Fruto del diálogo sostenido con su propio corazón, que ha ruminado, por así decir, el legado espiritual del mundo náhuatl, el artista comenzará a transformarse en un yoltéotl, “corazón endiosado,” o mejor, movilidad y dinamismo humano orientados por un especie de inspiración divina.

Fruit of the dialogue sustained with his/her own heart, that has ruminated, so to speak, the spiritual legacy of the Náhuatl world, the artist will begin to transform him/herself into a yoltéotl, “a deified heart,” or better, human mobility and dynamism oriented by a kind of a divine inspiration. [my translation]

—Miguel León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares

But what, or who, can emerge intact from such traumatic crossings, in response to the passionate call of the originary language, figured by the drum? Only the black trickster . . . .

—Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey

The journey of this writing is as much a journey into the past as it is into the future, a resurrection of the ancient in order to construct the modern. It is a place where prophecy and past meet and speak to each other.

—Cherrie Moraga, The Last Generation
It seems that what individuals and groups perceive and represent as the spiritual—that having to do with the s/Spirit(s)—is a socially and politically significant field of differences and contention, as well as of resonances, crossings, and even hybridization. Culturally specific notions of the spiritual circulate unevenly and with different political meaning in the United States. Thus, though we might perhaps be able to generalize the notion of the spiritual sufficiently to speak cross-culturally within and outside of the United States, doing so within Euro-dominated discourse runs the risk of collapsing cultural differences with respect to conception, experience, and representation of the same. The notion of the spiritual that I wish to discuss here as it is invoked and represented in contemporary Chicana writing and visual art derives its inspiration primarily, though not exclusively, from Mesoamerican, other American Indian, and African perceptions of belief, concept, and experience: that there is an essential spiritual nature, and thus an interconnectedness, of all beings, human and nonhuman. Interestingly, this view is also present in less dominant versions of Christianity (e.g., gnosticism) and Judaism (e.g., Kabbala), even as it is among the beliefs that are ascribed significant cultural difference in dominant Euroamerican thought and projected onto people such as U.S. Latina/os, African Americans, and third world populations more generally, as well as onto the rural or “uneducated.”

Beliefs and practices consciously making reference to the s/Spirit as the common life force within and between all beings are largely marginalized from serious intellectual discourse as superstition, folk belief, or New Age delusion, when they are not relegated to the socially controlled spaces of the orientalist study of “primitive animism” or of “respectable” religion within dominant culture. Even in invoking the spiritual as a field articulated through cultural differences, and in so doing attempting to displace dominant Christian notions of the spiritual while addressing the fear of politically regressive essentialisms, to speak about the s/Spirit and the spiritual in U.S. culture is risky business that raises anxieties of different sorts. Yet the very discomfort that attends talk of the spiritual outside of authorized and institutionalized spaces (i.e., churches, certain disciplines, old and new Eurocentric ideological and theory orthodoxies) alerts us to a tender zone constituted by the (dis)encounters of culturally different and politically significant beliefs and practices.