The Body and Indigenous Control of Environment. The Fluids of Life: Blood, Water, Power and Bugs a la Tlaxcalteca

JEANNE GILLESPIE
"A fascinating tour across genres and cultures of the Hispanic and Pre-Colombian worlds, illuminating concepts and depictions of the body as identity, conscience and the subject of art and literature. How has a subject so basic been ignored for so long? Andrist now corrects the record." Nicolás Kanellos, Ph.D., Brown Foundation Professor, Director of Arte Público Press and Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage

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"The Body Subject and Subjected is a salient contribution to the field of carnal hermeneutics. The contributors of this provocative volume engage the reality of embodiment as experienced in the Hispanic lifeworld. The range of topics, including environmental, political, perceptual, and medical concerns are engaged from multiple forms of Hispanic aesthetics. Anyone fascinated by the aesthetic rationality that emerges from Hispanic life and culture will find these articles invaluable." John Francis Burke, author of Mestizo Democracy: The Politics of Crossing Borders

"This collection of critical essays meticulously provides insightful examination on social and artistic life over a grand dimension of multicultural, trans-historic, and trans-Atlantic significance, which facilitates the reader profound understanding of the values and (self) challenges in the Hispanic world as well as for the whole humanity." Haiqing Sun, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Spanish, Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages, Texas Southern University

"This book is a compelling exploration of aesthetic representations and interpretations of the human body in the Indigenous, Hispanic American, and Spanish traditions. The thirteen essays based on varying methodological approaches provide thought-provoking material for both students and academics as the essays underscore how artists portray the body as both subject itself, and subjected to, a multitude of external factors." Kimberly A. Habegger, Associate Professor of Spanish, Department of Modern & Classical Languages, Regis University

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The Body Subject & Subjected
The Representation of the Body Itself, Illness, Injury, Treatment & Death in Spain and Indigenous and Hispanic American Art & Literature

Edited by
Debra D. Andrist

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Preface

In general, this book project started decades ago in a central part of the U.S. with me, a very young child, or accompanying, per medical journeys. My own body and mind, as well as those of my colleagues, were subject to—and subjected to—many of the aspects of themes in this book: function and dysfunction in terms of illness injury, restoration in terms of treatment and interventions and, finally, death.

My very earliest memories as a two-year-old are of my father, polio, doing hundreds of push-ups on the farmhouse living-room floor as part of his recovery. A scant couple of years later, my parents found a physician who could help me with my own leprosy-like ailment, eczema on the feet. Initially, for more than a year, we drove more than 400 miles round-trip once a week, spending two days each trip at the up-and-coming young physician’s office, where I became the subject of a study and article in the early days of allergy medicine.

Those experiences, insights and interest which resulted from long-term situations amplified to professional near-obsession in later. As a newly-minted assistant professor and social activist, I realized the life-changing/life-saving value of the practical applications of LOTE (the current buzz-word for “languages other than English”) language and culture acquisitions. The initial impetus grew out of emergency midnight phone calls for “freebie” translators for patients—perhaps suffering life-threatening illnesses or injury from a small-city south-central U.S. hospital in an area with relatively high Spanish-language-dominant populations but little or no interest in access to other-than-English resources for medical professionals and patients. Thus, in the early eighties, I began teaching medical Spanish courses but not the traditional ones mainly limited to terminology from the Latin. Those role-playing and real-life courses morphed into the added classroom use of visual art and cultural overlays. This is not to mention that these interests informed my own scholarly research, professional presentations and publications. Professors at three universities and hundreds of students over the years, undergraduates and graduates, taking both req
CHAPTER

1

The Body and Indigenous Control of Environment

The Fluids of Life: Blood, Water, Power and Bugs à la Tlaxcalteca

JEANNE GILLESPIE

While substantial scholarship has focused on the Mexica-Tenochca versions of Mesoamerican cultural history, regions like Tlaxcala and Texcoco as well as important trade destinations such as the Gulf Coast, Oaxaca, Guatemala, and Michoacan developed their own, often significantly different, versions of military and political interactions. Many of these accounts contain some information that historians can confirm and much information that does not contribute to a "factual" or "historical" interpretation. Historian Nigel Davies expresses frustration at attempting to sort through the multiple voices of Mesoamerica at the time of the conquest:

One finds that every small city-state at this time contains in its midst elements of each of its neighbors, so that no people is ever quite what is made out to be: there are few fixed bonds of friendship, but only a kaleidoscope of fleeting combinations between petty states and rulers. Every people seems to be the vassal of another and stronger one, and yet to be waiting for an opportunity to destroy its masters.

(Davies 1970: 164)

Davies is also sincerely bothered by the inclusion of mytho-poetic passages in many indigenous and mestizo narratives that he consults because, for him, these elements complicate his goal of establishing specific dates and historical "facts." For Davies, these details have "no redeeming historical value" unless specific dates and places can be assigned to them (1977, 22). Willard Gingerich counters that scholars who are seeking only specific correspondences in dates and events related to pre-Hispanic figures will remain frustrated in the same way that scholars who seek to establish a historical record of Jesus Christ and Christian events find it impossible to reconcile historical dates and facts from the time of Christ with the Bible. Gingerich explains that for scholars "intent on recovering the 'hard core of fact' embedded in the richness of myth, legend and chronicle, they are only annoyed by soft detail (Gingerich 1986: 48). This soft detail, however, is not merely filler; it contains information that can help better understand Mesoamerican communication strategies.

Narratives in Mesoamerica consistently used mytho-poetic data to frame their commentaries. For that reason, scholars must endeavor not only to understand the "facts" that Davies is seeking, but to also navigate the other organizing principles that frame historic narratives. It is not that these "details of fantasy" do not have significant historical value; it is that to understand these apparently fanciful components of the narrative, scholars must also understand the strategies and the rhetorical devices that the Amerindian narrators used to generate them. This study will examine an aspect of the rich and complex mytho-poetic data documenting the Battle of Poyauhtlan in the Historia de Tlaxcala. This particular data develops through the linking of the Mesoamerican rain divinity, Tlaloc, with Tlaxcalan victory at Poyauhtlan, the consumption of water insects in seasonal and ritual events, and the geography of the region.

Mesoamerican sources confirm that bands of Chichimec—nomadic tribes that came into the Valley of Mexico from the north—settled in Anahuac throughout the 12th century. Some of these groups settled along the eastern bank of Lake Texcoco. For the Tlaxcalans, a specific conflict on the lakeshore at Poyauhtlan in which the Chichimecs triumphed led to the emergence of Tlaxcala as an independent and victorious power in the Mexican plateau.

The Tlaxcalan victory at Poyauhtlan is mentioned fifteen times in the Historia de Tlaxcala. This battle is invoked whenever the narrative strives to support claims of Tlaxcalan hegemony. A deeper analysis of the imagery and geography of these narratives confirms that the victory is significant on several levels. If the reader can interpret these "non-factual" details, new meanings emerge that would certainly contribute to the confusion of a European reader, but authenticate the event for a Mesoamerican audience. The first aspect of the narrative that must be more fully understood is the amount and the quality of blood that was shed in this battle. Muñoz Camargo describes a battle so bloody that the water in Lake Texcoco turned red with the blood that flowed from the defeated warriors:
Vast armies assembled in the lake and on land to attack the Chichimecs at Poyauhtlan; who, because they were such a bellicose and ferocious people and they were continually alert, were not so careless that they did not launch themselves into the encounter with such noble fury to resist and defend their territory, defending themselves with intense effort and valor, and in such a manner that the histories and antiquities tell that from where the town of Cohuatinchan is located to the town of Chimalhuacan and all along the shoreline and beach of the lake, only streams of blood and dead men could be found, in such a way that the water of the lake all along the bank did not seem to be water but pure blood and a lake of blood, the whole thing transformed into blood; and [in the face of] such effective skill and effort their enemies ran away and disbanded with great shame and they were victorious and full of valor in their first settlement. (Muñoz Camargo 1998: 79)

This passage explicitly cites the battle along the eastern shores of Lake Texcoco between Coatlinchan and Chimalhuacan, near the base of the volcano commonly referred to as “Monte Tlaloc” or “Tlalocan,” the misty, watery paradise of Tlaloc. This divinity, inextricably linked to warfare and hegemony, demanded the sacrifice of blood.

According to the Tlaxcalans, the blood that flowed from this battle represented a sacrifice so powerful that a local delicacy from Lake Texcoco remains red to this day, commemorating the event. In a striking mytho-poetic gesture, even nature confirms the valiant “victory”:

and in memory of such a bloody battle, the locals there eat a certain aquatic creature that is cultivated in the lake that has the name izcahuiltil... the blood that was spilled there converted that creature... to that color [of blood], which is a fable; but still the memory of that war remains... because blood in the Mexican language is called ezti... (Muñoz Camargo 1998: 79–80)

While even mestizo chronicler Muñoz Camargo asserts that the story of the izcahuiltil—actually the larva of the shore fly Ephrydra bians—is a “fable,” the power of the fable is that by linking the creature found in Lake Texcoco to the violent battle, the izcahuiltil became a witness in colonial times to the purported military power of the Tlaxcalans. The larvae appear wriggling in the water and mud at the beginning of the rainy season, reminding the inhabitants of the violent battle and the bodies of the warriors dying along the lakeshore. The larvae are a transparent red color, so they look as though they have been stained by blood. The izcahuiltil’s connection with the rainy season—the time of Tlaloc—and blood reinforce the messages of this battle as a victory with the blessings of Tlaloc and the offerings to be made to the divinity to assure the proper rainfall. Metaphorically, nature reenacted the result of the battle every year and the harvest of the larvae would also “commemorate” the arrival of the much-needed rains. The fact that the bloodstained izcahuiltil is found in the exact spot of the battle offers a perfect example of how mytho-poetic details can contribute to the understanding of a particular historical event. This is not a historical fact, but it does help us establish that the blood shed in this battle was exceptionally special. It also represents the arrival of a vital and nutritious source of protein.

The izcahuiltil and the animals that preyed upon it (including migratory fowl) represented significant and high-quality protein sources that would also be important for non-agrarian groups like the Chichimecs. The 16th-century naturalist Francisco Hernández describes the harvest of the izcahuiltil (the larvae) as well as the pupae poni (puxi) from the edge of the lake with nets. He explains that the pupae would be dried and ground into a very nutritious flour to be added to corn for making tortillas. The dried larvae are stored in containers and this is a common and popular commodity in the markets. (1959: 395) Local women would harvest and cook these creatures or they would be dried and reserved for later consumption. Anyone who would have eaten the delicacy or who had seen the izcahuiltil along the shore of Lake Texcoco would have been reminded of the battle through both cultural and biological signs. These levels of meaning would escape a European reader; however, the message of Poyauhtlan would be very clear to a Mesoamerican audience familiar with this creature.

The geographical significance also offers a very rich communicative register. This violent and bloody battle occurred at the foot of an extremely sacred mountain dedicated to the pan-Mesoamerican divinity, Tlaloc, the patron of rain. The reference to this amount of warrior blood spilled in battle at this spot resonates with the theme of warrior sacrifice to Tlaloc. The fauna and the specific geography reflect visual and experiential communication strategies that reinforce linguistic commentary. Tlaloc was the patron of warfare, but he also was the divinity who controlled rain and access to the most precious fluid for survival, water. To assure victory in battle as well as to guarantee the appropriate amounts of rainfall, the Mesoamericans knew that their debt to Tlaloc had to be paid.

Philip Arnold explains that human sacrifices, often of children, were required to “pay the debt” to Tlaloc in the ceremony called Atl...
cahualo. These sacrifices took place at seven different sites, representing all seven of the aspects of water in Central Mexico:

Human sacrifices and other offerings to Tlaloc during Atl cahualo were called “debt payments” and seen as gifts given to the deity to sustain his life and therefore the life of the living landscape of the Valley of Mexico. This relationship is reinforced by examining the ecology of the locations of the seven sites where sacrifice took place during Atl cahualo. In order, these sites are (1) Quauhtepoc (tree hill place), (2) Yohtualtecatl (night dweller), (3) Tepeitzinco (honored hill), (4) Poyauhtlan (color-darkened place), (5) Pantitlan (banner row place), (6) Cociotl (sore or pimple), and (7) Yiauhqueque (sacrificial 37 Paper Ties to Land offerings). Hydrologically the seven sites encompass all of the various aspects of the movement of water. (Arnold 1995: 37-38)

It is interesting that Arnold translates Poyauhtlan as “color-darkened place,” especially because this place where the battle occurred would have been darkened by the color of the blood that flowed there. The testimony of the icabuitl corroborates this. So much blood was sacrificed that the marine life still bears the stain.

In a sacred song dedicated to Tlaloc from the Primeros memoriales, poyauhtlan is identified as the place of ritual dedicated to Tlaloc (Sahagún 1997: 132–135). José Contel explains that Sahagún indicated that the temples dedicated to rain divinities called ayauhcalli had four ritual structures that corresponded to the four cardinal points (Contel 2008: 161; Florentine Codex II 1950–82: f. 40). Both the Acolhua and their Triple Alliance ally, the Mexica, had ayauhcalli dedicated to the worship of Tlaloc, and both describe ascending Mount Tlaloc to participate in rituals dedicated to him. At the top of this peak, archaeologists have analyzed the remains of the ceremonial precinct that was dedicated to ritual feasting and human sacrifice to Tlaloc.

The ritual of the raising of the four poles in the Atl cahualo veneration of Tlaloc is described in detail in Sahagún’s Primeros memoriales in the first section on divinities, accompanied by a text called the “Song of Tlaloc” (Sahagún 1997: 132). This version of the “Song of Tlaloc” was collected in the Acolhua city of Tepepulco, the same city that produced the Codex Xolotl. The song, cuicatl in Nahuatl, helps us better understand why the Battle of Poyauhtlan held such significance for the Tlaxcalans.

The cuicatl draws a connection between the place of blood sacrifice and the process of receiving divine sanction for settling in the appropriate place. First, the sacrificial ritual itself is described: “In Mexico the god has been on loan. / The paper flags have stood in four locations. / At last it was his time to weep. / I [Tlaloc] have been formed. / My god is stained with blood. / The festive day is long. / I bring water to the temple court” (Sahagún 1997: 132). This ritual includes the fashioning of an image of Tlaloc from maize. The image travels around to be hosted by various politicks. This still occurs, for example, in Cholula where the Virgin of the Rosary from the chapel atop the pyramid is loaned to different parishes that venerate her with flowers and lay down seeds and sawdust in her path. The phrase “his time to weep” is particularly significant here, because weeping is often used as a metaphor for rain/blood sacrifice (Gingerich, 1977).

Later in the cuicatl, Tlalocan is established as a place connected with ancestors and with efforts to settle in Poyauhtlan: “From Tlalocan from the turquoise house. / Your forefathers, Acatal, have come forth, have seeped forth. / Go forth, gather [settle] in Poyauhtlan” (Sahagún 1997: 133). Tlaxcalan narratives confirm that their Chichimec ancestors did settle in “Poyauhtlan,” where they asserted that they triumphed. After that victory, they did go to Tlalocan to perform the appropriate rituals for pleasing Tlaloc.

Although complex and somewhat esoteric, the interwoven layers of meaning incorporating the landscape and geography, architectural practices, and alliances can help mediate the often-confusing discourse of colonial ethnographic texts. Like the mytho-poetic elements such as the bloodstained delicacy from the Texcoco lakeshore, icabuitl, the colonial mestizo and Amerindian authored texts often explicitly connect to the maps, using the landscape itself to affirm their creators’ right to rule.

As the major military power in alliance with the Europeans against Tenochtitlan, the Tlaxcalans represent the indigenous “victor” of the conquest. They successfully campaigned for favors and special status in New Spain by invoking their service to the Spanish crown in campaigns throughout Mesoamerica (Gillespie 2005: 193–196). While the details about the icabuitl, the sacred geography of Poyauhtlan and the sacrificial complex for the veneration of Tlaloc would have been noise to any Spanish reader, and certainly items of no redeeming value for anyone seeking “just the facts,” they do allow an insight into Mesoamerican mytho-poetic practices and some strategies that indigenous communities employed in their attempts to survive in the harrowing aftermath of the conquest.
Works Cited

CHAPTER 2

The Body and Control via Artistic Exercise

Pablo Picasso: From Physical to Mental Dissection of the Human Body

ENRIQUE MALLÉN

Italian Renaissance artists became anatomists by necessity, as they attempted to refine a more lifelike, sculptural portrayal of the human figure. In fact, until the years 1500–1510, their investigations provided much of the knowledge on anatomy and went deeper than what was taught at the universities. The historian Giorgio Vasari, in *Lives of the Artists*, identifies the great Florentine sculptor, painter, and printmaker Antonio Pollaiuolo (1431–1498) as the first master to “flay human bodies” in order to investigate how muscles work and to understand the human physical constitution “in a more modern way.” Pollaiuolo’s highly influential engravings display nude figures with their musculature clearly visible as observed from various angles. Later innovators in the field, such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo (1475–1564), who are both recognized for having undertaken detailed anatomical dissections at various points in their careers, set a new standard in their portrayals of the human figure. Following their example, a number of great artists also attempted direct dissections and produced écorchés, studies of the peeled away or ripped apart forms of muscles, to explore their potential for purely artistic expression. The majority of them, however, limited their investigations to the surface of the body—the musculature, tendons, and bones, etc., as observed through the skin. By contrast, Da Vinci, the most significant artist-anatomist of all time, went much further. His first series of detailed studies of the human skull took place in 1489, and borrowed from the architect’s rigorous method of representing