

Critical Phenomenology as Research-Creation: A Theoretical Framework

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a theoretical framework justifying the articulation of descriptive forms of critical phenomenology with experimental and poetic forms of research-creation. Through an engagement with Merleau-Ponty, the article argues that aesthetic concerns are ontological concerns. In particular, Merleau-Ponty defines embodiment not in terms of essences so much as in terms of stylizations. The focus on style opens the phenomenological description of embodiment up for research-creation through poetic experimentation. While critical phenomenology has greatly expanded the understanding of the politics of bodily stylization, this discourse has yet to fully explore the possibilities for imagining new modes of writing that are equal parts vivid description and poetical re-stylization of how bodies interact and perceive. Emphasizing the need for creative, transformative, and collective forms of writing, Gloria Anzaldúa's work serves as a foundation for research-creation grounded in a critical phenomenology of bodily stylistics.

KEYWORDS: Critical Phenomenology, Flashpoint Methodology, Autohistoria-Teoría, Anzaldúa, Research-Creation, Critical Reflection

Critical Phenomenology as Research-Creation: A Theoretical Framework

Although phenomenology is accepted as a well-established research method in education (Friesen et al., 2012; van Manen, 2015), there are very few examples of research-creation that explicitly employ phenomenological themes and/or theoretical frameworks (Blumenfeld-Jones 2015; Lee et al., 2019; Tam, 2010) and the existing literature on phenomenology and research-creation is lacking in two respects. First, it does not engage in the critical phenomenological tradition (Magri & McQueen, 2023; Weiss, Murphy, & Salamon, 2019), which articulates phenomenology with feminism, critical race theory, queer theory, postcolonialism, and Marxism. Second, it fails to make a *phenomenological* case for why the articulation between phenomenology and research-creation is even possible to begin with. This article attempts to address these oversights. To do so, we focus

on the aesthetic dimension of experience, and in particular, the theme of "style." For Merleau-Ponty (2013) in particular, the body is less an essence or fixed structure than it is a moving, living, and expressive style. Because the body and its perceptual grasp of itself and the world are always already stylized, aesthetic concerns are an *essential feature* of the phenomenology of embodiment, opening phenomenology up to various forms of research-creation, which we define broadly in this paper as any creative practice that generates new understandings and interpretations such as performative writing, visual texts, and so forth and does not insist on hierarchical relationships between scholarship and poetic/descriptive processes (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012; Loveless, 2019). We then pivot to Gloria Anzaldúa's work whose method is offered as an example of an articulation point between critical phenomenological description and more poetic, visionary, and experimental modes of writing. In conclusion, we offer a brief example of how a critical phenomenological practice of research-creation can expand the current calls in teacher education for phenomenological "flashpoint" writing (Hood & Travis, 2023; Lewis, 2018; Lewis & Kraehe, 2020; Travis et al., 2018). In particular, flashpoint writing as an aesthetic exercise that comes out of the lived stylistics of phenomenological embodiment which can be conceptualized as a descriptive-creative act that is collective in nature, and aids in the shift from embodied styles of ease to embodied styles of struggle and transformation.

Critical Phenomenology and the Politics of Embodiment

In this section, we briefly introduce critical phenomenology, what separates it from the classical tradition, and in turn, flashpoint methodology as one way in which critical phenomenological research is enacted. The overview will highlight strengths in this approach to phenomenological research, while also pointing to a particular oversight: the lack of sustained engagement with questions concerning the politics of stylization of bodies. Simply put, critical phenomenology is a practice that reflects on "the quasi-transcendental social structures that make our experience of the world possible and meaningful, and also by engaging in a material practice of 'restructuring the world' in order to generate new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence" (Guenther, 2020, p. 5). Let us unpack this definition. First, classical phenomenology is a transcendental project, meaning that it searches for the necessary and universal conditions that make possible lived experience (Husserl, 2002). These conditions are found in a transcendental ego that is directed at the world but somehow outside the world and unaffected by the world and thus maximally generalizable (i.e., not limited by historical circumstances/conditions).

From the critical perspective, this classical approach to lived experience fails to take into account the historical and contextual structures that fundamentally inform the nature of experience, possibilities for meaning making, and comportment of bodies. Stated differently, transcendental conditions of possibility are not outside of the world but are fundamentally conditioned by factors such as social identity, power relations, and social, economic, and political contexts. These complex and variable conditions take on a “quasi-transcendental” appearance. On the one hand, “quasi-transcendental” structures are *more than* merely subjective beliefs, and on the other hand, they are *less than* the presumed a priori (permanent and invariant, hence generalizable) structures of consciousness or embodiment that are the gold standard of classical phenomenology (Husserl, 2002). Whatever generalizability is described in critical phenomenology, this generalizability is neither necessary nor universal but rather contingently consistent and only relatively stable. For this very reason, any description of such quasi-transcendental structures is never absolute.

The quasi-transcendental structures that concern critical phenomenology are structures of constraint such as patriarchy, white supremacy, class alienation, and so forth. These structures of constraint differentially shape the fundamental forms of consciousness, intentionality, and perception that are possible. The purpose of critical descriptions is to understand how structures of constraint provide exclusive privileges to certain forms of embodied subjectivity at the expense of other forms of embodied subjectivity (such as the connections between white privilege and the oppression of non-white populations).

Critical phenomenological descriptions can then act as a starting point for interrupting the operativity of quasi-transcendental structures of constraint in order to live otherwise than what is prescribed by and normalized through these very same structures. An important example of this is critical phenomenology of colonized experience provided by Frantz Fanon. Part of Fanon’s project in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) is to place Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s description of the body schema within a colonial context to see if the structures Merleau-Ponty describes are indeed universal, necessary, and a priori. For Merleau-Ponty (2013), the body schema is the “principle unity” (p. 102) that lends an organic holism to bodies, and in turn, enables the body to mesh with the world, or achieve a sense of balance, ease, or “equilibrium” (p. 155) between what a body can do and what the world affords. The sense of ease and familiarity that result from embodied equilibrium is the presumed structural norm, where breakdowns in the flow of body-in-world are occasional deviations. Yet, growing up Black in the French colony of Martinique, Fanon experienced average, everyday life of body-in-world as painful and conflictual. These were not occasional incidents but were the baseline norm preventing Black bodies from achieving flow and equilibrium. Therefore, the nonreflective, nonthematic

possibility for achieving ease was not an option for Black bodies in a colonial context.

As Fanon’s (2008) experience demonstrates, there is a need to reframe Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body schema as a “historical-racial schema” (pp. 91-92) in order to reveal the specificity of the experience of living in a Black body in a racialized world which is non-transferable (or non-generalizable) to other kinds of experiences. Whereas Merleau-Ponty describes the average-everyday body as an organic whole that can effortlessly flow into an equilibrium with its lived environment, Black bodies do not have this privilege and constantly feel “amputated by the world” (p. 119). Amputation in this sense indicates both (a) fragmenting of the body schema and (b) loss of ability to gear into the world (meaning, there is a breakdown of the invisible arc that unifies bodies with the world). Through Fanon’s critical phenomenology, we can begin to ask a series of new questions such as: Whose bodies are allowed to be integrated into the world? Whose bodily stylistics are empowered, and which are disempowered? Critical phenomenology agrees with Merleau-Ponty’s maxim “I can” (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p. 139) but, in a critical appropriation, turns it into a question: “Who can do what?” or “Who is the ‘I’ that can?” These questions recognize that quasi-transcendental structures of constraint have to be taken seriously as constituting dimensions of experience. In agreement with Fanon regarding the need for situated and historically specific descriptions of how bodies are lived within and against quasi-transcendental structures of constraint, we are interested in a practice of critical phenomenology that will enable us to teach critical self-reflection in order to (a) determine violent and discriminatory body-world dynamics and (b) investigate how such dynamics might be rendered inoperative in our everyday practices, modes of interacting, and so forth. In other words, how might we operationalize critical phenomenology?

One possible answer to this question can be found in the recent conceptualization of a flashpoint methodology. A flashpoint is a moment when the implicit sociocultural knowledge carried in the body suddenly and unavoidably flares up to make itself part of the conscious experience of oneself and one’s context. Stated differently, the flashpoint makes salient how structures of constraint are lived, or how they lodge themselves in our bodily habits and perceptual stylizations. It is our contention that writing descriptions of such flashpoints is a central feature of critical phenomenology separating it from the classical variant that is in need of further elaboration and clarification. Indeed, critical phenomenologists often utilize “flashpoints” in order to examine how structures of constraint become embodied and how embodiment comes to take on the form and comportment abiding by the norms of these structures. This is particularly the case when it comes to phenomenologies of race (Ahmed, 2006; Fanon, 2008; Yancy, 2014), but is also found in literature dealing with sexual orientation (Young,

2005; Ahmed, 2006) and class (Charlesworth, 2000). For instance, Fanon (2008) opens chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks* with the moment in which he is objectified by the White gaze, “Look! A Negro!” (p. 89). This event, although distant in time (as it happened when Fanon was a child), is nevertheless near in terms of phenomenological and existential relevance (he cannot shake it).

Fanon’s flashpoint creates the occasion for his lengthy examination of the historical-racial schema of colonialism. As with Fanon’s graphic description of the flash of racialization (the precise moment in which he is objectified as black), the vividness of the flashpoint is what makes it educationally salient to any critical project. Indeed, public intellectuals such as George Yancy (2014) understand the pedagogical use of flashpoint vivacity to bring issues of race and racism to life for a broad, non-academic audience. We mean “vivid” in two senses. First, the flashpoint is an eruption in the flow of experience and thus stands out and shows itself in a way that is memorable to the subject of the flashpoint. It leaves a phenomenological imprint on the perception in such a way that there is a “before” and “after” the flashpoint. To use Sara Ahmed’s terminology (2006), the flashpoint disrupts and disorients, but also reorients the subject toward and around new objects, bodies, and actions. Second, the flashpoint is vivid in the sense that it can bring to life the fundamental meaning or significance of a phenomenon not only for the subject but also for others whose experience might resonate with the description.

Helen Ngo (2017) offers one more example of flashpoint writing in the critical phenomenological tradition:

I continue along. The market noise washes over. I walk, but my gait feels hollow...I feel hollow. Fuck this. Fuck it all! This guy today, those kids in Bellville, the men on the park bench at night. The singularity of this event recalls all the past ones...The list grows longer...I grow more agitated, angry, and distracted, until I blink myself into the present moment and place. Enough. This will just put me in a worse mood...The rage that appeared so quickly more or less quiets down, but I am left with a residual feeling of disappointment. This again. (pp. 58-59)

In this passage, Ngo highlights how the involuntary memory of certain affects of a racialized, White gaze on a non-White body is triggered by an event of being looked at while walking through a market. The flashpoint of the market generates a flashback - a repetition of a “this again” experience of her own racialization. The subsequent writing of the flashpoint helps Ngo then transform the pain of the incident (and its reoccurring, cumulative effects) into an educational moment for critical reflection and theorization of the racialization of bodies. As such, Ngo

eloquently demonstrates the importance of flashpoint methodology as constituting an educational opportunity to not simply relive trauma but actually work through it in productive and potentially transformative ways. It is therefore vivid in both senses: it brings the phenomena to life, and in so doing, creates a potential point of resonance with others for thinking through quasi-transcendental structures of constraint.

In sum, flashpoint methodology is a form of writing that thematizes and operationalizes a mode of writing already prevalent in critical phenomenology yet lacking a specific name. It highlights the importance of discrete and powerful images emerging from the flow of everyday life for unpacking the ways in which socio-cultural differences are embodied. They reveal how Merleau-Ponty’s theory of “I can” is conditioned by quasi-transcendental structures of constraint. We agree with the political and educational value of flashpoint methodologies in critical phenomenological literature, and we want to add to this line of inquiry by highlighting the centrality of the aesthetics of flashpoints in relation to stylistics.

Bodily Stylistics, Flashpoint Writing, and the Turn to Research-Creation

To unlock the aesthetic dimension of the flashpoint, we must return to Merleau-Ponty one last time, appropriating him for critical ends. Merleau-Ponty (2013) understood lived embodiment as the “unique manner” or style (p. xxxii) of our body-in-situation, an overall accent on being that is much more than simply how we think about ourselves. Furthermore, style is not reducible to the common-sense notion of style in which the term refers to a distinctive and recognizable form of mark making. Rather, style concerns how we are in the world as a whole. Style, in this phenomenological sense, is not a mere aspect of something, but rather it is how something is in the world. It is the unique accent that bodies acquire through movement, gesture, and behavior. For Merleau-Ponty, an individual is not a fixed essence but is an enigmatic style of being. He writes, the individual “is singular like a tone, a style, or a language” (Merleau-Ponty, 2000, p. 97), which means that a person expresses who they are through the style of their gestures, movements, and manners of speaking. Stated differently, style is the “in” in the phrase “body-in-situation.”

Importantly, Merleau-Ponty argues that “acquisition of a certain style” of perception is the definition of learning (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p. 155). Thus, the most basic form of education is aesthetic education (meaning sensual, embodied, and perceptual) that teaches through preconceptual sensation how something ought to appear (ought to be) in a world. As Merleau-Ponty (1968) writes:

These two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible,

the touching and the touched, form a close bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself, even when a particular vision turns out to be illusory. (p. 46)

Notice that for Merleau-Ponty, through perceptual acts of learning, a certain style of vision is acquired that forms a “close bound system” that can be “counted” on as “constant” and from which subjects “cannot detach” themselves even when a particular vision is proven to be “illusory.” The aesthetic orientation acquired through perceptual learning becomes naturalized, forming a taken-for-granted backdrop that defines how anything or anyone can show up in experience. Aesthetic learning, simply put, goes all the way down to the ontological level of being until it becomes transparent, invisible, and thus completely neutral.

We find Merleau-Ponty’s analysis compelling, but, like his general ontology outlined above, it is also lacking in a key respect. He once again misses how style is always already political - it is political because different bodies have access to different actions, movements, ways of extending into space, different gestures based on how they are positioned within “quasi-transcendental structures of constraint.” In emphasizing a style of ease and equilibrium Merleau-Ponty universalizes particular features of the style of whiteness (how whiteness appears to itself and to the world). This is indeed ironic, as Merleau-Ponty has failed to detach himself from his own style of perceiving and being in the world even if he described how such perceptual learning has a tendency to become invisible! Merleau-Ponty’s own style of whiteness formed a set of perceptual, gestural, and behavioral privileges granting him maximum extension, movement, expression in such a way as to trick him into universalizing white stylistics. This example also demonstrates how style is a constitutive aspect of the aesthetics of quasi-transcendental structures of constraint as they are lived through perceptual grasping and behavioral coping. Stated differently, bodies adhere to particular modes of seeing and being seen in the world, particular modes of extending into space, and particular modes of sensing, all of which are aesthetic manifestations of the effects of quasi-transcendental structures on bodily stylistics.

How might have Merleau-Ponty broken out of this “close bound circle” in which he was bound to his own white stylistics? Appropriating a phrase coined by George Yancy (2012), perhaps we can speculate that Merleau-Ponty never had a flashpoint experience in which someone shouted “Look, a White!” Such a flashpoint might have had the power to make visible the invisible aesthetic style of Merleau-Ponty’s whiteness, opening it up for critical self-reflection as the aesthetics of a historical-racial schema. This oversight exemplifies how certain styles

have the *privilege* of remaining invisible to the embodied subject of such privilege as opposed to the example given earlier of Fanon, whose lack of privilege forced him to be hyper self-aware of his stylistics and how these stylistics were perceived by white colonialists.

If learning is about acquiring a certain style that settles into a body forming a set of habits of appearing, then a flashpoint is an interruption of such habits. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty (2002) writes:

My relation to a book begins with the easy familiarity of the words of our language, of ideas that are part of our makeup, in the same way that my perception of the other is at first sight perception of the gestures and behavior belonging to ‘the human species.’ But if the book really teaches me something, if the other person is really another, at a certain stage I must be surprised, disoriented. (p. 142)

The general style of the book (and of the other more generally speaking) is, at first, recognizable precisely because of a shared stylistics between body and world. But Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe a moment of surprise and disorientation characteristic of real learning, which offers a moment of stylistic variation opening up to new modes of sensing the self and the world. In this sense, flashpoints are not interruptions of the real into the sphere of appearances but rather are situated on the aesthetic level of perceptual stylization - intervening into the distribution of what can be seen, heard, and felt, composing a new perceptual field. The existence of flashpoints indicates that stylization is far from neutral but is rather the result of certain aesthetic struggles (for who and what can be seen and heard) within and against quasi-transcendental structures of constraint (be they white, settler colonialist, or capitalist structures).

In sum, Fanon’s writing reveals a particular style of struggle versus Merleau-Ponty’s style of ease, freedom, and access. What was a neutral, average, everyday starting point for Merleau-Ponty becomes the sign of ontological privilege granted to some bodies and not to others. But this ontological privilege is also and equally an aesthetic privilege to appear in certain ways (dangerous vs. safe, suspicious vs. familiar, disgusting vs. beautiful).

The vividness of flashpoint writing is dependent on the aesthetic power of the flashpoint event to rupture the ‘close bound system’, which perceptual learning binds a subject to, and in this sense, offers a moment of critical detachment (through surprise and/or disorientation which opens up the close boundedness of the system). This unbinding is important because of the small opportunity it might offer for stylistic shifts in the distribution of appearances. Flashpoint writing can thus be considered a critical methodology into the stylistics of being that

has a decisively educational power. On an ontological level, the flashpoint offers a disorientation and reorientation (Ahmed, 2006), and on an aesthetic level, the flashpoint can potentially change the stylistic manner or accent of being (a destylization and restylization).

In the penultimate section of this paper, we gesture toward Anzaldúa's writing as overly thematizing and fully embodying the aesthetic and collective dimensions of flashpoint writing, making her a central figure for future development of flashpoint methodology as a research-creation approach to dealing with issues of inequality, oppression, subjugation, and marginalization.

Anzaldúa and Autohistoria-teoría

"Este arrebato, the earthquake, jerks you from the familiar... (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 122) ...the upheaval jars you out of the cultural trance and the spell of the collective mindset..." (p. 125).

In this section, we turn to Anzaldúa to give a more holistic and articulated theory of flashpoint methodologies as research-creation, with particular sensitivity toward the politics of style. Indeed, Anzaldúa speaks of bodily style when she notes, "Style brings up the politics of utterance—who says what, how, to whom, and on whose behalf" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 248). Here, Anzaldúa alerts us to the different political dimensions of the aesthetics of flashpoint stylistics. First, she asks us to consider whose voices are heard as legitimate voices and how any partitioning of the sensible within society always includes some and excludes others (as inarticulate, disruptive rabble). Second, the style of an utterance will use certain conventions that may or may not be shared with others, thus conventions are politically contestable (Hood, 2022). In this sense, style is never neutral but rather emerges through histories of contestation (think of the style of struggle vs. the style of ease described above). Third, the politics of style also concerns the question of audience. One must know one's audience in order to understand how certain stylistics will be judged differently given one's location within a certain partitioning of the sensible. Finally, politics concerns ends and how certain styles will either be complacent with (and reinforce) quasi-transcendental structures of constraint or challenge them. In this sense, Anzaldúa's theory of style reveals the multiple dimensions of the politics of vividness outlined above: critical phenomenological writing must bring the phenomena to life in such a way as to make tangible the invisible, taken-for-granted stylistics supporting oppression, discrimination, and marginalization while also being able to resonate with the experiences of others so that a collective struggle can emerge.

According to Pitts (2016), Anzaldúa believed that "the proposal that

writing about oneself provides the theoretical tools for others to critically interrogate their positions and the world. This would also then include the disorienting hails that might compel a reader to critically assess her/his/their own epistemic positionality and responsibility" (p. 174). In other words, the aesthetic stylistics of writing hail insofar as they are vividly compelling, producing epistemological and sensorial flashpoints in the reader that encourage critical consciousness about one's positionality. In this sense, Anzaldúa helps further clarify the aesthetic stakes in flashpoint writing.

We can further unpack the aesthetics of vividness in terms of Anzaldúa's theory of the embodied, intercorporeal, and intersubjective practice of autohistoria-teoría. Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría is a theory and methodology involving deep critical self-reflection, with intense, intentional, and vast recognition of the non-linear intertwining of body, self, self with multiple selves, others, time, and space, in order to reveal rich aesthetic dimensions of experiences (Arfuso, 2021; Bhattacharya & Keating, 2018; Pitts 2016). Speaking to the collective and collaborative nature of this process, Pitts (2016) frames autohistoria-teoría as referring to the "...explicit task of developing theoretical resources out of descriptions of oneself and one's experiences...speaking for oneself can extend toward others in ways that can be positive and conducive of further actions and forms of meaning-making" (p. 358). Thus, Keating summarizes: "Unlike mainstream Western autobiography, autohistoria is never conceived of, enacted as, or interpreted to be the story of an entirely unique, self-enclosed individual; autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría always intentionally and overtly include communal, collective components" (Keating, 2022, p. 87). In this sense, Anzaldúa's work can be described as tracing the effects of flashpoints that occur at the interface between self and other, individual, and collective. Her work is important for highlighting how flashpoints are never isolated incidents affecting only individuals. Instead, they are social, political, and economic symptoms, or vivid dilations of quasi-transcendental structures of constraint into momentary flashes that are as personal as they are communal.

For Anzaldúa (2015) autohistoria-teoría is in service of the Coyolxauhqui imperative, which is to "re-member" oneself through the act of self-writing. Pulling from Aztec mythology, Anzaldúa evokes Coyolxauhqui (the moon goddess) to symbolize and embody the creative and productive side of fragmentation. In the legend, Coyolxauhqui's brother (Huitzilopochtli) dismembers her body, scatters the pieces, and throws her dismembered head up into the sky where it becomes the moon. Anzaldúa uses this violence done to Coyolxauhqui's body as a way to frame healing as a destructive and creative process. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is one of the stages of *conocimiento*, "a heightened consciousness or awareness" that "stirs the artist to take action, propels her toward the act of making" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 40)

and is illustrated through practices of autohistoria-teoría—as a motive for meaning-making and healing (both on individual and collective levels). Healing thus involves this destructive/creative process of dismembering → re-collecting our scattered pieces → re-membering in order to remake ourselves and our reality (Anzaldúa, 2015). If quasi-transcendental structures of constraint dis-member (amputate, as Fanon once said) the embodied, then Anzaldúa attempts to deploy creative, poetic, and mythic writing as a strategy for re-membering the body or reassembling a fragmented body schema in such a way that trauma is not repressed so much as expressed and worked through in order to create a different kind of body stylistics. Hence the centrality of Anzaldúa for further developing the notion of the flashpoint as research-creation.

In Anzaldúa's (1990) terms, (as cited in Keating, 2022, pp. 85-86) the practice of self-writing (or writing the self) in autohistoria-teoría:

...evokes the memory of a trauma retroactively by means of association. It recalls the scene of trauma (an instance of racism, or rape, for example) and releases anger, fear or sexual excitement...often, instead of repressing the recollection, she highlights it, brings it to center stage, replays it, examines it from front to back and scrutinizes it in the act of not only recording it but of writing it with a myriad of choices and poetic license.

There is perhaps no more precise description of flashpoint writing as both a description of trauma held in the fragmented body and aesthetic stylization through “choices and poetic license.” In other words, Anzaldúa combines research and creation through the flashpoint (memory of trauma). While Anzaldúa maintains that the violence of colonization has stripped away the connection to the innate and visceral knowledge the body holds, it is through the disruption of *arrebatos* (earthquakes) that latent, repressed or suppressed embodied knowledge is jolted and shocked into reanimation, creating a flash. This abrupt momentary flash of understanding “sears” us, and in this way, re-membering serve as “bodily and boundary violation... shocking us into a new way of reading the world” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 86). The importance here is that this shock of the flashpoint is equal parts description and “poetic” reinvention that offers up a “new way” of reading the world. This new way of reading can be thought of as a different perceptual stylization emerging from within the earthquakes-as-flashpoints.

For Anzaldúa, the creative process of writing is powerfully transformative. Through the practice of autohistoria-teoría, she invites us to critically interrogate our own identities—social and relational:

Through the act of writing you call, like the ancient chamana, the scattered pieces of your soul back to your body. You commence the arduous task of rebuilding yourself, composing a story that more accurately expresses your new identity. You seek out allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice. (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 155)

Importantly, writing the self and its narrative is a “composition” or stylistic synthesis of the parts of experience into a mediated whole. This act of creative invention is not simply personal but also political. Through the writing process, the self extends beyond itself, or as Anzaldúa puts it, the self begins to “seek out allies” with which it can “begin building spiritual/political communities.” To compose a self out of what has been amputated is also and equally a composition of self in relation to others. The flashpoint “expresses” the self and its relationship to quasi-transcendental structures of constraint, but in such a way as to aesthetically experiment with emergent alternatives that not only re-member the self but, more importantly, begin the work of re-membering the community. The result is an invention of a new stylistics of struggle.

Acknowledging that narratives of vulnerability also include resistance and creativity, Anzaldúa calls us to recognize the profound effect of anxiety and anguish of racialized, fragmented, or wounded bodies while also appreciating their capacities for healing and transformation—flashpoints can be breakdowns, but they can also be breakthroughs of something new. Anzaldúa considers the performative role of mythopoetic text in constructing this resistant narrative, and she notes that within this framework, writing not only provides individual therapeutic opportunities, but also opportunities for collective healing and transformation as well, “I change myself I change the world” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 71). Just as Harbin (2016) suggests that disorientations do not always result in change, Ahmed (2006) also notes that disorientation work does not guarantee transformation, as “...the forms of politics that proceed from disorientation can be conservative, depending on the ‘aims’ of their gestures, depending on how they seek to (re)ground themselves” (p. 158). As such, modes of “epistemic responsibility” that are brought into action through the practices of writing autohistoria-teorías and flashpoint methodologies should not be treated as a given or response (Pitts, 2016, p. 174). Taken together, what is at stake are flashpoints that interrupt stylistics of being that sustain inequalities or injustices while also opening up to new collective resonances. Bearing this worry in mind, we suggest that flashpoint writing is most transformative when it:

1. Reveals how the quasi-transcendental structures of constraint are only “quasi-transcendental” meaning that their presumed

transcendental quality is an *appearance* of necessity and universality. The transcendental becomes historical and contingent, taking on a radically different appearance within one's experience.

2. Restylizes ways of perceiving the world, producing (a) a breakdown of how a body appears and what appears to a body while also and equally (b) a breakthrough of alternative modes of sensing one's self and the world.
3. Experiments with the aesthetics of descriptively poetic and poetically descriptive writing not only to convey rich descriptions but also to catalyze resonances across experiences in the name of collective re-membrance, opening up new stylistics for who says what, how, to whom, and on whose behalf.

Conclusion: Critically Creative and Creatively Critical Flashpoint Methodologies

In sum, this article has argued for the productive and politically efficacious partnership between critical phenomenology and research-creation. Critical phenomenology, and in particular its flashpoint methodology, can benefit from research-creation in many ways, especially in terms of its poetic inventiveness. And research-creation can benefit from critical phenomenology's emphasis on the body, lived experience, and political analysis. What makes this interface possible is the inherent stylistic and aesthetic dimensions of bodies. The body always already stylizes (a) how it composes its perceptual grip of the world, (b) how it moves and comports itself, and (c) how it links up with the world around it. For these reasons, description must involve an aesthetic dimension, and the aesthetic dimension cannot escape the lived experiences of bodies. Anzaldúa's mytho-poetic writing is an exemplary manifestation of the politics of style. She opens up a space and time for thinking through the politics of style (how styles are produced, how they embody histories of privilege and struggle) through her stylization of politics (her poetic license which is creatively necessary for re-membling as part of a collective act of invention).

It is also our contention that Anzaldúa's project can be extended so as to include nonverbal forms of flashpoints such as paintings, photographs, musical compositions, performances, and so forth. Such experimentation is needed now more than ever. For instance, stylistics of ease can be destabilized as privileges, or lived expressions of quasi-transcendental structures of constraint and stylistics of struggle can be extended into collective projects of healing and transformation. In moments of civil unrest and growing racist, sexist, and homophobic sentiments, styles of struggle need new languages of joy and empowerment for re-membling fractured pasts and envisioning alternative futures (Lewis & Kraehe, 2020).

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