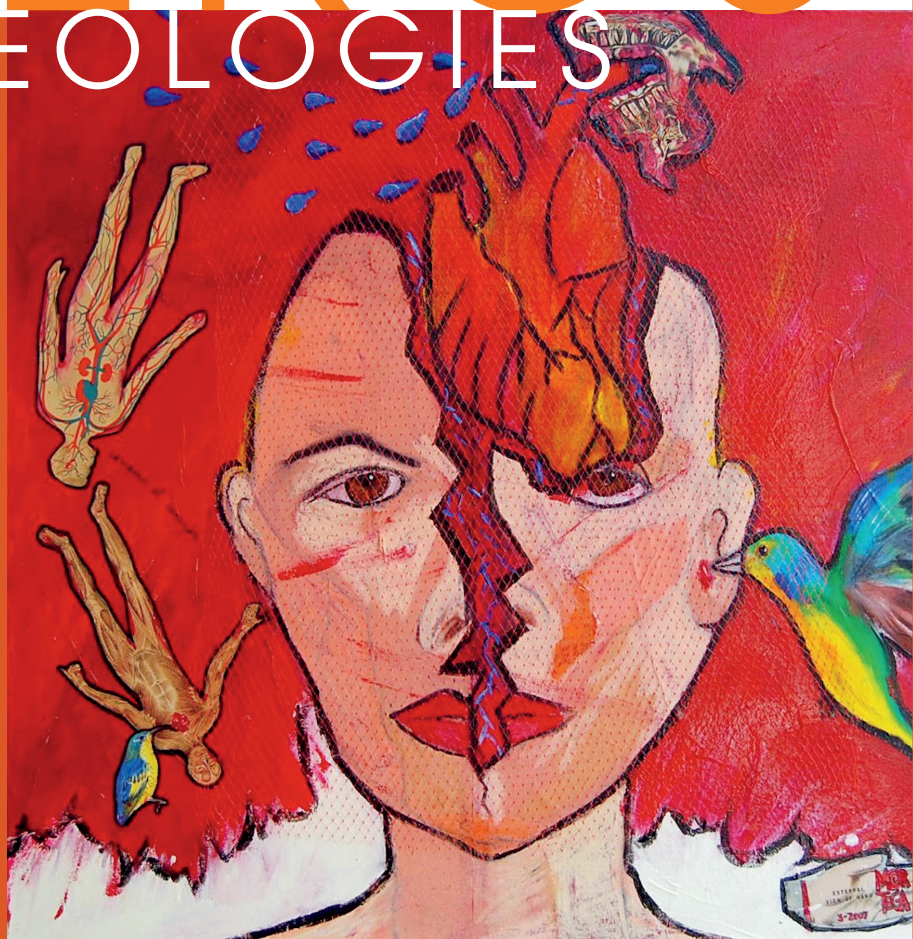


LAURA E. PÉREZ

# EROS

## IDEOLOGIES



Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial

EROS IDEOLOGIES

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Laura E. Pérez

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*Writings on Art, Spirituality,  
and the Decolonial*

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MAY THIS WORK BE  
for the Greater Good.

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If you live according to an example, you live the life of that example, but who should live your own life if not yourself? So live yourselves. . . .

The knowledge of the heart is in no book and is not to be found in the mouth of any teacher, but grows out of you like the green seed from the dark earth. Scholarliness belongs to the spirit of this time, but this spirit in no way grasps the dream, since the soul is everywhere that scholarly knowledge is not.

—CARL G. JUNG,

*The Red Book: Liber Novus*

To love is first of all to accept yourself as you actually are. “Know thyself” is the first practice of love.

—THICH NHAT HANH,

*Teachings on Love*

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Each of us needs to undergo  
a tremendous philosophical  
and spiritual transformation . . .  
awakened to a personal  
compassionate recognition of  
the inseparable interconnection  
between our minds, hearts,  
and bodies.

—GRACE LEE BOGGS,

*The Next American Revolution*

The act of writing is the act of  
making soul, alchemy. It is the  
quest for the self, for the center  
of self. . . . We start writing to  
reconcile this other within us.

—GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA,

"SPEAKING IN TONGUES: A LETTER  
TO THIRD WORLD WOMEN WRITERS"

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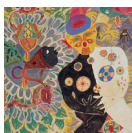


## CONTENTS

List of Illustrations *xi*

Preface *xv*

Acknowledgments *xxi*



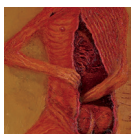
1

The Social  
Body of Love:  
Crafting  
Decolonial  
Methodologies  
*1*



2

Eros  
Ideologies  
and  
*Methodology  
of the  
Oppressed*  
*17*



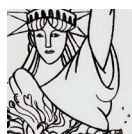
3

Long Nguyen:  
Flesh of the  
Inscrutable  
*24*



4

Hidden  
Avant-Gardes:  
Contemporary  
U.S. Latina/o  
Art  
*27*



5

Freedom  
and Gender  
in Ester  
Hernández's  
*Libertad*  
*34*

DUKE

UNIVERSITY  
PRESS



6  
'Ginas  
in the  
Atelier  
40



7  
The Poetry of  
Embodiment:  
Series and  
Variation in  
Linda Arreola's  
*Vaguely Chicana*  
52



11  
*Maestrapeace:*  
Picturing  
the Power  
of Women's  
Histories of  
Creativity  
82



8  
Art and  
Museums  
56



12  
Decolonizing  
Self-Portraits  
of Frida Kahlo,  
Ana Mendieta,  
and Yreina D.



9  
The@-Erotics  
in Alex Donis's  
*My Cathedral*  
70



10  
*Con o sin permiso*  
(With or without  
Permission):  
*Chicana Badgirls:*  
*Las hociconas*  
77



13  
Undead  
Darwinism  
and the Fault  
Lines of  
Neocolonialism  
in Latina/o Art  
Worlds  
112

Cervántez  
91

DUKE

UNIVERSITY  
PRESS



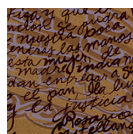
14  
The Inviolable  
Erotic in  
the Paintings  
of Liliana  
Wilson  
126



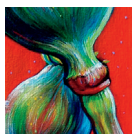
19  
Prayers for  
the Planet:  
Reweaving  
the Natural  
and the  
Social: Consuelo  
Jimenez  
Underwood's  
*Welcome to  
Flower-Landia*  
179



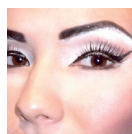
15  
The Performance  
of Spirituality  
and Visionary  
Politics in the  
Work of Gloria  
Anzaldúa  
133



20  
"Undocu-  
Nation,"  
Creativity,  
Integrity  
192



16  
Daughters  
Shaking  
Earth  
147



17  
Fashioning  
Decolonial  
Optics: Days  
of the Dead  
Walking Altars  
and Calavera  
Fashion Shows  
in Latina/o  
Los Angeles  
155



18  
On Jean Pierre  
Larochette  
and Yael Lurie's  
*Water Songs*  
174

21  
Writing with  
Crooked Lines  
201  
Notes 211  
References 245  
Index 263

DUKE

UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

## ILLUSTRATIONS

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

FIGURE 1.1 Celia Herrera Rodríguez, *Flowers Fall along the Road*  
(1997–2001) 1

FIGURE 2.1 Mariana Ortega, *Cómeme el corazón* (2007, detail) 17

FIGURE 3.1 Long Nguyen, *Tales of Yellow Skin #2* (1991) 24

FIGURE 4.1 Asco, *Spraypaint LACMA* (East Bridge) (1972), photo by  
Harry Gamboa Jr. 27

FIGURE 5.1 Ester Hernández, *Libertad/Liberty* (1976) 34

FIGURE 6.1 Favianna Rodríguez, *Del ojo de Dios no se escapa nadie*  
(1999) 40

FIGURE 7.1 Linda Arreola, *Wildfire* (2007) 52

FIGURE 7.2 Linda Arreola, *Double Helix* (2007) 54

FIGURE 8.1 Emma Amos, *Tightrope* (1994) 56

FIGURE 8.2 Ana Mendieta, *Corazón de roca con sangre* (1975, Iowa,  
*Silhueta* series) 64

FIGURE 9.1 Alex Donis, *Untitled (Jesus and Lord Rama)* (1997) 70

FIGURE 9.2 Alex Donis, *My Cathedral (Pope John Paul II and Gandhi)*  
(1997) 74

FIGURE 10.1 Maya Gonzalez, *Self-Portrait Speaking Fire and*  
*Flowers* (2008) 77

DUKE

UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

- FIGURE 10.2 Diane Gamboa, *Supreme Spirit* (2006, *Alien Invasion: Queendom Come* series, 2006–12) 80
- FIGURE 11.1 Juana Alicia, Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, and Irene Pérez, *Maestrapeace* façade (1994) 82
- FIGURE 11.2 *Maestrapeace* (1994, detail) 88
- FIGURE 12.1 Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* (1976, Mexico, *Silhueta* series) 91
- FIGURE 12.2 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940) 94
- FIGURE 12.3 Yreina D. Cervántez, *Do You Know Where ITZ'AT? Searchin' for My Mojo* (2014) 103
- FIGURE 12.4 Ana Mendieta, *Tree of Life* (1977, Old Man's Creek, Iowa) 109
- FIGURE 13.1 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Untitled (The Forbidden)* (n.d.) 112
- FIGURE 14.1 Liliana Wilson, *El calvario* (2002) 126
- FIGURE 14.2 Liliana Wilson, *Bearing Witness* (2002) 129
- FIGURE 14.3 Liliana Wilson, *Las amantes* (2002) 131
- FIGURE 15.1 Celia Herrera Rodríguez, *Ojo de sabiduría* (2006) 133
- FIGURE 16.1 Juana Alicia, *Cool Plants, Hot Planet* (2010) 147
- FIGURE 17.1 Rigo Maldonado, *Callas* (2006, detail) 155
- FIGURE 17.2 Poli Marichal, *The Dance of Love and Death* (2008) 167
- FIGURE 17.3 Poli Marichal, *Soul Catcher* (2010) 168
- FIGURE 17.4 Rigo Maldonado, *Too Much Is Never Enough* (2004) 170
- FIGURE 17.5 Rigo Maldonado, *Too Much Is Never Enough* (2004, detail) 170
- FIGURE 17.6 Rigo Maldonado, *Too Much Is Never Enough* (2004, detail) 170
- FIGURES 18.1–18.9 Jean Pierre Larochette and Yael Lurie, *Water Songs* series (1999–2007) 174
- FIGURE 18.1 *A Well of Living Waters* 174
- FIGURE 18.2 *The River in One* 174
- FIGURE 18.3 *Seminal* 175
- FIGURE 18.4 *Returning* 175
- FIGURE 18.5 *Quietude* 175
- FIGURE 18.6 *The Ancestor's Garment* (previously *Seven Generations*, as one panel) 176

FIGURE 18.7 *Waterfall* 177

FIGURE 18.8 *Yosemite* 177

FIGURE 18.9 *Watershed* 177

FIGURE 19.1 Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, *Flowers, Borders, and Threads, Oh My!* (2013) 179

FIGURE 19.2 Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, *Welcome to Borderlandia* (2013) 187

FIGURE 19.3 Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, *5 Mothers / Rebozos* (2010–13) 188

FIGURE 20.1 Yreina D. Cervántez, *Mujer de mucha enagua: PA' TI, XICANA* (1999) 192

xiii

ILLUSTRATIONS

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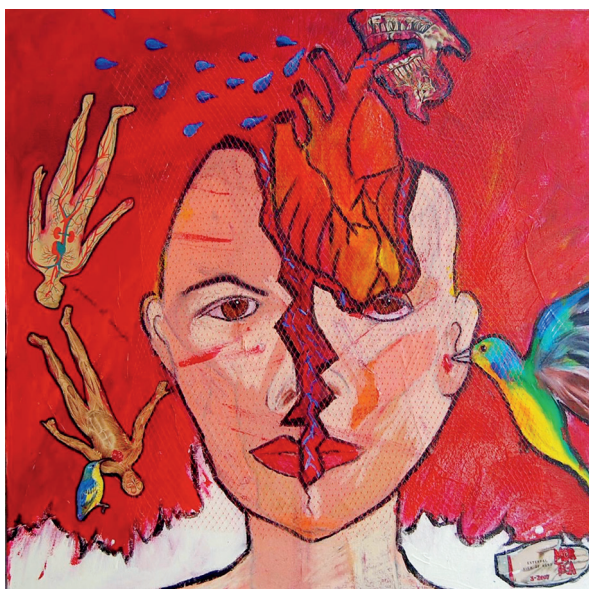
## PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To give thanks, according to Mayan spiritual elder don Pascual Yaxon, is the minimum duty we pay for the blessing of our life. Life is given us, not to be taken for granted, unfolding when in balance, according to *el plan invisible* for the greater good. A life and its fruits are made with and through others. My father, to whom this book is jointly dedicated, now with my ancestors, taught me that counting our blessings is a way to maintain a balanced view. Accordingly, I give thanks to the Creator for my life and its many blessings and the life on this precious planet that nourishes, inspirits, and sustains existence.

The many people that surround us with their care, affection, attention, and support help weave a basket of strength that helps us live well. My life and this book were nourished by countless acts of goodwill and camaraderie.

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You should know I have been conducting a scientific experiment with all those mentioned, and am now in a position to verify that we are each, in a literal, creative, affective, spiritual, and material way, each other's other self:

*In Lak'ech.*

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## NOTES

### Preface

1. See, for example, the work of French intellectual historian Didier Eribon (*Michel Foucault* [1991]), and Richard King's *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (1972). King also provides an insightful intellectual history of Norman O. Brown's work, including his *Love's Body* (1966).

2. Promising as the title of French philosopher Luc Ferry's *On Love: A Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century* (2013) seems, I find his arguments that "European civilization can and must deepen its quest for autonomy" "culminat[ing] in [a] revolution of love" (30), as the product of a "second humanism," problematic in many ways. This cannot be the place for a detailed treatment of Ferry's book, but his focus on the human (excluding other life-forms) and his conception of love as imagined through a parents' feelings for one's child and thereby future generations, remain human-centric and fail to acknowledge and engage traditional indigenous/Native American philosophical and ethical discourses of acting in the present with "seven generations," human and nonhuman (the rest of nature), in mind. Even if his concerns are explicitly Eurocentric, a position he wishes to depoliticize as simply a question of preserving a great tradition, he erroneously universalizes in many ways from his parochial position, for example: "For the first time in history, we are witnessing the emergence of a principle of meaning that, even though it justifies a long-term action and sacrifices, is not in itself a sacrificial ideology destined to kill huge numbers of people. The only sacrifices for which it calls are those carried out by human beings on behalf of human beings — not for great causes that have always led to the extermination of vast swathes of mankind" (95). For Ferry, "there is one collectively

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and sociologically new passion, namely love, which is found in different types of feeling, including sympathy. To repeat my previous point: love has always existed but, before the triumph of marriage for love, it did not have the now central role it plays as the major bond within the family and society" (101). "The fundamental political question is that of the future of Europe, in so far as Europe is the bearer of a civilization — a singular and precious civilization — of autonomy. It's not just political autonomy that I have in mind, not just the invention of democracy and human rights. It is also the civilization in which art and culture have emancipated themselves from the authority of religion: this can be seen in the fabulous revolution represented by Dutch seventeenth-century painting, which, for the first time in the history of mankind, produced pictures that were emancipated from any religious or cosmological subject and could devote themselves to the depiction of daily life, of the human as such. This staging of daily life, of human life as such, is the prime example of the ideal of autonomy that has increasingly characterized Europe throughout its history" (102–3). Why autonomy from Christian culture should be a great achievement for the (non-Christian) world at large, depends on the generalization that all religions and cosmologies function in presumably restrictive, unfree, irrational ways. There are too many points in passages such as these tautologically claiming universal achievements. In addition, the anti-poststructuralist position of the author renders the political cultural project of Derrida, Bourdieu, and Foucault (30) a caricature of their important and highly democratic critiques.

Alain Badiou, in *In Praise of Love*, a published interview with Nicolas Truong ([2009] 2012), writes, "My own philosophical view is attempting to say that love . . . is a quest for truth. What kind of truth you will ask. I mean truth in relation to something quite precise: what kind of world does one see when one experiences it from the point of view of two and not one? What is the world like when it is experienced, developed and lived from the point of view of difference and not identity? This is what I believe love to be" (22). "Love doesn't take me 'above' or indeed 'below'. It is an existential project: to construct a world from a decentred point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive or re-affirm my own identity" (25). "I don't think that you can mix up love and politics. In my opinion, the 'politics of love' is a meaningless expression. I think that when you begin to say 'Love one another,' that can lead to a kind of ethics, but not to any kind of politics. Principally because there are people in politics one doesn't love. . . . That's undeniable. Nobody can expect us to love them" (58). Interesting as this short publication is, as my own book will make clear, the binary either/or thinking of affirmations such as "In politics, the struggle against the enemy constitutes the action. The enemy forms part of the essence of

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politics. Genuine politics identifies its real enemy. However, the rival remains absolutely external, he isn't part of the definition of love" (59) does not persuade me that it offers something hopeful and new. Badiou states the "reinvent[ion of] love" finds new possibilities in "a resurrection, a re-affirmation, of the Communist idea, the idea of a world that isn't given over to the avarice of private property, a world of free association and equality" (72–73). As I argue, the either-orism of ideologies of left and right are cut from the same historical and cultural cloth; both fail to overcome a sense of fundamental difference and disinterest in some as absolute others, such as the ideological "enemy" of the other side of the political spectrum. Jung's critiques of the failure to see the enemy as our own unintegrated projections is well placed in this respect. As I argue, a philosophy such as the Mayan "In Lak'ech," you are my other me, departs from the literal understanding of the relationship between all, including the seeming foe.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s thoughts on this are remarkably similar to those of the Maya, and other traditional non-Western philosophies: "A vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws will bring an end to segregated public facilities which are barriers to a truly desegregated society, but it cannot bring an end to fears, prejudice, pride, and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society. These dark and demonic responses will be removed only as men are possessed by the invisible, inner law which etches on their hearts the conviction that all men are brothers and that love is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation." And "I must not ignore the wounded man on life's Jericho Road, because he is a part of me and I am a part of him. His agony diminishes me, and his salvation enlarges me" (King [1963] 1981, 38).

3. Mahatma Gandhi, "Truth Is God," Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal & Gandhi Research Foundation, accessed June 28, 2018, <http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap10.htm>.

## 1 The Social Body of Love

1. I want to make clear that the argument for joy as a peaceful, healthy human state is found in mystical Christianity as well as in Buddhism. Audre Lorde (1984b) makes the important argument that joy, through the erotic, is an important compass regarding freedom and what it means to be living more fully as a human, particularly from the point of view of women of color who have been made to feel unattractive, undesirable, and that sexual and emotional intimacy of their own choosing is not a right or a reasonable expectation. Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010),

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