlds are interrelated. For Anzalúa, adjacent worlds of sense can and do interact, with spectral subjects from other domains arriving in and affecting our own. Subscribing to this ontology, and drawing heavily on Anzaldúa’s attention to memory as “otherworldly,” we theorize a haunted subject for whom experiences of continuity and discontinuity are coconstitutive rather than mutually exclusive. Our account of memory does not necessitate an existential “I,” nor

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29 Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 100.
30 Though we cite Moraga’s use of the term women, we do not define the category “women” in strictly biological terms. It is even possible that La Malincha haunts multi-gendered communities, though this last claim needs fleshing out.
the impossibility of contact with our multiple selves. Memory is a borderland where various selves meet, a portal through which other selves are conjured.

We begin by connecting Anzaldúa’s claim that one can be haunted by cultural memories to her description of her own past selves as ghosts. In “La Prieta,” Anzaldúa’ claims her childhood memories of trauma are intimately tied to spirits: “when I began writing this essay, nearly two years ago...It opened the door to the old images that haunt me, the old ghosts and all the old wounds.”31 Like Lugones, Anzaldúa is haunted by several childhood selves, who arrive from the past as spirits: other selves from other domains of sense. When they appear she is confronted by selves out of sync with and irreducible to the self she is in her present world. We claim Anzaldúa is experiencing a coconsitutive continuity and discontinuity. The discontinuity, the shocking distance from and dissimilitude with these different selves, facilitates a continuity, allowing her current self to work through trauma. Simultaneously, it is the continuity, her familiarity but not identification with these selves, that provokes the sense of haunting. We describe this play of presence and absence as aperacernos y peracernos—simultaneously appearing to, and seeming like (or being recognizable as) our selves.

It makes sense that Anzaldúa calls her past selves “ghosts,” since arriving unexpectedly from other worlds with information or grievances is exactly the sort of thing ghosts do. Spirits haunt and appear from places of otherness—other worlds, moments in space-time, planes or realms of existence. Nonetheless, they are often understood to inhabit or even be stuck between worlds, neither fully present in nor fully independent of this world. Yet in the moment of haunting, these penumbral visitors communicate by scaring, comforting, startling, causing trouble or setting things right. In fact, spirits are almost always understood to arrive because they need to communicate something. Ghosts are unclear, ambiguous signs, but signs nevertheless, from another world.

From Anzaldua’s ontological articulation of memories as ghosts of oneself, we propose the notion of a haunted subject. Like Anzaldúa experienced versions of herself as kinds of spirit guides, the designation “haunted” names the way subjects experience disconnection with their various selves, while nevertheless communicating with them, and without any need for an “I.” The haunted subject combines Anzaldúa’s spirit-thinking with Lugones’s ontological pluralism, and Ortega’s notion of in-betweenness.

Spirit-thinking formulates a subject constituted and accompanied not only by living beings, but also various versions of themselves who manifest as spectral presences. But where do these versions come from? Understanding worlds as Lugones

31 Gloria Anzaldúa, The Reader, 39.
does, realms in which different selves exist, we claim memories of our other selves are spirit guides in the Anzaldúaian sense. That is, when we are in one world and encounter a memory, specter, or version of our self from another world—a childhood, playful, or queer self—we think of these encounters as hauntings. When in one world, we remember ourselves from other worlds. But these memories are the impossibility of coherence—one self is clear and remembers, and the other, the remembered, is less clear. These spirits as memories are part of the worlds in which they appear, since spirits belong in worlds just like the fleshy beings they haunt. But they are present only as specter and their ghostly and partial nature gives them away; they do not appear to belong or make perfect sense in worlds not their home. Yet they serve important epistemic roles. They are instructive, with our younger selves haunting our older selves, the playful haunting the serious, the queer haunting the Latinx. In short, our explanation for the way memory functions still requires an ontological plurality—the real existence of different worlds which harbour different selves—and the importance of remembering different selves in different worlds. But we understand memory as incomplete, and thus incapable of sustaining a unified experience across worlds.

The haunted subject draws also on Ortega’s in-between subject. For Ortega, no one completely travels out of the worlds they inhabit; they are always in-between them. Instead of understanding in-betweenness through the existential “I,” we argue for the existence of multiple experiencing “I”s who a/parecer in each other’s worlds. For the haunted subject, each “I” is at home in a different world. The self we are in one world is haunted by a set of spirits or memories from others. When traveling to those worlds, one is haunted by different sets of memories—those spectral to those worlds— including the memory of the self you previously inhabited, and so on. It is as if we travel through worlds with a band of sister spirits who are ourselves, but who each belong to different worlds, affecting but never fully present in worlds not their own. Though you recognize yourself in your fright of ghosts—as Anzaldúa did—you still know they are only ghosts.

Rather than contradicting existential pluralism, we infer it. But instead of reducing multiple selves to a single existential “I,” we maintain the tension between unity and multiplicity by positing a subject who has multiple experiencing selves—one in each world, experiencer and experienced in turn.

IV: Conclusion

It may seem odd to imagine our other selves as ghosts. But in truth, thinking about memories as spirits or hauntings is a long-held, if historically subjugated way of thinking about selves. For us, the haunted subject captures the intimate sense in which...
memory both interrupts and connects our experiences of multiplicity. We intend our theory to be pragmatic, in that while it is not absolute, we hope it is useful for articulating and naming certain experiences of multiplicity.

**Bibliography**


