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# **From My Home to Yours, From Your Home to Mine**

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Tria Andrews & Tala Khanmalek



Dear Tria,

I stretched my right arm, and grasped energy from the Northeast. I stretched my left arm, and grasped energy from the Southwest. With my fists, I connected heaven and earth against my chest, kneading the interval like my grandmother when she sang gilgilihozak. After electrifying the red, purple, and yellow triangles, we danced the movements of the Orixá for two hours. Drums played through our bodies, each sound and step so simultaneous that it became impossible to identify which led the other. Sure, the marley floor was not terreiro. This class was not ceremony. Vera Passos was not initiating us. Yet it seemed impossible to separate her as a teacher and a priestess. The studio became sacred, and my tired spirit rose to the fore immediately.

It's usually difficult for me to feel apart from my material being. People who take open dance classes, more often than not, think that dance is just exercise. And people who take open dance classes besides Ballet, Modern, or Jazz, think that dance is just exercise with flavor. Occasionally, people who take the latter appropriate/mimic the "Native" with such force that besides making me hot with anger, it makes me laugh. The situation is a lot more complex. To really understand the state of dance, especially of dance from non-White communities in America, necessitates quite a wide explanation. For now, though, I want to tell you about my experience the night before last.

The snake: the snake bites the ankle, the waist, or the common carotid artery in the neck. Before my family (row of dancers) moved across the floor, I visualized my prey but my projection disappeared the closer I got to the mirror. The site of my self weakened my concentration. My eyes filled with tears. "Are you breathing?" Isaura asked. Yes. No. My breath was caught and my thoughts only remembered the snakes that had bitten me as a girl. I was afraid to writhe because I was afraid to show the density of my hurt, the hurt I had been storing, the hurt that had become stagnant at the bottom of my uterus in a dark pit. I cried throughout the first hour of class, and I think I was crying for my younger self with a bit of pity. I was confused. Now I hear Luisah Teish say, "the healing knowledge of 'Our Ancestors' is central to our survival. The veneration of our foremothers is essential to our self-respect."<sup>1</sup> Then what the fuck?! Why was it so hard for me to feel my powers, manifest my woman-magic, and *bite*?

In the shift to Ochoosi, my sadness turned angry. The swift pace of the hunt had me snarling with a heartbeat full of base. You see, my warrior has been trained well. I had been preparing myself for a fight since I was in the womb. I have mastered anticipation, the art of war. My sympathetic nervous system knows, senses threat from the slightest tones. But, Ochoosi is a hunter *and* an herbalist. Ochoosi is sometimes crippled himself. What kind of hunter is the one who has been hunted, and shot? The kind of hunter whose bow and arrow can turn the trick, even on the trick itself. The West African god Elegba, the divine trickster. "The white man had used trickery in procuring the slaves, therefore trickery was necessary to survive. And in this world they could barely understand, trickery was a move beyond logic."<sup>2</sup> In reflection, I smile cunningly at the tattoo on the inside of my injured foot; Inanna's reed, forever reminding me of her journey to the underworld and back. Forever reminding me that she was hung naked on a meat hook to die, which she did. She died and returned home, enabling her powers to transform her into the most powerful of all.

We end the class seated with Oshun. I fan my sweaty face and splash myself with fresh river water; scallops and shells fall around me. My dress tala, gold. When I lift my palm to see my radiating beauty my look is pleasure, coy and totally sure of my confidence. Perhaps we really weren't dancing for the Orixa, but there was indeed a moment of invocation for me. I smelled Oshun's favorite foods in my armpit funk: honey, cinnamon, orange, and pumpkin. Catching a whiff of her in my pores reminded me that masked as my prey is myself. But like Ochoosi, I too am a healer, with the antidote to my own venom.

Love,

Tala



Dear Tala,

One of my innermost secrets is that I cannot dance. I can do many things with my body in terms of movement, grace, and strength—I know this—but something always prevents me from feeling the rhythm and translating it through an expression of flesh and bone that is organic, that makes sense, that says exactly what it is I want to say. When I dance, something is always lost in translation, always abstracted by my own self-consciousness. It is as if I need the practice, the structure of yoga, to make meaningful shapes with my body. Like a poet paralyzed by the prospect of free verse, I am wedded to the structure of yoga, the beat of my breath, the alignment of the asana. The confines are what make me flourish. Does any of this make sense?

You could not breathe, you said, because of the pain. I know this feeling too. Breath choppy and short like a discontented sea. If you keep the breath shallow, high in the chest, above the heart, maybe it can't hurt you. My yoga teacher placed his hand on my back, behind my heart, and said, Breathe here. You're not breathing here. And I wanted his hand on my body, and I didn't want it there. I wanted to be the creator of my own pain, muscles aching and quivering, but the creator of a superficial pain, a pain that doesn't broach fresh wounds, scabs I can't stop picking at, and a cartography of scars in which you can locate my own particular history.

Yoga is ceremony. I do not feel holier or humbler than when I am shaky, sweaty, vulnerable, my back arched, and my arms and heart open to the sky. When Cherríe Moraga spoke to our seminar, she said, One thing I know about ceremony is that I am never comfortable. And the longer that I practice yoga, the more I enjoy discomfort, seek it out within controlled environments without sacrificing my breath. It's what yogis call finding your edge. Where is the point where your body moans inwardly, the lion's breath saves you, and you are calm, strong but still supple? Perhaps the question arises, how and why as women of color would we subject ourselves to more pain and claim to enjoy it? I see yoga as a means to suture the mind-body split, so that the shores of the wound unite, so that what I know in my body and soul, I also feel in my mind.

Yoga is survival. At my thirtieth birthday last week, he came to dinner and left early. Ordered an Italian soda because he was anxious about being around other people who would be drinking. When friends arrived, he stood up. Had mentioned before he was going to a meeting. I could see their eyes linger on the inside of his forearm, still purple and disfigured where he had once held the flame from a lighter. I hadn't been there for that wounding, but had been there for another. I recall someone saying that at least this time he'd had the sense to burn the other arm. I attempted to stop him by threatening to hold a lighter to my own flesh. I loved him that much. I could sacrifice myself. I would sacrifice myself. If only he could see how he was hurting us inside, out. He stepped outdoors, held the sliding glass door closed while I struggled against it and with his free hand fumbled with the lighter.

I have hurt myself before like that, but never so seriously. Scratched my face, blackened my eye, and denied myself adequate food for weeks or even months. Sometimes the emotional pain was so great that hunger seemed effortless, comforting even. Yoga is about survival, Tala. About channeling pain into healthier and more helpful forms. Over the years, others have not understood. They think it's about staying slender—as if that's even a consideration when you cannot breathe. Why must I practice daily? Why can't just this evening I just relax? They don't understand that between him and myself there is only a sliding glass door, and depending on the way the light is shining, sometimes looking at him, I can see my own reflection.

Love and light,

Tria



Dear Tria,

There is a track on Talib Kweli's debut solo album *Reflection Eternal* that begins with "an old African proverb:" if you can talk you can sing, if you can walk you can dance.<sup>3</sup>

It makes sense, but it's not how dance is believed, taught, and learned by dancers. Dance is never a translation of music; it's always an encounter in which neither the dance nor the music comes first but meet equally at once. What you see and hear (on stage, in class) is the interval. This is why dance is so hard, because the "structure" negates itself as "structure," doing and undoing simultaneously. When we dance, we usually dance to live music. The bateria plays anything, using only an "empty" rhythm. Nothing pre-determined. Everything to be determined. Sometimes the drummer or the dancer will suddenly break, and it's up to

the other to become so tuned in that the playing/dancing continues. The challenge is to survive at this border, in total freedom yet totally unfree. Like writing, both exist together—not in opposition—even though it seems contradictory. “Free-verse” is not just “free,” because there is language. Similarly, in dance there are movements, but movements are just tools.

After I injured my foot and mourned for a while, I decided to take a few drum classes. It transformed my dance and especially my hearing. Now I dance best when I face the drummer, when the energy is literally between us. And this opening of creation is what I hunger for. I remember when I quit Ballet and I began other forms of dance, it was such a struggle to erase the movements from my body. I hated it! Ballet was/is so colonizing. Kind of how you interpret yoga, but to an impossible degree. I mean, really impossible. Ballet thinks that feet should turn out in a completely horizontal line, that female dancers must dance on their toes, etc. Its essentials are all anatomically impossible! It's no coincidence then, that ballerinas (including myself) hate and force our bodies. Force, force, force. Death. This is suffering uselessly. This is not the laboring edge that births new worlds.

I arrive at your question: “how and why as women of color would we subject ourselves to more pain and claim to enjoy it?” You and I know the answer well. Sometimes I feel my foot enflame during a class. I know that if I dance through the pain it will get worse and stop me from dancing the day after. In fact, that is exactly how I was injured. I did not listen to my foot when it begged me to quit. Except sometimes my hands swell with blood because I dance so hard. I feel like passing out but I know that if I keep dancing I'll get high instead: *spirit*.

I was and still am him too. The more my mind, body and spirit are integrated though, the less I see my reflection in him, the less I believe that between us is only a sliding glass door. Yes, the less I believe this. The less I trust this. “Let her who is sick with sickness pass on the story...”<sup>4</sup> I am done with binaries. I am passing that shit on. The colonizer and the colonized. We always talk about colonialism like that, falling into its very trap! I am not one nor/or the other. I am not both. I refuse to chase my tail anymore. And that, Tria, takes me to another dimension altogether, another way of being, another relationality. We are indeed similar, but no longer resemble each other. I cannot mistake his face for mine. I am my own reflection.

Love,

Tala





Dear Tala,

To be met.

As Cherríe Moraga concludes in her "Preface" to *This Bridge Called My Back*, "It is about physical and psychological struggle. It is about intimacy, a desire for life between all of us, not settling for less than freedom in the most private aspects of our lives. A total vision. I will lay my body down for that vision. *This Bridge Called My Back*. In the dream, I am always met at the river," (xix).<sup>5</sup>

To be met. How to witness suffering, to suffer alongside the sufferer, but remain whole? This is the challenge.

When Cherríe spoke to our seminar, I was just beginning to emerge from a traumatic breakup. These things are always traumatic but somehow you forget the pain and commit to loving another, even search for another to love, because the excitement of the new outweighs the fear of suffering.

For weeks following the breakup, I did not want to be in my body. Could not be in my body for many days. I could not sleep, could not breathe, as I have already told you, I could not eat, because my stomach, the part of me that feels most thoroughly, was broken. A series of anxious phone calls, several a day, so I could spew stories of what could have been, what might be. I crafted these stories until I made myself sicker.

Cherríe spoke to me that day, Tala, (and I could refer to my notes, but I don't need to, some words you take in, and they never leave you), she said, Remember. If anyone gets in the way of your work, they don't have the capacity to love you.

And of course by work Cherríe did not mean grading papers and reading abstract theory that no matter how hard you try, you cannot connect with. She meant real work, dharma, your calling. She meant writing, yoga, dance, what you feel you must do, produce, give birth to, or you cannot survive. You need the hope of the vision that you have created in order to sustain you.

And there is no question that this partner got into the way of my work. Near the end, there was lots of crying on my part—not sad crying as much as fierce, frustrated sobbing. You speak of binaries, borders, dichotomies. This partner, whom I once loved, had one vision of Truth. Once he said to me, are you a scholar or creative writer? A photographer or yoga teacher? And when I stood there too shocked to answer, he said, That's your problem. You don't know who you are. I couldn't answer, Tala, because I am all and none of these things, which cannot be separated or categorized. I hope to lead a meaningful and useful life, and this partner fell away like he was supposed to, so that I could further cultivate my craft/s.

You speak of your foot, of injury, of mourning. Injury is one my greatest teachers, because I too know how to force, to sacrifice that within me which is most sacred. But I have also learned that morning often follows mourning.

Let us not suffer uselessly. Let us find morning in our mourning.

Namaste,

Tria



Dear Tria,

When I was in middle school and in high school I wanted to change my name.

I often called myself Violet, after a character in Francesca Lia Block's novel *Violet and Claire*.<sup>6</sup> As a child and an adolescent, I was obsessed with fairies and mermaids, especially the latter as I had/have a powerful relationship with the ocean. I was obsessed with another world that I was sure exists, and seeing crossings of time and space at which this world and ours meet. Block's novels always play with such crossings, often using the body as the place of encounter. Anyways, I want to say that my hope for another world was really, faith.

In Persian, there are also two words for hope and faith: امید and ایمان. Unlike hope, faith is

one of the three dimensions of Islam. One can have islam without ايمان, but one cannot become or be a muslim without both. Faith signifies a trust that "to hope" is not necessarily necessary. It was/has been my faith in another world that survives me through ours. The morning in mourning. For my mourning is not manifest in injuries alone, but day-to-day life. In living, I never forget. I once shared with my partner that there are a few things I remember daily. My grandmother's journey from Iran to America, my father's diseases, the violences I experienced throughout childhood and adolescence...How? How do you remember? he asked. How can I forget? I answered. How can I forget when it's in my flesh? The morning in mourning, for me Tria, must become a quotidian sunrise to give me the energies for sunset. Injuries are just densities of the grief, of memory.

1,950 mile-long open wound

dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,  
 running down the length of my body,  
 staking fence rods in my flesh,  
 splits me splits me  
*me raja me raja*

This is my home  
 this thin edge of  
 barbed wire.<sup>7</sup>

Later I realized that in my own name, in me, is a tool. Tala means gold in Persian, I knew that and it's what I hated about it. But gold is the most malleable and ductile of all metals. "I am the welder. / I understand the capacity of heat / to change the shape of things. / I am suited to work /within the realm of sparks / out of control."<sup>8</sup> Not only am I too, all and none of the things you are, I/you/we are welders. We are infinite layers.<sup>9</sup> We know how to be all and none at once, eagle and serpent at once, a new consciousness, a new way of being. "I am the welder. / I am taking the power / into my own hands."<sup>10</sup>

Yet, I am scared. Although I no longer fear the morning after, the next day that cannot be the same as before offering with itself a passing and possibilities, I am scared of power. Honestly, I am scared of my power, because I know/feel how powerful I am. Once I decided to journey with myself and own my power to play with it. I quickly understood its potential and became scared; I even became scared to be alone. While I believe that part of my fear just needs teaching (about how to use my power) to transform, I believe that it is mostly symptomatic. What is my question? How Tria, do we unbecome "ghosts in the machine?"<sup>11</sup> How do we decolonize our selves and take power into our own hands without fearing the

significance of divesting from whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, etc.?

Love,

Tala



Dear Tala,

I did change my name. I began to go by my middle name, my great-grandmother's maiden name. It happened almost by accident, because there were too many of me waiting tables in a small pizza shack in a college town. But my middle name was different. It meant that I was connected to women I would never meet, lands I have yet to see, languages I cannot yet understand. It means that I have a herstory. It also means that I have a responsibility.

You sat on my bed tonight after I called you, because I needed someone, because I had been hurt deeply by a woman of color, a woman whom I thought I could trust, who pursued my friendship—only to wound me.

This woman and I had sat side by side at a women of color gathering less than an hour before. On the way there, a leaf had caught itself in her hair, and I unwound it from her locks. I know that I can never look at her or touch her in that way again. And I feel that sadness deeply.

When you are committed to living a life that is healing to yourself and others, you often surround yourself with people who live likewise. But it seems to me that there is a certain danger in that, a certain vulnerability, because sometimes you are so protected that you can forget that there are others who are not like you.

But it also occurs to me how privileged I am to have such a luxury. To have had the time and space to be nurtured and protected. To be disrupted as I was and to be forced to feel the suffering, which for some women of color comes without reprieve.

I have faith, Tala. I have great faith in so many things. When my stomach/heart was broken, you invited me to come to Womyn's Circle, and there happened to be an apartment next to yours for rent, the only apartment I looked at, which I recognized immediately was meant for me. I have so much faith that I don't know where my faith ends and generosity, love, and gratitude begin.

You are gold, my beautiful friend. When I asked you to come this evening to be with me, so I could tell you the story, show you where I ached, elicit your help to put the pieces back together, I also doubted you. I stopped my story, because I felt, as I admitted later, that I didn't think I could trust you.

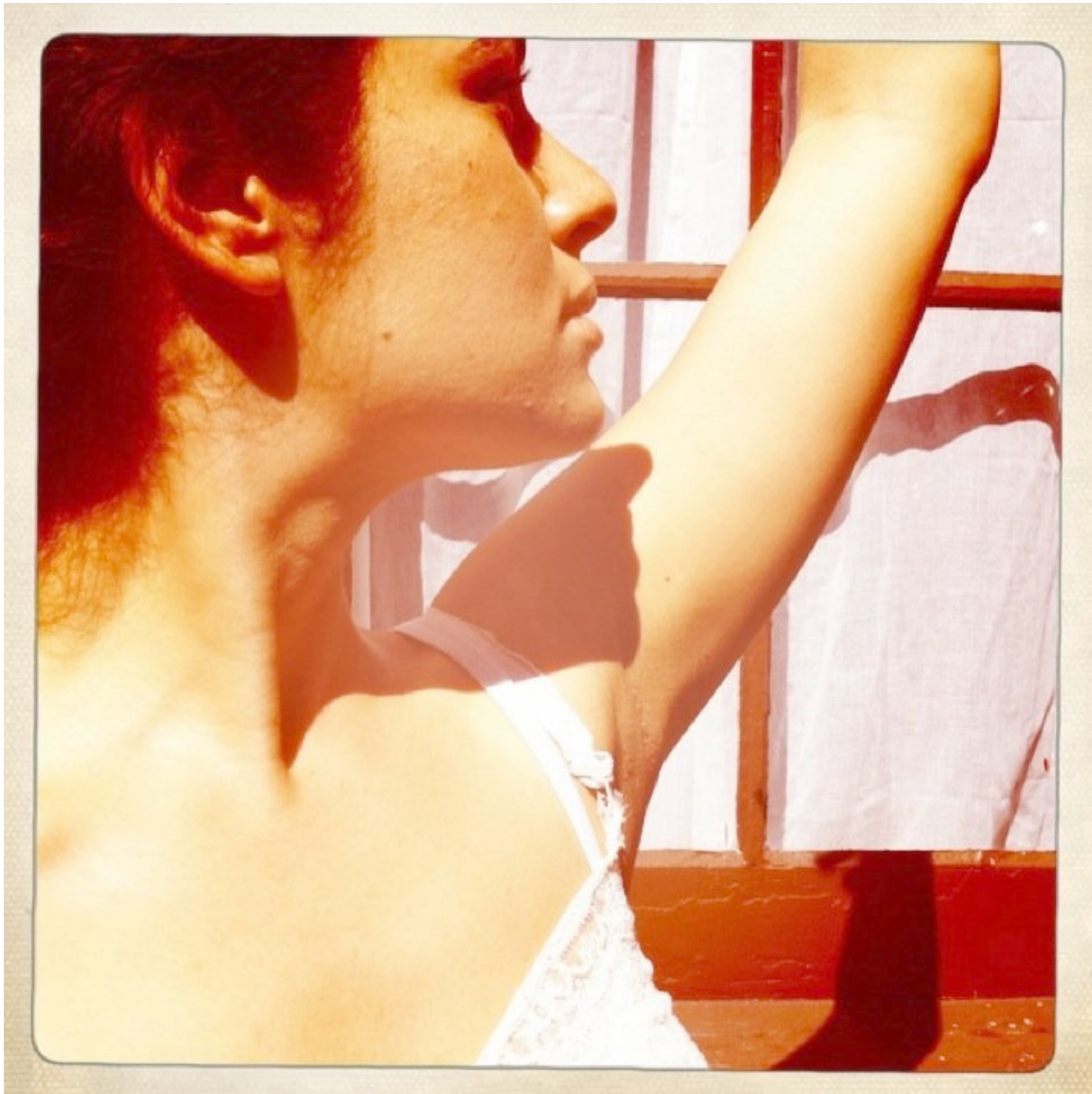
Hurt is ugly like that; it spreads like a disease. And I don't want to be sick. I want to be whole and transparent.

I too am afraid of being alone. It is so much harder to sit with yourself and thinkfeelheal.

Now I am searching for what it is I want to say, now that it is nearly 2 a.m., and you told me hours ago to take a hot shower and go to sleep. I am cold; I am shivering; I have worn myself out. To answer your question, perhaps there comes a time when you are too tired to think about divesting from Whiteness, Maleness, Heterosexuality. Perhaps things will look differently in the morning.

I love you. I am thankful to you. If you vow to try your best not to hurt me, I will do the same for you.

Tria



Dear Tria,

Your email has returned me to childhood and adolescence yet again, and also here, now. I am not afraid of being alone. When I lived at home, being alone was my only peace. I recently reminisced about the many hours I passed in the bathroom between my brother's room and the one my Babba slept in. The room I slept in, before my brother moved into the garage and I moved into his, had no lock. It also had a vent on the bottom of the door, and another door that opened to the garage, which had another door that opened to the driveway. My point is that even inside, I was unprotected, although my window was barred—my view of the park across the street always incomplete.

During a fight my brother once taught me to lock myself in the bathroom until it ended. Was I quarantining my self or my family? The difference between me and them has become in-



creasingly blurry since I moved away. I sat in the cold ceramic bathtub or on its ledge, either crying or reading with wild thoughts and feelings. Finally, I was safe. Babba and Mamman had threatened to force the door open once or twice. More often than not I was forgotten, and forgotten meant unintentionally freed from firsthand injuries.

I agree, hurt is like a disease, unless it's understood differently. I can follow many paths in this email. For some reason, I want to write about hurting. Well, I want to write about hurting because being alone became a habit. Not natural. A habit that has been one of the central challenges in my relationship(s). If I am hurting, I "lock myself in the bathroom." Sometimes I lock myself in the bathroom by saying no to my partner's love, speaking away from him/her, or telling him/her to leave. Sometimes I do it without words, with the language of my eyes, or my body. After all, hurting/hurt is both a verb and a noun. They are so close, Tria. Unless it's understood differently, hurt causes hurt. Whether I am hurting/hurt or hurting/hurt I am made alone.

Anzaldúa understood hurting/hurt differently, as we do. The laboring edge that births new worlds. Hurting/hurt in dance is hurting/hurt with other dancers. Quarantine is no longer sensible. In this society we quarantine hurting/hurt in hospitals, in prisons, and even in these places we re-quarantine people in rooms, in "solitary confinement." We have places of quarantine within communities too. Healing also applies this logic, the logic of the individual. Therapy. The logic of psychological realism. No more, Tria, no more. In my family, when someone is hurting/hurt everyone migrates to the person. The logic of contagion is different. If we are hurting/hurt together, the pain spreads thin, and in turn, makes healing more powerful. The remedy is the collective. The circle. The reflection.

Aloneness is not real, I learned/am learning in process. First, I am never "alone." I am always with myself. In the bathroom, there is a mirror. And I am always with spirit, or whoever/whatever energy I invoke. Second, the other. I need these other people, and other people. Third, my brother taught me to perform surgery. Lock yourself in the bathroom: surgery. I am a surgeon in any time and space though. Being and being, otherwise. I do not need the bathroom to move from one place to another.

I love you too and am thankful. I have a better promise, one that love/my partner is teaching me, one that the women in my family taught me: to be with you in hurting/hurt, to be with you in the bathroom. My Mamman and Babba hate each other with extraordinary love. When Babba had a heart attack and the doctor said that he will die soon, Mamma was there. Mamman has always been there. Mamman is still here. Mamman has never left us, even the people who violenced her. Mamman was in our home. Mamman is on Bentley Street and we are on WoodBine. Mamman is in our neighborhood. Mamman is in the food she cooks and drives over for me. Mamman was at dance class, my performances, doctor's appointments, school. Everywhere, Mamman is everywhere. Mamman has always been there. Mamman is still here.

Love,

Tala



"In gatherings when people feel powerless, la nepantlera offers rituals to say goodbye to old way of relating; prayers to thank life for making us face loss, anger, guilt, fear, and separation; rezos to acknowledge our individual wounds; and commitments not to give up on others because they hurt us. In gathering where we've forgotten that the aim of conflict is peace, la nepantlera proposes spiritual techniques (mindfulness, openness, receptivity) along with activist tactics. Where before we saw only separateness, differences, and polarities, our connectionist sense of spirit recognizes nurturance and reciprocity and encourages alliances among groups working to transform communities. In gatherings where we feel our dreams have been sucked out of us, la nepantlera leads in celebrating la comunidad sonada, reminding us that spirit connects the irreconcilable warring parts para que todo el mundo se haga un pais, so that the whole world may become un pueblo."<sup>12</sup>

Dear Tala,

I have been transformed by this project, by the seminar for which we are writing this collaboration, by Laura Pérez, our professor, and by the speakers who have shared with us their dreams, fictions, and theories, which are ways of re-envisioning and transforming the world. To call something a fiction in the Eurocentric domain of the academy is often an attempt to strip the work of its power, its Truth, and its credibility, so that we feel, as Anzaldúa writes, “our dreams have been sucked out of us.”<sup>13</sup> But as we have seen, women such as Chela Sandoval, are not afraid to reclaim the word “fiction.” These women bravely acknowledge that their visions are born of a creativity that may be misunderstood, unrecognized—or as Andrea Smith emphasized in a recent address at Cal—considered illegible by the academy. But what, as Andrea Smith questioned, referring to the necessity of an intersectional approach, what if instead of talking about centering, we just did it? What if we possessed the bravery to give birth to our dreamsfictionstheories without feeling the need to justify or translate?

In la nepantlera ceremony with Chela yesterday, we responded in free/stream of consciousness writing to passages from Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. When I read aloud what I had written in the fifteen minutes that we had been allotted, Chela said that two-thirds of it could be translated into a dissertation. Chela is a very generous woman, but I need to believe her. I must believe her, because long ago I realized that I can never respond or write like my colleagues. When I write in the language of the academy, I cannot find my heart. It is only through the intersections of the personal and political that I can make theory make sense. Chela gave me a precious gift yesterday. A gift I must hold on to, that I know I will come back to and press close to my heart like a love letter to remind me that the work I do matters. That I matter and that I can make a contribution in my way, which is the only way I know how.

I have felt more exhausted than I ever have these last few days. And I know it is the end of the semester, the end of the academic year, but I feel it is an emotional exhaustion that is manifesting itself physically. It is this writing, which comes quickly, but is also tremendously draining. My heart feels so full during this writing, but it also feels pressed, pressured, as if there is not enough room in my chest for its growth. My brain feels full, ever expanding, so that there is a pressure behind my eyes.

These texts, these Women of Color/Third World Women Feminisms, have become my bibles. These women, Gloria Anzaldúa, Trinh Minh-ha, Laura Pérez, Cherríe Moraga, and Chela Sandoval, are my foremothers. Like my own mother, I go to them for comfort—regardless of whether we have met or will ever meet, they have left me a map of how to proceed into uncharted territory, territory that can never be taken or appropriated from us, because it is our essence, our soul. In yoga, we talk about master teachers. My dearest friends and I scrape together the money to attend their retreats, workshops, travel to L.A. to take their classes. At Cal, I recognize that I am surrounded by master teachers, who have so much wisdom. In yoga, the sacred texts are *The Bhagavad Gita*, The Upanishads, The Vedas. I

supplement those texts with *Borderlands*, *Woman*, *Native*, *Other*, and *This Bridge Called My Back*. It is all interconnected; it is all interrelated, "so that the whole world may become un pueblo" within me. As you say, Tala, "Mamman is everywhere." Interconnectedness is the truest fiction I know.

I must return now—I feel as if we must always return no matter how difficult it may be—to the passage with which I foregrounded this email and to the healing wound inflicted by a woman whom I said I would never look at or touch in the same way again. Anzaldúa has spoken to me in the passage that I selected. She has told me that I must be brave, strong, and "[commit[ted to] not to giv[ing] up on others because they hurt us." I do not like what she has asked of me, Tala. This is a love letter that hurts. And how do I undo hurt with more hurt? But I am committed to Anzaldúa, to this life, to the work. I am committed to self-critique and evolution. And so I will do my best to forgive, forget, and move forward, to live a life in which "the aim of conflict is peace." And when a leaf catches again in that woman's hair, I pray that I will have the strength to untwine it gently and with love.

Yours,

Tria



Dear Tria,

There is so much I want/need to share; I feel the density of my unwritten thoughts/feelings.

I tried to recover an email I wrote to my advisor about U.S. Third World Women of Color feminisms to guide me, but could not find it so I will start my narrative from scratch. From a scratch. Which scratch? There are so many.

Where is the center?

In Ballet we learned that the navel is the center of the body, and that every movement begins there. I have walked with a tight belly ever since. Centering commands so often threatened me, 5-7 days per week for years, that the posture became mine, any residue of my own way

of standing gone. When I learned to listen better, I also learned that my body has many centers. Sometimes, the center is my womb. Sometimes, it is my heart. Sometimes, my injured foot. The center cannot be placed because it moves and it changes in space/time. The center is an idea. An idea that I believe, is part of the sciences. The obsession with symmetry, of equivalence in two or more directions. Later, the reasoning of phrenology, all the studies of crania to determine a hierarchy of being. Everything is created with equidistance, everything is created around a center; performances are choreographed around center-stage.

But, the center cannot be "the center" without the non-center. The center is (only) because the margin, the alternative, the Other is too. If U.S. Third World Women of Color feminisms have taught us anything, it is that these binaries are a fiction. For, how can we center ourselves when we have been everywhere all along? Centering is no longer sensible. And, as Toni Morrison emphasizes, the center is *full* of us. Here we are, in between each line.

I do not believe that our bravery lay in (re)claiming the non-center. Rather, I believe our bravery lay in divesting from the either/or, dancing outside and inside the frame at once. Borderlands, is to me, much more than a centering as it is understood. Anzaldúa et al., through their theories and practices of simultaneity are actually moving us towards a way of being ("the mestiza consciousness") that has no center whatsoever. Translation is significant, and its losses too. La nepantlera must always translate her self to move. I think this is what we fear, losing our "center" in translation. But if we know that binaries are a fiction, we can realize that there is nothing to lose. Samba is impossible with Ballet's posture. Sambaing necessitates imbalance, even falling. Off-center sambistas improvise the best, playing with orientation until their next step is totally unpredictable. Like you yourself say, theory is only intelligible through you. Is that not a translation? Actually, it is the kind of translation that is most de-centralizing, especially if my female and dark body is the medium.

There is one more thing I want/need to say about the center: it is gendered. Have you read *Lose Your Mother* by Saidiya Hartman?<sup>14</sup> She reminds me that the center, the navel, is also the umbilicus. Yet in her book, she asks us to lose mother and enter the birth/death canal of the Middle Passage or transatlantic slave route. Hartman and Anzaldúa intersect here. Home, you see? Follow me still...

You recently moved into my apartment complex, which is now ours. I walk from my home to yours. You walk from your home to mine. We cross the courtyard almost every night. We sit on each others' bed and talk, laugh, cry, longer than we expect our visit to be. We never "meet half way," outside in the cold. Otherwise, what would be the point of the bridge?!

While in your studio I see how similar we are. The colors reflect my favorites. Your cupboard of teas, like mine. And the books! Just like my stacks, and pretty much the same ones. I also see how different we are. You work in the kitchen, your laptop and notes on the round table. Whereas I prefer a desk near my bed big enough for everything I might reference. I hear Trinh T. Minh-ha in *Woman Native Other: the I/i*.<sup>15</sup> These emails, exchanges really, embody the I/i. Was it your email or mine that cited Moraga's preface to *This Bridge Called My Back*? I can't remember which means the I/i is working! Anyways, I do remember that she

says in her dreams she is always met after the crossing. I think/feel that our project has been truly practicing what U.S. Third World Women of Color feminisms theorizes. Thank you, Tria, for being at the other end of the courtyard.

Love (is this the first time I've said love in this email?!),

Tala



Dear Tala,

I have the pleasure and responsibility of concluding this text. And Tala, the skilled dancer that you are, you ended strong. I expected no less from you, my friend, but still, when I first read your last email, I had no words. You glided off the stage, and there I was: sprawled on the wooden floor of my apartment, cradling my laptop, straining for one last glimpse of your golden beauty.

As it were, you entered my apartment then. I was composing a quick email to you that I never finished, because you appeared, so I could tell you heart to heart, face to face what I felt. We gathered on my bed then, and this part is the most important.

You were tired, so you lay down. Your feet were bare, and you curved your body around



the head of the bed, propping up your head with your hand. Your body formed a half moon. I was tired too, so I also lay down. The way you were positioned, it made the most sense to place my head near your bare feet and curl my body at the foot of the bed. Together, we formed a circle, a full moon. For me, in that moment, as we lay there, mirror images of one another, our navels parallel, there was a center. But yes, that center shifts, is always in flux. We were each other's reflection, and we lay like that and talked until it was time for each of us to return to our work.

But do we ever really disconnect from our work—our dharma—or is it the hope that the ways in which we have learned to thinkfeelbe will inform our every action? Do the ways in which we work become the ways in which we live? More and more do all of our interests, our ethics align? As you said, after years of ballet practice, "the posture became mine, any residue of my own way of standing gone." The beauty of yoga is that the lessons that we learn on the mat serve us off the mat. We practice inversions and in doing so, shift the center of gravity upside down. We practice standing balances and recognize that we grow the most from falling. The posture that I practice in my seated meditation is the same spinal alignment that I observe while writing to you.

As you said in your last email, "we never 'meet half way,' outside in the cold." Tala, you are correct. We come together in the bed, meeting each other fully, in the warmest, most intimate spaces. And we come together here, because in my studio, there is simply nowhere else for both of us to sit.

Spaces force us to move, think, and write in new ways. When there is nowhere else to sit, we find ourselves on the bed. When I transition from teaching yoga in a studio setting to teaching yoga at juvenile hall, I find new challenges. When I teach yoga at Womyn's Circle and there are seven women in your small studio, we also move differently, and the practice evolves.

In la nepantlera ceremony with Cherríe, I wrote this, "You speak about strengthening the muscles. These muscles must be strong and flexible. The strength is necessary for survival; the flexibility trains you to move in new ways—ways you never thought possible. But again, back to the power dynamic. Back to inserting non-violent forms of intervention into the power dynamic. Is that enough or must the body be broken apart, reshaped, transcended?"

The body provides us with its own epistemologies and metaphors. The body allows us to thinkfeel the love we feelthink in our mind-soul. We have much work to do, but we have been provided with such malleable tools. We must cultivate our flexibility and our strength. Our bodies and our minds, our heart centers.

This text is the personal and political: documentation of our budding friendship and our work as budding theorists. I must say that when I read what I have written over these last few weeks, many of the events that I describe seem so far removed, and yet many still seem so close. Our minds, bodies, and spirits at a particular place and time are laid out in these pages. We wrote about each other. We selected the clothing for each other in the photographs. We asked each other to pose according to our separate/united vision. And yet to

me, the details of our love that are not centered—the homemade soup you brought to me for dinner Saturday evening, so I could continue working—are equally important.

Above all, this is a text about love. As the writers in *This Bridge Called My Back* consistently cite their fellow contributors, we cite each other. That is love. Collaboration is love. Days before we began the editing process, we recognized the mistake in your final email, in which you conclude, “Love (is this the first time I’ve said love in this email?!).” We recalled that you had signed your first email—in fact all of your emails— “Love , Tala.” I asked you not to change what you had written, and you didn’t. Because whether we recognize it or not, love has the power to create real change. Because whether we recognize it or not, love is what we’ve been practicing all along.

I/i, your sister,

Tria

## Notes

1. Luisah Teish, "Women's Spirituality: A Household Act," *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table Press: Women of Color Press, 1983), 320.
2. *Ibid.*, 327.
3. Kweli Talib, *Reflection Eternal* (New York: Priority Records, 2000).
4. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2.
5. Cherríe Moraga, "Preface," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981), xiii-ix.
6. Lia Francesca Block, *Violet and Claire* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999).
7. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books: 1987), 24-25. .
8. Cherríe Moraga, "The Welder," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 219.
9. Trinh, 90.
10. Moraga, "The Welder," *This Bridge Called My Back*, 220.
11. Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American-Literature," *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 35.
12. Gloria Anzaldúa, "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts," *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 540-578.
13. *Ibid.*, 568.
14. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).
15. Trinh, 90.