

The Embodied Practice for a Visual Plática as Testimonio

Leslie C. Sotomayor II, Kutztown University

Esther Medina De León, Texas Tech University

As Latinas/Chicanas experiencing academia within different geographical locations, we creatively engage in framing and theorizing our lived experiences as extensions of *pláticas*. *Pláticas*¹ are one on one conversations or group talks as a way to gather knowledge or share about lived experiences. In this context, text as an organic conversation between two friends, *mujeres*², is a shared space for our experiences through a creative act. *Pláticas* are an engagement in conversations where organically interests emerge and become reservoirs for knowledge building (Fierros, et. al, 2016).

In our creative visual *plática*, *feeling forbidden A compilation of letters:::accolades:::letras y notas*, we utilize a variation of fonts, font color, white space, printed words on “paper,” and other graphic elements as the visual. We “play” with words to record and share parts of our testimonios to each other and by extension to the reader/viewer. We employ Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2015) theories within our work - *nepantla*³, *autohistoria-teoría*⁴, *testimonio*⁵, and *Coyolxauhqui Imperative*⁶. Navigating *nepantla*, the rupture of existing in-between worlds or realms, as a decolonial strategy, we center our Latina/x and Chicana/x embodied experiences within our academic environments (Anzaldúa, 2015). We document and share a decolonial praxis within academia through visual *pláticas* by entering a dialogue where one person initiates the dialogue and the other responds visually through written text, drawings and symbols (Sotomayor & García, 2023).

The visual *plática*, *feeling forbidden A compilation of letters:::accolades:::letras y notas*, that we are sharing in this article was not scripted, but rather, the authors took turns responding on the page to one another. Inspired by a *Pláticas Feminist Methodology*, our conversation, captured upon a document, is the *plática* that engages a back and forth dialogue. For example, the reader/viewer cannot distinguish one voice from another by reading the visual *plática*, this ambiguity is intentional as both of our voices are entangled and may become one or many simultaneously. It could be read like one author or like several having an overlapping dialogue.

¹ *Plática(s)* - *Pláticas* are an informal dialogue originating from indigenous and marginalized communities that predate Chicana/x oral history (Bernal, et. al, 2023, 1).

² *Mujeres* - Spanish word for women.

³ *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl word which means "in the middle of it" or "middle." In Anzaldúa theory, it is used as “in-between-ness” regions between different spheres of existence (Anzaldúa, 2007). Nahuatl is the indigenous language of the Aztec people.

⁴ *Autohistoria-teoría* - the theorizing of one’s lived experiences (Anzaldúa, 2015).

⁵ *Testimonio* - *Testimonio* is the Spanish word for testimony. It has roots in oral cultures and Latin American human rights struggles. The genre of testimonios exposes brutality, disrupts silencing, and builds solidarity among women of color (Anzaldúa, 1990). Testimonios challenge objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance leading to new perspectives and knowledge building towards transformation, solidarity, and social justice (Delgado, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012).

⁶ *Coyolxauhqui Imperative*: a process of making and un-making.

Sotomayor uses letters that make up words sparingly throughout the page to notate strained thoughts and embodied experiences. She draws spirals or arrows to depict the various directions that she often feels she is being pulled in or experiencing. De León includes blurbs of short italicized paragraphs as iterations of thoughts in her psyche that are ongoing conversations within herself as the main dialogue takes place. We use Spanglish as a vernacular artifact to the mestizaje of our multiplicitous identities (Ortega, 2016). Through this abstract conceptualization, the reader/viewer can engage with the authors' creative visual plática and witness their fragmented perspectives.

In theorizing their experiences, they manifest Anzaldúa's (2015) *autohistoria-teoría*, situated in *testimonio* work by co-creating a visual plática. Our creative act, the co-creation of a visual plática, is an iteration of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, Anzaldúa (2015) explains that the Coyolxauhqui Imperative is an active process towards wholeness and recognizing ourselves as such. As we co-write and create our visual plática, it is a process of writing and re-writing repeatedly as we piece together parts of ourselves and each other.

Coyolxauhqui Imperative is the re-organizing of oneself to create meaning, tapping into the stream of consciousness, el cenote (Anzaldúa, 2015). We recognize the necessity of breaking down and rebuilding ourselves and revisioning ourselves, deconstructing previously held notions, patterns, biases, and continuously re-searching ourselves. Simultaneously, new realms are created with words connecting them and building new narratives, giving them a place of their own. In the doing of our visual plática and sharing it out into the world, we insert ourselves into academic canons to intentionally represent our cultures and lived experiences as mujeres. The back and forth crossings in our visual plática is an ambiguous, curious collaboration where the boundaries between who is talking, initiating, and responding are unclear, blurred. As a metaphor, our intentional uncoded visual plática, is our unified sense of belonging with and to each other as we traverse our own individual lived experiences.

Academia has seen growth of Latinos represented in higher education, in attendance and as successful students (Santiago, et.al., 2024), yet representation in professional fields in academia is still lacking. Representation does not stop at filling seats - representing, engaging, and conversing with our communities must also include consistently being visible in spaces that disturb the norm, especially within our artistic and written expressions within academia, and especially among mujeres. Sharing our testimonios, within this visual plática, provides insight and relatability to others. We discuss topics in which we navigate and negotiate the worlds we live within as well as our "selves" to unveil thoughts, emotions, reactions – to manifest our desires of an idealistic, but genuine, future.

I'm TIRED

failed relationships

romantic or otherwise

Share my whole self again

Vida mi Vida entera

It'll be a while to share myself like that again

I taught myself that I am a beautiful soul

I'm reinventing myself as we speak

Kind Loving

Sentimental

Sensitive

He(art)

I think I'm too sentimental

it's gotten me in trouble! I can't trust my feels.....

TIRED of navigating

TIRED of balancing work/life

to live in such a place of animosity

where there are

always worries and strife

I feel so old! Too old to be doing all of this. To continue navigating the "system," academically and just in life. I'm faculty, I'm tenured! Shouldn't that amount to something? I should be reveling in success! I shouldn't have to keep finding out for myself how to do this! But, No! I still must figure out where I fit, how I fit, how to do almost everything myself.

Sola, me sienta sola

It feels like in my world, if it isn't happening, I must do it myself.

*Pero estoy **CANSADA!***

I taught myself to see the deep inner struggle of seeing myself

I see myself for who i am

I accept and love myself

¡Eso!

I care for myself
I go into my heart

My spark to shine

I love me

I respect myself

I have hopes

Dreams
plans
nourishment
cultivate my connection
I am creating

Ni de aquí o de allá

Can I really be me? **¡Neta?**

Hay veces, en cuando, "I don't give eeeefak!"

Pero, en realidad.....

Man! I don't want to, I don't want to care! I don't want to write! I don't even know what to write!?! I feel like I don't know anything, at all! I am stuck. Living in funks, where imposter syndrome lives. . . . all the freaking time! And that's just academia! The last few years have been a shit show! Granted, most of it was self-inflicted – that self-inflicted chaos – work, life, love life, kids, dogs, gah!

Saying no

Not wanting to care

Comes with a price

Heartache

Because, also in reality... I always care. I want to help. It bothers me.

The hardest part **Healing**

Unlearning toxicity

Combatting **imposter syndrome**

Battling myself

Consistently

It's almost like going

s d r a w k c a b

References

- Anzaldúa, G. (2007). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.
- Delgado Bernal, Dolores, Alma Itzé Flores, Tanya J. Gaxiola Serrano & Socorro Morales. (2023). An introduction: Chicana/Latina feminista pláticas in educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 36:9, 1627-1630, DOI:10.1080/09518398.2023.2203113
- Fierros, C. O., & Bernal, D. D. (2016). Vamos a platicar: The contours of pláticas as Chicana/Latina feminist methodology. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, 15(2), 98-121.
- Gloria A., and Keating, A. (2015). *Light in the dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*. Duke University Press Books.
- García, C. S., & Sotomayor, L.C., & Sandoval, K. (2023). [Forthcoming]. Visual pláticas: An Anzaldúan art praxis. *Chicana/Latina Studies*.
- Ortega, M. (2016). *In-Between: Latina feminist phenomenology, multiplicity, and the self* (1st ed.). State University of New York Press.
- Santiago, D., Arroyo, C., & Cuellarsola, L. (April 2024). Latinos in Higher Education: 2024 Compilation of Fast Facts. Washington, D.C.: Excelencia in Education. <https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/latinos-higher-education-2024-Compilation-fast-facts>