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## CHAPTER 13

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### Tracing Trajectories of Indigenous Literacies in the Americas

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#### Abstract

Recent studies examined Indigenous and mestizo communities that engage in social practices of transculturated, Amerindian literacies, often to resist efforts by powerful groups to oppress them. By drawing on data from studies conducted in Peru (Salomon, 2004), Mexico (Wahrhaftig, 2006), the United States (Cowan, 2007), and transnationally, Coronel-Molina's autoethnography (1999), we trace two trajectories of Indigenous literacies from the early modern/colonial period to the postmodern/postcolonial present. One traces the domination of alphabetic-text literacy driven by the ideology of its superiority; the other traces the coexistence of Amerindian literacies driven by the ideology of border gnoseology. We merge Urban's "metaculture" (2001) with Mignolo's "colonial semiosis" (1995) to account for continuities and discontinuities among semiotic systems in the Americas. Metaculture, colonial semiosis, and the data enable us to recognize previously overlooked texts and the social practices that produced them as products of border gnoseology, and to apprehend indigenous and mestizo material in autoethnographic texts studied primarily from the perspective of the subaltern appropriation of dominant paradigms.

#### Introduction

In *The art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec*, Miller (1996), writing about Aztec codices, tells a story about the Aztec ruler Itzcoatl who grew the Aztec empire through alliances and conquests, glorified and elevated his tribe the Mexica to become synonymous with Aztec, and literally rewrote Aztec history (Smith, 2003, pp. 46-48).

Shortly after his accession to power in 1426, Itzcoatl decided to have history rewritten. Manuscripts were collected and destroyed, making way for a new record of official Aztec history and religion. Nevertheless, it is obvious from the variety of historical and mythic information later written down in the Roman alphabet that a great diversity of religious and historical ideas continued long after Itzcoatl's edict. . . . Sadly the Spanish conquest was more effective than Itzcoatl's purge, and, even though books were common among Aztecs, no manuscript survives that can be attributed to Preconquest Tenochtitlan. (Miller, 1996, p. 222)

This story contains recurring patterns in the relationships among power, literacy, and historiography in the Americas. Those with power—in this example Itzcoatl, and the Spanish beginning a century later—use their power allied with their literacies to construct histories and legacies to maintain their power. Although the products of literacy are vulnerable, as when Itzcoatl destroyed Aztec codices and the Spanish annihilated Amerindian texts, the social practices<sup>1</sup> that produce them, and the cultural knowledge, albeit subordinated, that they encode, survive and are passed on within those communities. In other words, destroying codices to change history discursively was unsuccessful because history exists not just in those texts but in the social practices of remembering and transmitting it. From “the variety of historical and mythic information later written down in the Roman alphabet” (ibid.), we know that this subordinated history survived not just Itzcoatl’s edict, but the Spanish imposition of the social practices of their Renaissance, alphabetic-text literacy. The survival of social practices of Mesoamerican, pre-Columbian literacies implied in this phenomenon intimate a tradition of resistance to discursive formations of imperialism in Mesoamerica that predates the Spanish Conquest. What intrigues us beyond the survival of Amerindian cultural knowledge—their histories and epistemologies—is the agency that subaltern communities exercise to resist the dominant histories and social practices they are often perceived to accept.

Recent scholarship in the Americas suggests that Indigenous and mestizo subaltern communities still draw on practices of Amerindian, pre-Columbian literacies to critique and resist more powerful groups that seek to exploit their less powerful positions by denigrating their Indigenousness and undermining their autonomy. In this paper, we trace two trajectories of Indigenous literacies from the Conquest to the present by using recent research to document their continued existence and importance in indigenous and mestizo subaltern communities. We use “metaculture” (Urban, 2001) to theorize the products of Indigenous literacy practices drawn from studies conducted in Peru (Salomon, 2004), in Mexico (Wahrhaftig, 2006), and in the United States (Cowan, 2007), and transnationally in Coronel-Molina’s autoethnography (1999). Drawing on data from these studies allows us to illustrate the theoretical power of merging Urban’s “metaculture” (2001) with Mignolo’s “colonial semiosis” (1995) to account for continuities and discontinuities among semiotic systems in the Americas from the early modern/colonial period to the present. This data also provides empirical support for reconceptualizing transculturation as a bidirectional rather than a unidirectional dynamic. Finally, our project contributes to the larger effort to decolonize scholarship and unlearn intellectual privilege.

## **Theoretical Framework**

We are adding to well-known resources, and work by scholars examining issues of Indigenous literacies in the Americas (Hornberger, 1997; Francis and Reyhner, 2002; Salomon and Hyland, 2010; Hinton and Hale, 2001; McCarty, 2005; McCarty and Zepeda, 1995; López and Jung, 1998; Hernández-Zamora, 2010; The *Popol Wuj* and the Mayan Cultures Archives/Archivos del *Popol Wuj* y las Culturas Mayas [online], Huarochirí, a Peruvian Culture in Time [online], among others). However, we begin by stating explicitly that we are not talking

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<sup>1</sup> We are invoking the New Literacy Studies conception of social practices of literacy here; that is, the notion that literacy is made up of culturally situated social practices of making meaning that people use as cultural resources toward achieving some cultural end (for discussions of literacy as social practices see Street, 1984, 1993; for a discussion of the use of “practice” in literacy studies see Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Baynham and Baker, 2002; Barlett and Holland, 2002; Street, 2003).

about alphabetic-text literacy among Indigenous people in the Americas, nor are we talking about pre-Columbian literacies in the early modern/colonial period. We are theorizing from empirical evidence collected throughout the Americas that Amerindian literacies have coevolved and coexisted with the practices of alphabetic-text literacies.

We merge “colonial semiosis” (Mignolo, 1995) with “metaculture” (Urban, 2001) to construct our theoretical framework.

Colonial semiosis is the general term to indicate a network of semiotic processes in which signs in different cultural systems interact in the production and interpretation of hybrid cultural artifacts. In colonial semiosis the meaning of a sign no longer depends on its original cultural context (for instance, Castilean, or Amerindian, or Chinese), but on the new sets of relations generated by communicative interactions across cultural boundaries (Mignolo, 1994, p.16).

Mignolo’s colonial semiosis redraws the boundaries of the study of colonial discourse in the New World by opening “it up to a wider spectrum of semiotic interactions in Amerindian languages and in non-alphabetic scripts” (1995, p. 78). We use colonial semiosis as our method, and characterize our project as doing colonial semiosis in the postmodern/postcolonial present. We use texts produced by people in indigenous and mestizo subaltern communities in which they participate in semiotic interactions of Amerindian ways of taking meaning from the environment and making meaning in culturally valued ways. We use these texts and metaculture to theorize trajectories of indigenous literacies in the Americas from the Conquest to the present.

Urban (2001) argues that anthropology’s focus on cultural products in the context of the transmission of traditional culture fails to capture the complexity of culture in motion. Given that culture is “whatever is socially learned, socially transmitted”, and “accumulated social learning” (Urban, 2001, p. 64), metaculture—“culture about culture”—describes and clarifies the continuities and discontinuities within the social processes following social pathways that culture lays down for itself as it travels across space and through time (p. 3). Metaculture has two salient features that account for the reproduction of traditional culture as evidenced by the replication of traditional cultural products, and for the creation of new culture as evidenced by the transformation of traditional cultural products into new products that reflect their relationship to the traditional. It is their newness that attracts people’s attention and encourages many of them to produce these new cultural forms that drives cultural change. The first, “inertial metaculture,” describes how cultural products display their links to the past by replicating traditional elements. The second, “accelerative metaculture,” describes how cultural products hybridize and incorporate new elements that attract and encourage the participation of subjects in new cultural processes.

We are working within the social practices model of the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990, p. 49). People around the world practice a multitude of literacies, but in schools the literacy practices of the mainstream or elite, school-oriented classes are taught as the norm (Gee, 1990; Heath, 1983). Over twenty-five years ago, literacy research among Anglophone scholars took an ethnographic turn as they began to observe and report what people actually did with literacy in diverse sociocultural contexts. They argued that literacy—practices of reading and writing—cannot be conceptualized as an autonomous set of universal skills; that there are many literacies, each with particular, culturally valued social practices of reading and writing situated in specific sociocultural contexts (Heath, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). However,

the multiplicity of literacy practices is obscured by the ideology that school-based, alphabetic-text literacy is “real” literacy (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984).

The New Literacy Studies reveals that literacies are “socially learned, socially transmitted,” and we argue that metaculture reveals that practicing one’s social group’s literacy demonstrates “accumulated social learning” (Urban, 2001, p. 64). Texts are cultural products of that accumulated social learning, and it is “from such physical manifestations that culture is able to journey through the world making its way from individual to individual, group to group” (p. 42). These physical manifestations of culture are the vehicle for the dissemination of culture—i.e., how through physical manifestations, culture is made accessible to others. Literacy practices as social processes for encoding and communicating cultural information make them metacultural. Literacies’ social practices are the immaterial social processes that produce material products that can be identified as either inertial metaculture or accelerative metaculture.

In summary, we are doing colonial semiosis by using images from colonial texts to represent the non-alphabetic, semiotic interactions in Amerindian literacies. We are foregrounding the accumulated social learning of literacy to affirm it as a cultural process, and we are using metaculture to account for (a) the perpetuation of traditional practices of literacies, (b) the power dynamics that subordinate indigenous and mestizo literacies, and (c) the transculturation of Amerindian literacies that account for cultural change, for oldness evolving into newness to represent new lived experiences and meanings.

### Tracing the Trajectories

Sixteenth-century Amerindian and Spanish empires had semiotic systems for encoding, preserving, and transmitting cultural information and knowledge. We use images of a Renaissance secretary, *kipukamayuc*, and *tlaculio* to represent the Renaissance, alphabetic literacy practiced by Europeans and the pre-Columbian, picto-ideographic literacies practiced by Amerindians when these groups came into contact and conflict in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: 16<sup>th</sup> Century Literacies in the Contact Zone of the Americas

*Tlaculio*, Nahuatl for “scribe,” is used to describe one whose social role involved knowledge of both production of codices and the activities of rendering codices into oral discourse, i.e. “reading/writing and looking at/reading a story” (Mignolo, 1995, pp. 76, 87-96). “The *tlaculio* was the social role equivalent to the Peruvian *kipu* maker, the medieval scribe, or the Renaissance secretary” (p. 87).

Although the social roles of the *tlaculio*, *kipukamayuc*, and Renaissance secretary were equivalent, the semiotic systems that they used were maximally different. In the Amerindian tradition, writing is using semiotics to represent the world. In the European tradition, writing is using semiotics to represent words that represent the world. In other words, in Amerindian semiotics signs directly represent things in the world. Thus, across their multilingual empire Inca *kipukamayuc*s could transform the knotted threads of *kipus* into discourses, and between Aztec and Mixtec empires in Mesoamerica, Aztec *tlaculios* and Mixtec scribes could give voice to each others' histories from their codices even though they spoke different languages (Boone, 1994, pp. 18-19).

European semiotics takes an extra step. The letters of the Roman alphabet are signs that represent phonemes that are written in combinations to construct words. The words, in turn, represent things in the world. This extra step means that language mediates between the signs and things in the world and that books cannot cross linguistic borders like *kipus* and codices; they have to be rewritten in the target language. Since the European tradition has dominated for the last five hundred years in the Americas, most people in the Americas believe that “real” literacy is alphabetic-text literacy.

## **Two Trajectories of Indigenous Literacies in the Americas**

We diagram two trajectories of Indigenous literacies in the Americas following the Conquest (see Figure 2). Each trajectory begins in the lower left quadrant, passes through the center, and continues through to either the upper or lower right quadrants. We are conscious of the conventions of Western visual grammar in the composition of visual representations, and that our diagram can be interpreted through these conventions (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Our diagram is divided by a vertical and a horizontal axis; the vertical axis creates left and right sides, the horizontal axis creates upper and lower parts. In this conventional arrangement of information, the left side represents the past (the 16<sup>th</sup> century), and what is known (the presence of European and Indigenous literacies in the early modern/colonial world). The right side represents the present (the 21<sup>st</sup> century), and what is being offered as new knowledge (that European and Indigenous literacies have coevolved over 500 years and coexist in the postmodern/postcolonial world). The lower part in Western visual grammar represents what is, the real (Indigenous & mestizo picto-ideographic literacies), and the upper part represents what could be, the ideal (European & alphabetic-text literacies). We are not arguing that “the ideal” is the domination of alphabetic-text literacy. We are pointing out that the ideological meanings of the two trajectories of Indigenous literacies in the Americas (which we discuss in the next two sections) are mirrored in the ideological meanings constructed by the visual grammar of Western visual design in our diagram.

At the center is Guaman Poma de Ayala's *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (1615; see Hamilton, 2009, for an English translation of the first part), in which they intersect and through which they pass to the upper or lower quadrants on the right. Guaman Poma was an Indigenous Andean living in and writing about the rapid and violent technological, social, and cultural changes engendered by Spanish colonialism in Peru. Guaman Poma sought to help the Spanish King, Phillip III, understand the history and cultural achievements of his Andean subjects, to inform him of the unnecessarily brutal treatment of his Indigenous subjects by his colonial officials, and make recommendations for social and governmental reform. As a self-selected cultural broker, Guaman Poma composed an 1189 page manuscript/letter illustrated with

398 full-page drawings addressed to King Phillip III. His text disappeared into obscurity only to reemerge from the Danish Royal Library in 1908, having resided there since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. We place Guaman Poma’s text at the center and trace our two trajectories of Indigenous literacies through it because it is a multilingual, multimodal, colonial text (i.e., written from within the Spanish colony of Peru), and as such draws on both European and Indigenous languages, and European and Indigenous literacies (Coronel-Molina, 2009). For more information on Guaman Poma’s manuscript, visit The Guaman Poma Website (online).

Drawing on Mignolo’s work, we name one the *Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power* (see Mignolo, 2000, p. 16) to foreground the domination of alphabetic-text literacy, and represent it visually in Figure 2 as the vector of dashes. We name the other the *Trajectory of Border Gnoseology* (pp. 9-12) to foreground the subalternization of Amerindian literacies as a result of the “coloniality of power . . . a conflict of knowledges and structures of power” (p. 16), and represent it visually in Figure 2 as the vector of dashes and dots.

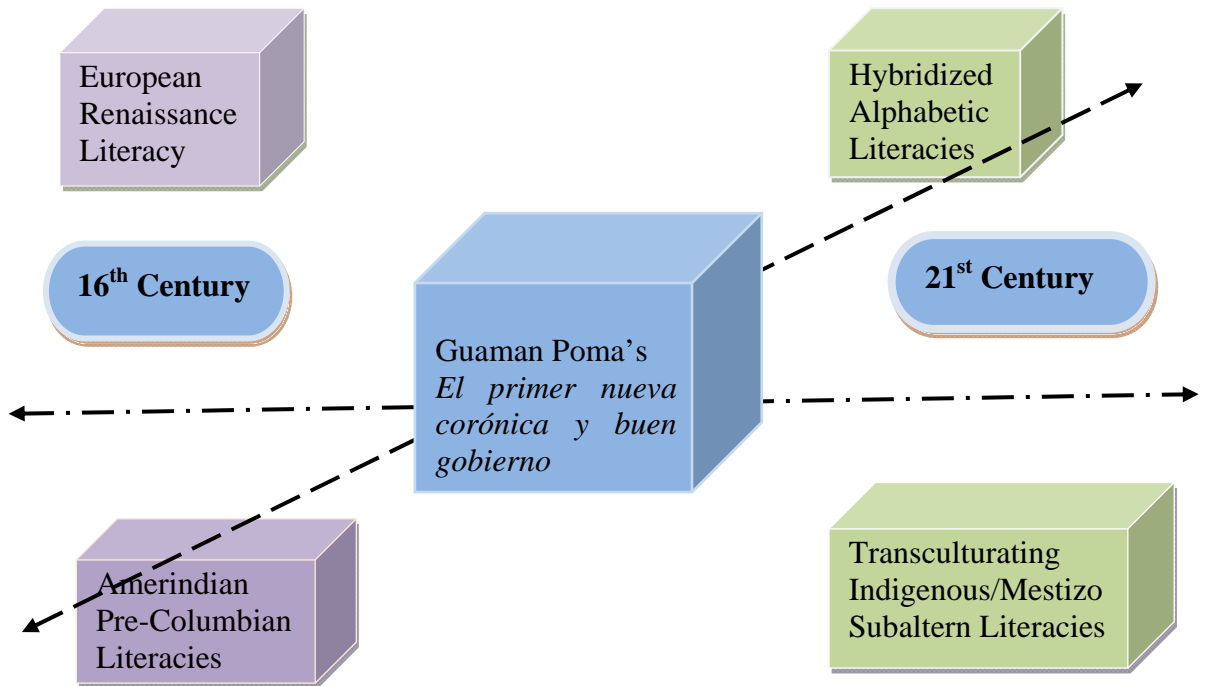


Figure 2: Two Trajectories of Indigenous Literacies in the Americas

In Figure 2, the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power (dash vector) follows an upward path, because it passes through the lower left quadrant representing Amerindian Pre-Columbian Literacies in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, traces through Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica*, and continues through the upper right quadrant representing Hybridized Alphabetic Literacies. The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology (dash and dot vector) has a flat trajectory. It also begins in the lower left quadrant representing Amerindian Pre-Columbian Literacies in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, traces through Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica*, but continues through the lower right quadrant representing Transculturating Indigenous/Mestizo Subaltern Literacies.

## The Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power

The Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power is driven by the ideology that alphabetic-text literacy —by its inherent, technological superiority for communicating information across time and space (see the “great divide” theory in Street, 1984) —extinguished Indigenous literacies when Amerindians adopted it for their purposes. Thus Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica* from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century is a turning point and at the center of Figure 2. The 21<sup>st</sup> century publication of a Quechua translation of *Don Quixote* can be seen as a product of the natural evolution of alphabetic-text literacy to encode and communicate cultural information for Quechua speakers.

We have also represented the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power visually in Figure 3.

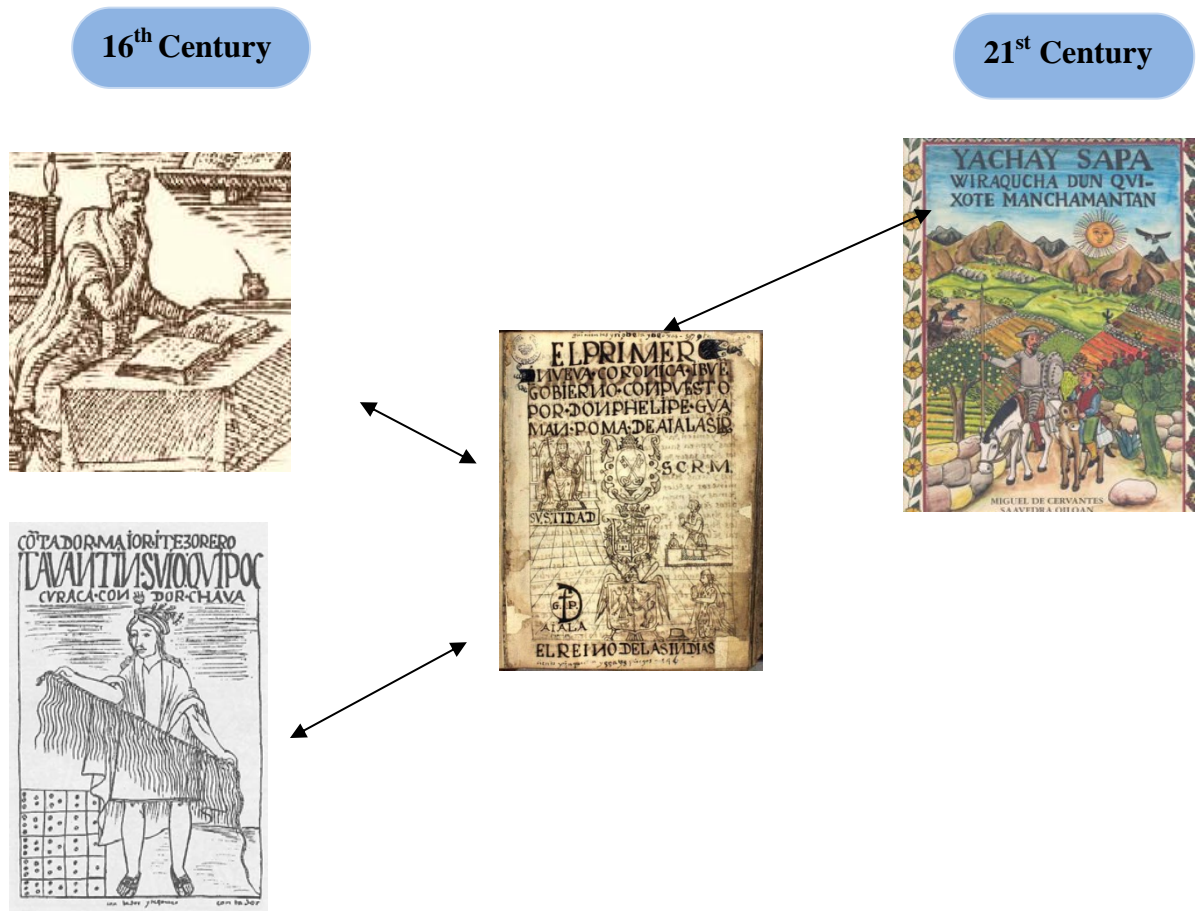


Figure 3: The Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power in the Americas

Figure 3 illuminates the contested literacy practices at the heart of the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power. The image of the Renaissance secretary visually encodes the social practices of European Renaissance literacy during the early modern/colonial period and occupies the upper left quadrant of European Renaissance Literacy. This image is connected by a vector to the title page of Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica*. Below the Renaissance secretary, the image of the *kipukamayuc* visually encodes the social practices of Andean *kipu* (quipu) literacy and occupies the lower left quadrant of Amerindian Pre-Columbian Literacies. (This particular image is one of the pictorial representations Guaman Poma composed for the *Nueva corónica*.) The

image of the *kipukamayuy* is also connected by a vector to the title page of *Nueva corónica*. These two images document the presence of maximally dissimilar semiotic systems in the early modern/colonial period. The vectors that connect the social practices of Renaissance and Andean quipu literacies to Guaman Poma's text reflect that, when he was writing it, both literacies were used and contested for encoding and transmitting cultural information. The outcome of this contest is represented by the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power. Going from the title page of *Nueva corónica* to the cover of *Yachay Sapa Wiraqucha Dun Qvixote Manchamantan*, (*Don Quixote* translated into Quechua), this vector represents the continuity of alphabetic-text literacy from its introduction in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to its dominance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The discontinuity of Andean *kipu* literacy between the *kipukamayuy* and Poma's *Nueva corónica*, as represented by his apparent embrace of Spanish and alphabetic writing, represents the ideology of the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power. This ideology asserts the inevitability of alphabetic-text literacy extinguishing quipu literacy practices—and by extension other Amerindian literacy practices—because indigenous literacy practices were ill-suited to the conservation and transmission of cultural knowledge. For literacies practices worldwide, see (Endangered Alphabets: The Blog [online]). From this worldview, the Quechua translation of *Don Quixote*—the early 17<sup>th</sup> century classic of European, Spanish-language literary culture—is another milestone in the transformation of indigenous America into the “modern world.” It makes accessible to Quechua-speakers cultural knowledge of 17<sup>th</sup>-century European literacy practices and literary culture, which may enable them to more fully assimilate to the modern world.

The conflict between Renaissance and indigenous literacies and ways of knowing was played out in what Pratt termed the “‘contact zone,’ . . . the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (1992, p. 6). In the Andes, the apparent discontinuity of quipu literacy and the continuity of alphabetic-text literacy is not the outcome of the inherent superiority of one set of sociocultural practices over another. Rather it is an outcome of asymmetrical power relations, which Ortiz defined as “transculturation:”

how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for, (quoted in Pratt, p.6)

Given Guaman Poma's startling achievement in writing in Spanish and Quechua, Pratt applied this definition to the *Nueva corónica*. She characterized it as an archetypal transculturated text for the obvious reasons that Guaman Poma selected a Spanish literary genre (the chronicle), the Spanish language, and alphabetic-text literacy to address King Phillip III and advocate particular reforms.

The Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power identifies the discontinuity of quipu literacy represented by the disjunction between the *kipukamayuy* and *Yachay Sapa Wiraqucha Dun Qvixote Manchamantan* as an accelerative metacultural process in the contact zone of 16<sup>th</sup> century Peru. Metaculture describes and clarifies the continuities and discontinuities within the social processes following social pathways that culture lays down for itself as it travels across space and through time. Seeing these texts as cultural products of accumulated social learning,

we can see that Spanish colonialism changed social conditions for the indigenous people of Peru, subordinating their cultures to Spanish colonial culture. As social conditions changed, culture changed and social practices of literacies changed. From these physical manifestations of immaterial cultural processes, we witness the transformation of social practices of literacy as a result of colonialism, and the perpetuation of this transformation as a result of the Coloniality of Power.

These texts as physical manifestations of metacultural processes are the vehicle for disseminating alphabetic-text literacy, making it accessible to others. Guaman Poma's archetypal transculturated text is a striking example of accelerative metaculture, of oldness —quipu literacy— transformed into newness, alphabetic-text literacy in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. He understood that both *kipukamayusq* and Renaissance secretaries used semiotic systems to encode and communicate cultural information, and he composed a text that drew on both.

The Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power also identifies the continuity of alphabetic-text literacy between the *Nueva corónica* and the *Yachay Sapa Wiraqucha Dun Qvixote Manchamantan* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an inertial metacultural process. Since the imposition of Renaissance literacy practices and their adoption by indigenous and mestizo subjects, alphabetic-text literacy has dominated. For more than 500 years, social practices of alphabetic-text literacy have been traditional culture.

### **An Elaborated Definition of Border Gnoseology**

Mignolo's thesis in *Local Histories/Global Designs* is that one mechanism of Western colonialism is making distinctions between epistemology and hermeneutics in such a way that Western epistemology "subalternizes" other kinds of knowledge (2000, p. 13). He draws on Mudimbe (1988) to construct his definition of "border gnoseology."

Mudimbe argues that the history of philosophy as a disciplined practice (imposed on Africa by colonialism) was the means by which "other undisciplined forms of knowledge were reduced to subaltern knowledge by colonial disciplined knowing practices called philosophy and related to epistemology" (p. 10). To inquire into and clarify this phenomenon, Mudimbe discusses the Greek etymology of gnosis, which comes from ancient Greek *gnosko*, "to know," and, more specifically, "it means 'seeking to know, inquiry, method of knowing, investigation, and even acquaintance with someone. Often the word is used in a more specialized sense, that of higher and more esoteric knowledge' (Mudimbe, 1988, p. ix)" (p.11).

"Gnosiology" refers to "the theory of the origin, nature, and validity of knowledge" (Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, Unabridged, p. 1070) and "epistemology" refers to "the theory or science of the method and grounds of knowledge, especially with reference to its limits and validity" (ibid., p. 861). "Epistemology" is often used as a synonym for "knowledge," thus knowledge is heavily associated with the "science of the method and grounds of knowledge." "Gnosiology" is rarely used, thus "the theory of the origin, nature. . . of knowledge" goes largely unexamined. Mignolo uses "gnoseology as the discourse about *gnosis* and we will understand by *gnosis* knowledge in general, including *doxa* and *episteme*" (2000, p. 11). *Doxa* is Greek for common belief or popular opinion and "episteme" is Greek for knowledge or science. Plato set "episteme" as true knowledge, in opposition to *doxa*:

The difference in Plato's work between *doxa* and *episteme* is well known, the first indicating a type of knowledge guided by common sense and the latter a more second

order knowledge, a systematic knowledge guided by explicit logical rules. (Mignolo, 2000, p. 9)

Mignolo uses “gnosis” to name a more expansive kind of knowing than the scientifically inflected “epistemology.” Gnosis combines commonsense knowledge earned through experience with knowledge that things function systematically following logical rules, which he then applies to knowledge derived from the experience of being positioned as subaltern:

Border gnosis as knowledge from a subaltern perspective is knowledge conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system, and border gnoseology as a discourse about colonial knowledge is conceived at the conflictive intersection of the knowledge produced from the perspectives of modern colonialisms (rhetoric, philosophy, science) and knowledge produced from the perspective of colonial modernities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas/Caribbean. (p. 11)

In other words, border gnosis as “knowledge conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world” describes the kind of accumulated social learning transmitted among the villagers of Tupicocha, the townspeople of Tepoztlan, and practitioners of Chicano visual discourse in Oakdale. Border gnoseology describes a discourse about the conflictive intersection of epistemology, which is “knowledge produced from the perspectives of modern colonialisms,” and hermeneutics, knowledge as accumulated social learning about being subaltern and about the rules of the system of power that positions one as subaltern, which is “produced from the perspective of colonial modernities.”

The empirical evidence contradicts the ideology of the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power; figures 4, 5, and 6 document the existence of indigenous literacy practices in the Americas. Border gnoseology describes the “conflictive intersection” of the ideologies of the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power and the Trajectory of Border Gnoseology. The latter posits that the social practices of indigenous literacies are well suited to the conservation and transmission of subaltern cultural knowledge, and have been used for such purposes since pre-Columbian times. Inertial metaculture describes the continuity of practicing indigenous literacies, and accelerative metaculture clarifies the changing practices of Indigenous literacies as social processes following social pathways that culture lays down for itself. In the cases from North America, Mesoamerica, and South America, these social pathways serve these communities’ needs to pass on border gnosis, accumulated social learning about resisting forms of coloniality.

### **The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology**

The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology is driven by the survival of social practices of Amerindian literacies in subaltern communities that intimates these communities’ agency to resist social practices and discursive formations of coloniality. It names continuities between 16<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century indigenous literacy practices and ways of knowing that have coexisted and coevolved alongside of alphabetic-text literacy. Whereas the Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power privileges Guaman Poma’s adoption of Spanish language and Renaissance alphabetic-text literacy, the Trajectory of Border Gnoseology highlights his inclusion of indigenous languages and his prodigious production of visual representations of Inca and colonial Peru. We argue that Guaman Poma’s text is transculturated, but with an emphasis on different culturally valued social practices of literacies than is routinely acknowledged (Pratt, 1992). Thus we trace continuities

from Amerindian literacies that were subalternized in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to transculturated literacy practices in indigenous and mestizo subaltern communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These literacies continue to offer practitioners a means of preserving their autonomy under the pressure of coloniality, and to critique and resist more powerful groups.

We have represented the Trajectory of Border Gnoseology visually in Figures 4, 5, and 6.

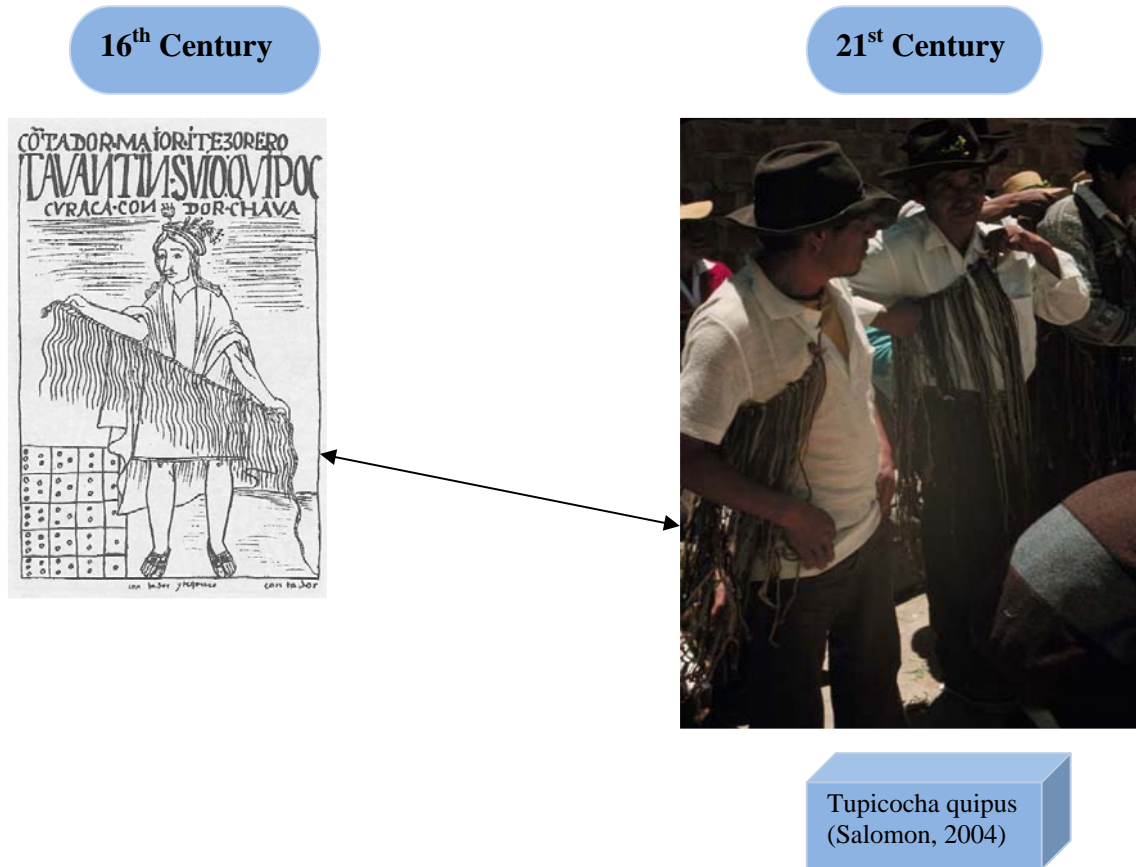


Figure 4: The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology in the Andes

Figure 4 draws on Frank Salomon’s “ethnography of writing” adapted to the social practices and political significance of “*equipocamayos*” in the village of Tupicocha, Peru (2004, p. 6). Ethnohistoric inquiry in Tupicocha reveals that quipu literacy and alphabetic-text literacy coexisted for more than 500 years, yet now Tupicocha’s quipus are worn (rather than read) in an annual civic plenum and confer political status on the wearer. *Equipocamayos* is both a Spanish cognate for *khipukamayuqs* and a “punning folk-etymology” on *equipo* (Spanish for ‘team’), which refers to the Tupicocha quipu’s function in the political organization of the village (p. 5). Tupicocha is organized into *ayllus*, an ancient word for sectors, and:

all but the newest of them were symbolized in political ritual by quipocayamos . . . The ayllus that owned the cords had . . . the same names as the ones that made up the confederacy which the Inka regime called the ‘thousand’ of Checha. . . [and] each ayllu really is a ‘team’ . . . in the sense of furnishing one team in the complex array of crews who, in friendly rivalry, do the village’s basic infrastructural work. (p.5)

That Tupicocha's *allyu*'s names have continued since the Inca regime, that these *ayllus* own quipus that are worn in an annual ceremony, and that these quipus are viewed as the village's living constitution, its founding organization, "argues against the supposed political demise of the cord-art in the early colony" (p. 21). Inertial metaculture describes the 500-year continuity of the social practices of *kipukamayus* and *equipocamayos* in Tupicocha. Accelerative metaculture clarifies the discontinuity in the ways Tupicochans use quipus through time, which shifted from carrying textual to performative or symbolic meanings at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

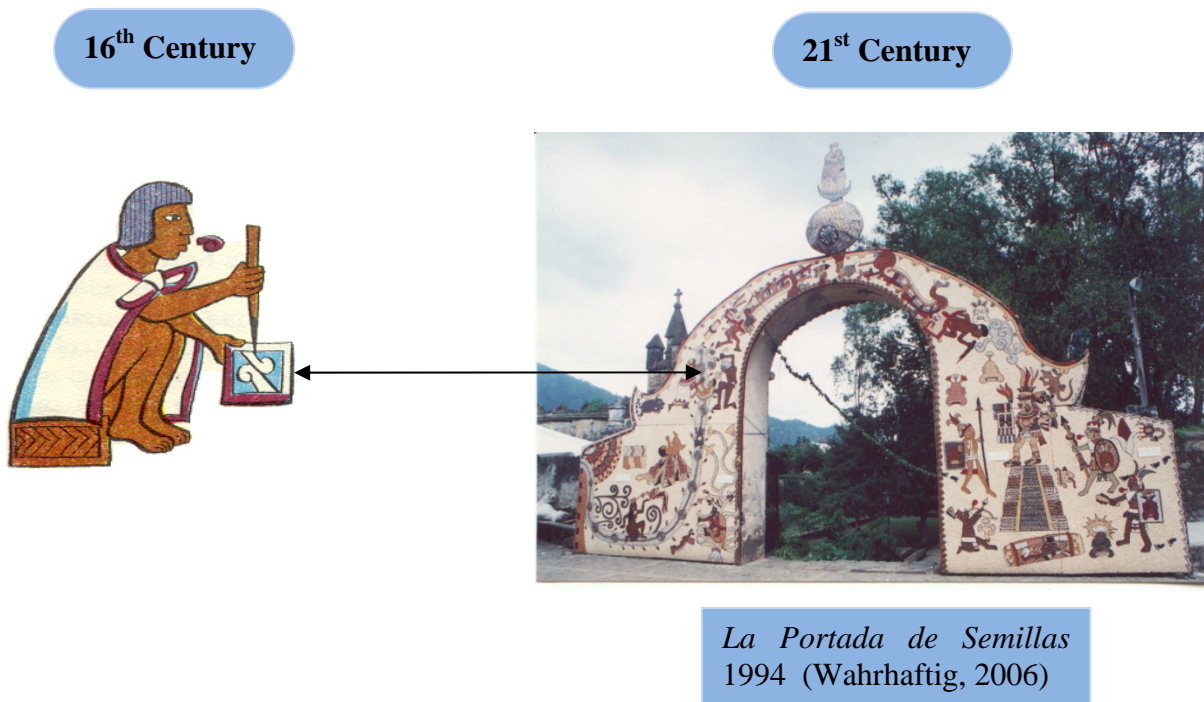


Figure 5: The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology in Mesoamerica

Figure 5 draws on Albert Wahrhaftig's work documenting the beginning and evolution of the annual creation of a *portada de semillas* (a mosaic mural made by gluing tens of thousands of seeds to plywood backing) in Tepoztlan, Morelos, Mexico.

The portadas have evolved into a deliberate communally supported effort to consolidate and communicate the value of Tepoztlan's traditional culture in the context of the present day world. Each constitutes an annual public visual declaration about the present state of Tepoztlan as measured against the ancient and sacred roots of Tepoztecan culture. The makers are, in effect, analogues to the pre-Columbian tlaculio, "the Aztec pictographic poet, whose wall art draws the past into the present through recourse to reds, blacks, and ochres" (Campbell 2003: 198). (Wahrhaftig, 2006, p. 3)

In the mid-1990s powerful interests in nearby Mexico City sought to usurp Tepoztecan property, water, and townspeople to build a golf community for the ultra-rich. During that time the annual *portadas* retold the legend of *el Tepozteco*. This is the Mesoamerican boy-hero who confronted and killed the monster of the *Xochicalco* empire, saving his kin and freeing all the kingdoms in

the region from Xochicalcan rule. Invoking Tepozteco inspired the townspeople in their confrontation with monstrous developers, politicians, and corporate elites. The townspeople barricaded Tepoztlan, occupied the town hall, and repelled attacks by state riot police intent on retaking it. The *portadas*, “a deliberate attempt to reinforce Tepoztecan identity in the face of an ever-increasing intrusion of the globalized world into Tepoztecan autonomy,” rallied the townspeople, who defeated the golf club project in what is now known as the “Golf Club War” (Wahrhaftig, 2006). Accelerative metaculture describes the social processes by which the first *portada* in 1991 became the means to reclaim social practices of Mesoamerican pictographic literacy. It also clarifies the tradition of resistance to imperialism by using pre-Columbian literacies to critique powerful groups seeking to subvert subordinated groups’ autonomy.

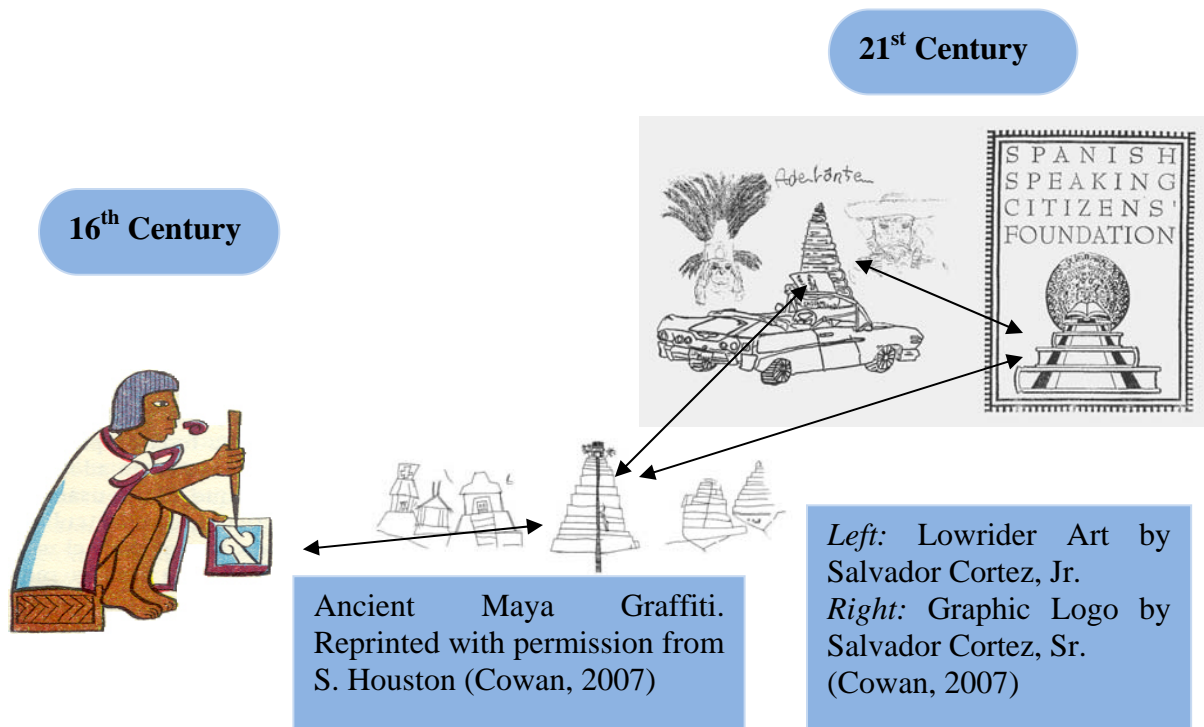


Figure 6: The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology in the U.S.

Figure 6 draws on Peter Cowan’s literacy ethnography of social practices of lowrider art in a *barrio* community in Northern California. Those who have been socialized into the practices of Chicano visual discourse in Oakdale learn to “read” and “write” circulating semiotic forms, like the Mesoamerican pyramid, as symbols to communicate meaning about contemporary lived experiences (see also Cowan, 2008). This is border knowledge, a transculturated epistemology in the U.S. that draws on Spanish/Latin American and Amerindian ways of perceiving, thinking and knowing that is subaltern (Mignolo, 2000). The existence of pre-Conquest Mesoamerican semasiographic literacies, the presence of Latino visual discourse in Oakdale that operates along semasiographic principles, and Latino youths’ use of it to visually communicate a message of pride in their indigenous ancestors suggests that this is a subaltern literacy that evolved out of the contact zone of Mesoamerica following the Conquest (Saldivar, 2004). Accelerative metaculture describes the revealing connections between social practices of Mesoamerican pictographic literacies and Chicano visual discourse in Oakdale. It also clarifies social processes of resisting

negative stereotypes and embracing the indigenous aspect of the Chicano cultural identity, which connects with the Mesoamerican tradition of creating counter-discourses to the discourses of powerful groups that subalterns are expected to accept.

### **A Transnational Trajectory of Border Gnoseology**

Using colonial semiosis and metaculture to apprehend empirical evidence for the coloniality of power and border gnoseology has implications beyond the study of Guaman Poma's text. It has personal implications for indigenous and mestizo intellectuals as well. For instance, Coronel-Molina's own lived experience (1999) represents the positionality of the intellectual in relation to the subaltern semiosis. He is an intellectual (as defined by Western standards) who is also indigenous person who comes from a remote area of the South American Andes (that is, the sociocultural periphery), where abject poverty is the norm, and obtaining more than an eighth-grade education is still rare. To achieve what had always been a life-long dream, a college education, he had to pass through a labyrinth of profound and complex struggles in his life, crossing many linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries. In the process, he developed various dimensions of his identity before first establishing himself in the metropolitan city of Lima, Peru (the social and cultural center), where he continued to struggle to improve himself and overcome countless hurdles to achieve his goals, and finally at an institution of higher learning in the United States.

Coronel-Molina is a product of a society in which a sharp division still exists between the mainstream, hegemonic society and "others," who often appropriate hegemonic tools for their own purposes in a classic example of Pratt's autoethnography. It is not only Coronel-Molina who defines himself as a member of such a subaltern society, but the dominant society of Peru also recognizes and treats him as such. What is it that made him "other" despite having attained so many of the markers of a member of the mainstream society? Quite simply, it is the mere fact that he is a Quechua speaker Andean native who lived in a society dominated by Spanish-speaking criollos. This fact fits Norval's definition of an ethnic group, according to which it is impossible to define one's ethnicity without referring to an "other," distinct from the in-group's perceived "self" (1996). This, of course, is the same unreflective process that most dominant societies follow, generally defining themselves as "us," non-ethnic or "the nation," and all other groups as "them" or merely ethnic. In Peru, the Indigenous population are just one of the many "others" against whom the criollos define themselves. Hence, Coronel-Molina is a member of a marginalized ethnic group. While he spent his childhood in an Indigenous culture, he passed his youth and entered adulthood in the criollo culture, where dominant Spanish-speaking society constantly reminded him of his lower social standing. He did not let this hold him back from pursuing his ambitions. Few subaltern subjects receive the opportunities he has had in his life. These opportunities have allowed him to broaden his horizons—and his identity—beyond the sphere of his ancient and vibrant cultural roots, while still keeping close ties to those roots. Hutchinson and Smith believe that this is a common phenomenon: "it is ... quite possible for large numbers of individuals of a diaspora ethnics to assimilate to their host society, and yet leave the ethnics in question intact" (1996, p. 5). They seem to be proposing an additive model of diaspora ethnicity, and certainly Coronel-Molina believes he has added to his ethnic identity, rather than replacing it in any way.

Coronel-Molina is an example of what Clifford discusses in his article "Traveling Cultures." He is an "ex-centric native" a "traveling 'indigenous' culture-maker" with "hybrid

cosmopolitan experiences” in addition to his “rooted, native ones” (1992, p. 101). Ultimately, if there is one thing he has learned from his life experiences, it is that he must preserve his sense of identity despite the prejudices he may encounter along linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical borders. In the preface of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa, a Chicana author and intellectual, discusses her experience of life on the border:

Living on the borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an “alien” element ... And yes, the “alien” has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society’s clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home. (1987: preface, n.p.)

Anzaldúa’s words speak to Coronel-Molina’s experience, and at the same time, demonstrate that it is not unique. Because of the roads he has traveled and the new perspectives he has gained in transit, he inhabits the “shifting and multiple identities” Anzaldúa speaks of. He, too, has developed his own “hybrid culture,” a culture that defines who he is and where he fits in the complex society in which he lives. And it seems that one of the keys to his survival is not only the hope for a better future, but also the ties he has maintained with the past that have helped him remember who he is and who he wants to become. Schlissel’s observation about American frontier women resonates with his experience: “They [the frontier women] simply refused to serve the framework of their old lives as they began to build a new” (1989: xvi). It is knowing who he has been, based on his personal, linguistic and cultural history, that allows him to understand who he is now and be aware of the possibilities of who he may be in the future. Being always on the border, being a part of and apart from the center informs all of his scholarship.

In a nutshell, then, Coronel-Molina’s autoethnography depicts his journeys and struggles to become a cosmopolitan and an “organic intellectual”, and an effective and dedicated educator with much to offer to the local and global academic community. As Pratt notes,

if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others constructed in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations ... [A]utoethnography involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror. (1992, p. 7)

This means that when subaltern communities are recognized as exercising agency through their literacy and cultural practices, Western scholars who wish to understand how these literacies construct border gnoseology will have to confront and unlearn their intellectual privilege. In other words, they will have to decolonize scholarship in order to deconstruct and understand border gnoseology, which is closely related to the bidirectional dynamic of Ortiz’s transculturation. In this sense, Coronel-Molina’s autoethnography constitutes an example of transculturated material that can serve contemporary purposes. It is also an example of accelerative metaculture and border gnosis, “knowledge conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 11).

## Conclusion

Merging colonial semiosis with metaculture to explore social practices of Indigenous and mestizo literacies enables us to theorize continuities and discontinuities among semiotic systems in the Americas from the early modern/colonial period to the present postmodern/postcolonial period. Studies by Salomon, Wahrhaftig, and Cowan provide empirical support for apprehending that Indigenous and mestizo, subaltern communities still draw on transculturated practices of Amerindian, pre-Columbian literacies to critique and resist more powerful groups that seek to exploit their less powerful positions. Using metaculture as our theoretical lens, we can see that social practices of literacies are socially learned, and products of those practices represent accumulated social learning. As social conditions change, culture changes, and cultural practices, like literacies, change. Accelerative metaculture theorizes how culture is continuously changing and converting oldness into newness. Accelerative metaculture drives the Trajectory of Border Gnoseology: it is traditional in its social practices and novel in the changing cultural products of those practices.

Indigenous and mestizo practices of literacy have coevolved alongside the imposed practices of alphabetic-text literacy and have transculturated to serve contemporary purposes. In the case of the Tupicocha quipus, we see that indigenous practices of quipu literacy were maintained for almost 400 years after the Conquest. Then, beginning at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social practices of making and communicating meaning transformed the use of quipus to a performative role in affirming the ancient political organization of the village. In the Golf Club War of Tepoztlan, townspeople drew on Aztec pictographic literacy to transform the annual *portada de semillas* into a text to retell the legend of *el Tepozteco*, in which the “boy-hero and liberator, stands for the ability of astute and courageous folk to overcome the illegitimate demands of powerful external oppressors” (Wahrhaftig, 2006, p. 10). In Chicano visual discourse in Oakdale, youthful practitioners acquire access to cultural knowledge that many use to construct cultural identities that counter negative stereotypes applied to them, that honor their indigenous ancestors, and that reflect their lived experiences as Latino youth in the U.S. (Cowan, 2005, 2007, 2008). And Coronel-Molina’s entire life has been an exercise in constructing an identity that allows him to make the best possible use of his Indigenous ways of knowing combined with the Western ways he has spent a lifetime acquiring and understanding. All four cases represent accelerative metaculture.

The Trajectory of the Coloniality of Power and characterizing Guaman Poma’s *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* as an archetypal instance of transculturation encourages the belief that Amerindian literacies are extinct. When scholars in literary studies adopted transculturation to fit the colonial texts they were studying, they emphasized Indigenous and mestizo writers taking up the languages, literacies, and literary genres of their colonizers to write autoethnographies: “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms” (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). Working from the disciplinary perspective of literary studies, Pratt used a narrower definition of transculturation than Ortiz intended when he coined it (1947/1995). An unintended consequence was characterizing transculturation as a unidirectional dynamic in which the colonized adopt the ways of their colonizers, which has been reproduced in innumerable scholarly iterations.

Ortiz set transculturation in counterpoint to assimilation. Assimilation implies that shedding one’s native culture, conforming to, and then being absorbed into the dominant culture is, or should be, each individual’s goal. Ortiz created a paradigm to fit the dynamic of cultural

integration in his native Cuba. In transculturation, the dynamics of cultural change happen in three stages: deculturation, acculturation, and neoculturation. Deculturation describes the process by which all, Indigenous people and (voluntary and involuntary) immigrants to Cuba, were torn away from their old cultural roots. This is a violent process in which the conflicts created by competing cultures, and the violent imposition of one cultural system on others, leads to the destruction of old cultural forms. Acculturation is a process of adopting or adapting various cultural forms better suited to this different sociocultural context. Neoculturation is an ongoing project, the syncretic creation of new cultural forms out of the contact and conflict among old forms, a process of the transformation of culture into new forms to communicate new experiences and meanings.

Ortiz's transculturation is a bidirectional dynamic. Acculturation means that indigenous and mestizo creators of autoethnographic texts, such as Coronel-Molina, have a variety of cultural forms to adapt to their purposes. When transculturation is defined largely in terms of the subaltern selecting and inventing "from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt, 1992, p. 6), it privileges the dominant materials and leaves unmentioned the subaltern selecting and inventing from Indigenous and mestizo materials. Colonial semiosis, by broadening what counts as colonial texts, enables us to apprehend what is Indigenous and mestizo material in autoethnographic texts, and to recognize previously overlooked texts and the social practices that produced them as products of border gnoseology. There is an Indigenous side to Guaman Poma's *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* that has been overlooked. With "colonial semiosis" and "metaculture" we can glimpse a new theoretical landscape to be explored by reindigenizing Guaman Poma's *Nueva corónica*. This approach will serve as a significant corrective to transculturation by restoring to it the bidirectional dynamic Ortiz conceived it to be.

In short, metaculture and colonial semiosis are theoretical lenses that help us understand the trajectories of Indigenous literacies of the America (the Trajectory of Coloniality of Power and The Trajectory of Border Gnoseology). Language and culture are always in motion across time and space. As social conditions change, cultural and literacy practices change as well. Inertial metaculture guarantees the continuity of Indigenous literacy and cultural practices, and accelerative metaculture explains the dynamic, changing practices of Indigenous literacies in the Americas from the Conquest to the present as they resist different forms of domination and the Coloniality of Power, and participate in Border Gnoseology.

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